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Self-portraiture and Self-Fashioning

Fisher, the son of a Revolutionary War widow, was educated at Harvard College in the late 1780s and early 1790s where he was trained in the use of perspective for representing three-dimensional objects and spaces on a flat surface; at the time, this was a standard part of the mathematics curriculum.

In all of his self-portraits, Fisher depicted himself at a table with a paneled door behind him. That architectural detail is quite revealing for it suggests that he had a room with a door that closed for his reading and writing.

Following his Harvard graduation in 1792, Fisher pursued his theological studies in Cambridge and received his M.A. in 1795.

Like other frontier families, the Fishers depended upon paid boarders and family members to participate in a variety of activities to make ends meet. Braiding straw hats and weaving cloth to earn cash and store credits, not to mention the daily household work of a small farm, could create noise and disrupt the parson, but the 1814 addition he made to his house included a study with a door to close out the distractions of home production.

Fisher took advantage of his ability to make things by hand and his uncommon skills in drawing and painting to add to his minister's salary.

In some of these enterprises he had the assistance of his wife Dolly Battle Fisher (1770-1853) and some of their eight children, born between 1798 and 1812. Fisher himself painted shop signs and the names of ships on their stern boards and made furniture, buttons, and household utensils—all for cash payments, barter, or store credits.

He applied his drawing skills, garnered at Harvard, in different sorts of paid work, such as surveying land and designing a small number of buildings for the new settlement. Fisher also produced broadsides, and he attempted to sell oil paintings, although the market for those was extremely small.

His best-known work, *A Morning View of Bluehill Village, Sept. 1824* (1824-1825, Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine), was painted for his own pleasure and displayed in his own home in Blue Hill, which is now the Jonathan Fisher Memorial.

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