

SAMUEL FISHER, D.D.

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SAMUEL FISHER, D.D.

ABOUT 1830.



## PREFACE.

I have had a personal interest in the preparation of this memorial beyond the fact of my being a grandchild of Samuel Fisher.

I well remember his dignified presence in the home of my childhood in Orange, N. J.

My earliest remembrance is of his trundling my younger brother, who was named for him, in a baby carriage, the first we had owned in the family, which grandfather had bought for his namesake.

Some two years before his death he suffered a stroke of paralysis, which rendered him quite helpless, though his mind was entirely clear. I was regularly called in from my play to roll his chair through the rooms to the kitchen and back, for his diversion.

I was one of the few grandchildren present in Paterson at his funeral and burial on the bleak New Year's Day 1857, and in later years I personally attended to the removal of the remains of the family from the old Sandy Hill Burial Ground to Laurel Grove Cemetery.

The picture drawn may suggest a man of stern character only. But he had a keen sense of humor and was highly valued by his friends as a genial companion.

In the last year of his life it became necessary to move him with, his daughter's family, to the new Parsonage at Succasunna. It was along a level road, and in his wheel chair he was rolled into a wagon. Those who had the matter in charge thought it unnecessary to secure the chair, or even put in the tailboard. An unlooked for gully in the road gave the wagon a lurch, the one who held the chair was thrown off his balance,

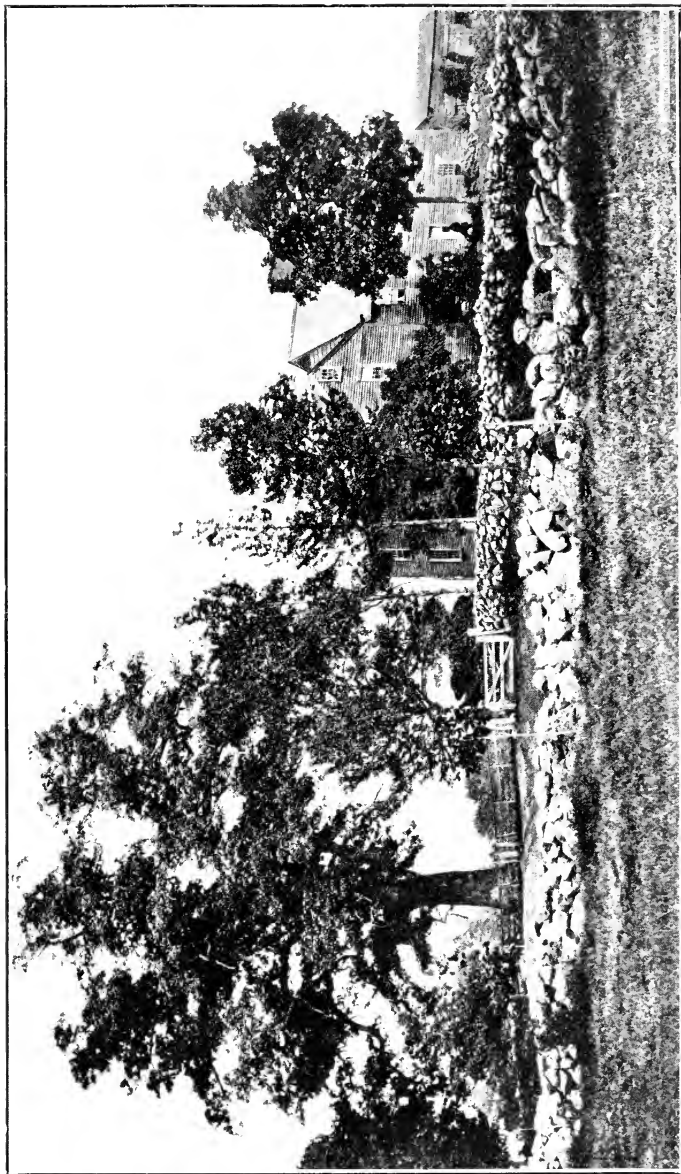
the chair and heavy paralytic rolled backward into the road. The chair was crushed to pieces, the occupant was not hurt, but sat in the midst of the wreck laughing so heartily that they feared for his life.

Of the grandchildren who lived to mature life fourteen are living, and the five who have passed away have left descendants, and all have contributed toward this memorial.

In preparing notes to be added to this sketch of Dr. Fisher, it has been difficult to make selections from the wealth of testimony which is on record in regard the high value of his character and work.

The times in which he lived were formative in the history of our country. In the regions where his lot was cast he was a leader in courageously meeting the problems of life. He always gave a positive contribution to their solution and left the community uplifted and benefited.

A. R. K.



The Avery House and Oak, Dedham, Mass. Built about 1650. Taken down in 1885.  
Photograph taken October 23d, 1871

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AMUEL FISHER was called to the pastorate of this Church in 1814.

He was then thirty-seven years of age, and had been engaged in ministerial work for about ten years.

Five years in the Congregational Church at Wilton, Conn., and five years in the First Presbyterian Church at Morristown, N. J.

In the twenty years of his service in this community he performed the principal work of his life, and was accorded by his associates the highest honors they could confer.

Three-quarters of a century have passed away since he labored here. As we look over the record of what he accomplished, it will be interesting and profitable to consider the conditions which surrounded his birth and education, together with the circumstances which developed his character and attainments.

We must go back in mind to the middle of the Eighteenth Century in the years shortly before the War of the Revolution, when the principal settlements in New England existed along the eastern seaboard, and the tide of emigration set across Massachusetts to the unoccupied lands in the central and western part of that State.

In 1765, Jonathan Fisher, the grandfather of Samuel, then a man fifty years of age, left Dedham, near Boston, with his family and settled in New Braintree in Worcester County.

With him also went his son Jonathan, afterward the father of Samuel, then a young man of twenty-two, who the next year returned to Dedham and brought back as his wife Katharine, the daughter of Deacon William Avery.

In 1773 the whole family again moved into that part of Northampton, now included in the town of

Westhampton, buying land from the first settler and occupying a log house.

Later the family home was built, the plain square New England farm house, with the great chimney in the center, away up on the side of Cub Hill, 1,000 feet above the Connecticut River and nine miles west of Northampton.

The old house is standing to-day, still occupied by the descendants of the family.

At the opening of the War of the Revolution, the younger Jonathan was a fine, stalwart farmer, thirty-two years of age, and a family of six children had been born to himself and Katharine.

He had held a commission in the King's Army, but resigned in 1775, and was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Second Regiment of Militia in Hampshire County.

He is described as a "fair-looking, well-built man, with gentlemanly manners, a zealous patriot who did much to aid the enlisting of soldiers."

After Washington's disastrous retreat across the Jerseys in the last months of 1776, the young Lieutenant responded to a call and enlisted as a private, December 20, 1776, for three months' service, and marched to Peekskill, N. Y., and later to the camp of Washington at Morristown, N. J.

There he died of a camp fever on March 10, 1777, only a few days before the return of his company to their homes.

We have the letters which he wrote to his wife during his absence, brief, simple communications such as would be written by a man unaccustomed to the pen, but expressing sincere religious feeling, and his reliance upon his Heavenly Father. The message that came after his death was that he died praying for his children.

Dr. Fisher was wont to relate that the last person whom he received into his Church in Morristown was



Fisher Homestead in Westhampton, Mass.

Photograph, Oct. 17th, 1905.



Church in Wilton, Conn.

Photograph, Nov. 5th, 1910.



the very woman who had nursed his father during his dying hours, and had received the last messages to be sent to his distant family.

Under these trying conditions Katharine went to the home of her brother-in-law, Dr. Samuel Ware, at that time living in Sunderland, down by the Connecticut River, about twenty miles from the Westhampton home, and there on June 30, 1777, her youngest son, Samuel, the subject of this sketch, was born. Later, with her children, she went to live with her father in Dedham.

We can hardly imagine more pathetic conditions than this commencement of the life of little Samuel. We know from his mother's letters that she was a person of strong and deep Christian character, courageous, faithful and industrious, and we can imagine her influence upon those early years of her little flock as they knelt at her knee and she told them of the noble father who had given his life for his country.

Three of her four sons became ministers of the Gospel. She lived to a great age, passed her declining years with her son Samuel, and her remains were interred here, and upon her gravestone he inscribed, "A Mother in Israel."

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*Note.*—The Fishers and Wares seem to have met in New Braintree, Samuel Ware, the father of Dr. Samuel Ware, came from Wrentham to New Braintree before the Fishers, they occupied farms on the eastern side of the Ware River as the ground rises to New Braintree Village. There was a triangle of marriages between the families. Lieut. Jonathan Fisher and Katharine Avery. Samuel Ware and Bethiah Avery. Maj. Aaron Fisher a younger half-brother of Lieut. Jonathan Fisher married Samuel Ware's sister Elizabeth and the old Homestead in Westhampton descended in his family to this day.

Katharine Avery Fisher lived with her father in Dedham after the death of her husband and later with her married daughters until she came to Paterson in 1822. She left a record in her own hand writing of the cloth which she wove each year from 1778 to 1822—9,138 yards in 45 years—the highest was 420 yards in 1788.

On the day of his birth Samuel had been adopted by his uncle, Dr. Ware, Mrs. Ware being Bethiah Avery, a sister of Katharine, and when he was five years old he was taken to Conway, Mass., among the hills north of Westhampton, to which place Dr. Ware had removed.

Of Dr. Ware it is recorded "he was a gentlemanly and tender physician, cheerful and ingenious in his profession, and his genial spirit gave him many friends."

Dr. Fisher left an interesting sketch of his own life complete to the time of his call to this Church.

His time during his residence in Conway was principally employed in laboring upon his uncle's farm, and in those various occupations which are usually attended to in country places by youths of his age and situation.

He had a natural fondness for learning and living in the vicinity of a good district school and having access to the town library he acquired a good common education by the time he was sixteen years old.

He had made up his mind to learn a trade, but through the influence of a student of Dr. Ware's who had taught the district school and was impressed by Samuel's desire to acquire knowledge, it was arranged that, with some financial help from his uncle, he should have the opportunity to obtain a college education.

He remained in the family of his uncle and pursued his preparatory studies, entering Williams College in 1795, graduating in 1799. The low state of his finances rendered his collegiate course laborious and fatiguing.

The first three winters he was obliged to be absent for the purpose of teaching school, and he also had to labor during the vacations.

The whole expense of his four years' college course, including clothes, books, board, tuition, and incidental expenses amounted to \$642.32.

He taught school in Conway during the winter following his graduation, and was appointed Preceptor in the Deerfield Academy in February, 1800.

During the latter part of his collegiate course he had several seasons of deep and pungent convictions of sin, and finally as he trusted surrendered his heart to the Lord. He made a public profession of religion, and joined the Church in Deerfield.

In the fall of 1801 he was appointed a tutor in Williams College, where he remained two years pursuing his theological studies as he had time.

He continued these studies, first while living in the family of Hon. John Davenport in Stamford, Conn., and instructing his children, and later with Dr. Hyde, of Lee, Mass., and was licensed to preach by the Berkshire Association at their session in Lee, October 3, 1804.

While a tutor in Williams College in 1802 he met Miss Alice Cogswell, who afterward became his wife.

The acquaintance led to his visiting her in Stamford and his subsequent employment as tutor in the family of her uncle, Mr. Davenport.

**In the summer of 1805, Aug. 22d, he was married. Miss Cogswell was a daughter of Dr. James Cogswell, of New York.**

He had been a surgeon on the staff of General Washington, and active during the Revolutionary War; afterward practiced in New York and was largely interested in promoting philanthropic work. He died of yellow fever, contracted while attending upon the duties of his profession.

Her mother was a daughter of Col. Abraham Davenport, of Connecticut, and on Mrs. Davenport's side descended from a sister of Jonathan Edwards.

Of Col. Davenport it is related:

The 19th of May, 1780, was a remarkably dark day. A very general opinion prevailed that the day of judgment was at hand. A proposal to adjourn the Coun-

cil of Connecticut was under consideration. Col. Davenport arose and said: "I am against an adjournment. The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may be brought."

*Note.*—See Wittier's Poem "Abraham Davenport."

In Dr. Fisher's marriage he not only found a gentle and helpful companion, but he was brought into intimate association with a cultivated family circle.

During the first pastorate at Wilton, Conn., Dec. 3d, 1805 to July 5th, 1809, he was sent as a delegate to represent the General Association of Connecticut in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church at Philadelphia.

Here he met Rev. Dr. Richards, of Morristown, and was led to visit the place of his father's decease. This opened the door for him into the Presbyterian Church, and soon after, when Dr. Richards moved to Newark, he was called to succeed him in 1809.

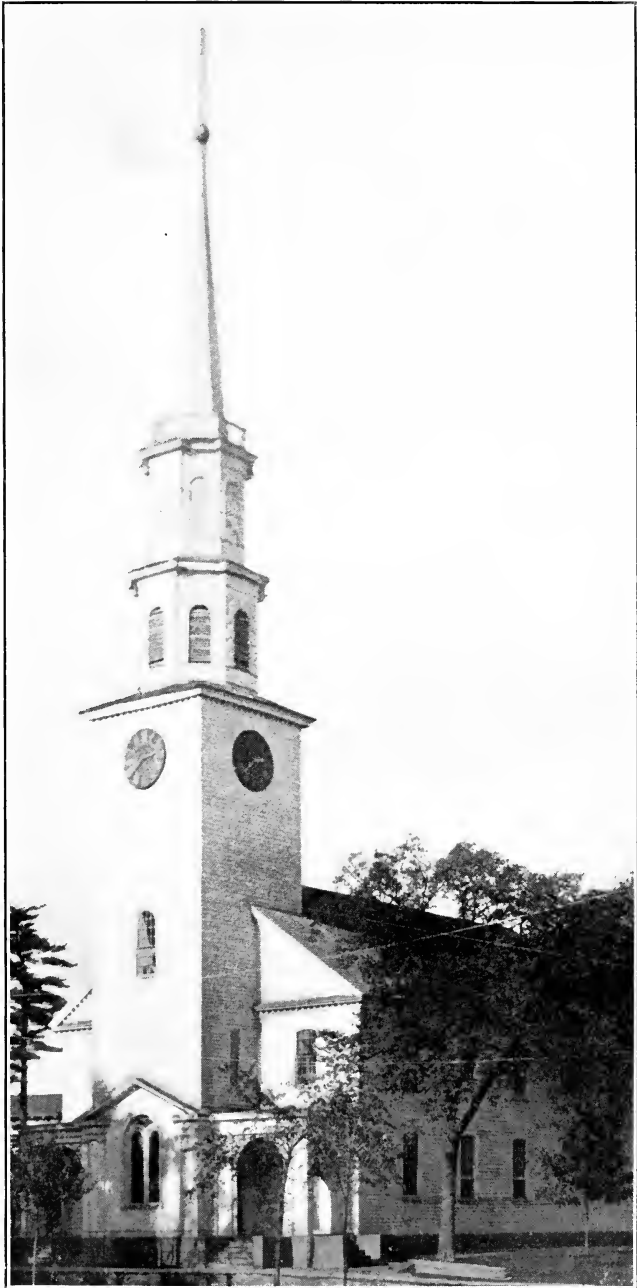
The congregation in Morristown was one of the largest in New Jersey, embracing as it did over five hundred families. His ministry there was most ac-

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*Note.*—Mr. Fisher's ministry in Wilton was most valuable. He used his influence soon after his installation in securing the giving up of the "Half-way Covenant." The membership of the church increased largely under his charge and the spiritual blessings which in the next twenty-five years increased the church two or three fold is a sufficient justification of the wisdom of his course.

The annals of the church in Morristown reveal many interesting characteristics in Mr. Fisher. It was a period of great political excitement and of agitation against the vice of intemperance. He spoke plainly and directly to bring his congregation under the control of the noblest principles, and was active in every thing to promote the interests of the people and the town. The opposition of some was aroused as distilleries were owned within the circle of his congregation. When he left the church a majority expressed the desire that he should remain and he left it much stronger than when he came.





First Presbyterian Church in Morristown, N. J. 1791-1893.



ceptable and useful, continuing five years, from Aug. 9th, 1809, to April 27th, 1814.

From the address of Dr. Hornblower, then the pastor of this church, delivered here at the funeral of Dr. Fisher on January 1, 1857, I quote the following account of his pastorate in Paterson:

“He assumed the charge of this church under very discouraging circumstances. The congregation was small, and chiefly composed of the poor. The number of communicants was only twenty-four.”

The church had no house of worship. The only church edifice in the village at that time was the Reformed Dutch Church of Totowa, which was burned in 1827. It had been resolved, previously to Dr. Fisher's installation, to erect a small frame building as a house of worship. This plan was afterward changed and a brick edifice of large dimensions was built. One of the first pastoral acts of Dr. Fisher was the laying of the cornerstone of the old “Brick Church,” on August 5, 1814. That cornerstone was sacredly preserved and is deposited under this church. It is a simple slab of red free stone, marked with the initial letters of the church, the full name of the pastor, and the year 1814. Dr. Fisher worked on this building with his own hands. He and his colored man cut the timber, of which it was constructed, in the woods and dragged it to the village; and he did what was more disagreeable if less laborious, solicited funds from neighboring towns and churches. The work progressed slowly. For a long time the congregation worshipped in the church while it was still unfinished, sitting on rough boards. The pews were not put in till the year 1819, and the galleries were not finished till several years later.

Scarcely was this arduous work completed ere it had to be done over again. On the evening of the 20th of June, 1822, the church edifice was struck by lightning, the tower and the window sashes were al-

most destroyed, and the walls, the galleries and the pews greatly injured. The congregation, already in debt, were overwhelmed by this calamity. The pastor himself was deeply distressed. But with his accustomed energy he set himself to work, and the subscription books which he circulated through the neighboring towns show how indefatigably and perseveringly he worked.

But the event, which was so great a temporal calamity, proved to be one of rich spiritual benefit to the people. On the Sunday succeeding the casualty the pastor preached in the ruined church a solemn and impressive sermon. His text was, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them who obey not the Gospel of God?" The Spirit of God descended that day in power, and then began a revival which extended through several consecutive years. Those were years of the largest ingatherings and the most precious spiritual blessings that this church has ever enjoyed.

During the prevalence of the cholera in 1832, Dr. Fisher was assiduous and untiring in his labors. Over eighty persons died of the pestilence; most of them very poor and uncared for. He was with the sick and dying day and night. He ministered to their temporal comfort, as well as spiritual, and with his own hands laid out many of the dead for their burial. His friends knew not which most to admire, his physical powers of endurance or his unfaltering and self-denying benevolence.

He left this church in a state of great prosperity. The number of names enrolled among the communicants during his pastorship had increased from 24 to 524, and he had baptized some 400 persons.

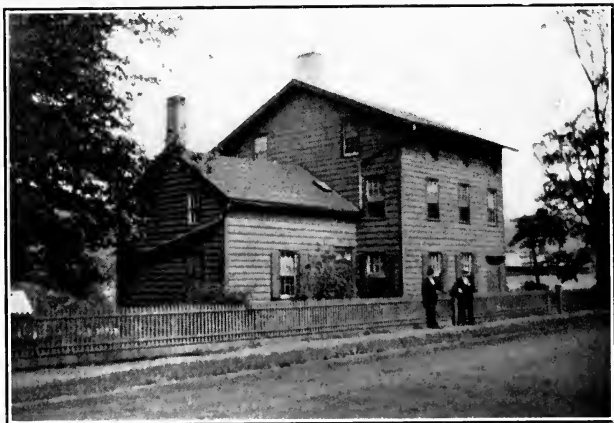
It is doubtful if ever a pastor's memory was cherished with more fervent affection than his, by those who were born and reared in this Church, dur-



1810.

Ramapo Church.

1893.



Parsonage at Ramapo, N. Y., where Mary Davenport Fisher  
was married to Dr. Horace Kimball.

Photograph, Sept. 8th, 1910.



Parsonage at Succasunna, N. J. The wing was built  
for Dr. Fisher's room and in it he died.

Photograph, Nov., 1899.

ing his ministry. The Church has, indeed, reasons to cherish love for his memory. To it he gave the very prime and vigor of his manhood. With great spiritual profit to himself and the people, he here spent and was spent in the service of Christ. And to the end he loved it. His love seemed to grow more fervent with each succeeding year; and the unusually affectionate manner in which he expressed his interest on the occasion of his last visit cannot be forgotten.

In 1834, being then 57 years old, Dr. Fisher felt the need of retiring to a less arduous field of work, and he took charge, as an Evangelist, of a missionary field at the Ramapo Works, in Rockland County, N. Y., and later served as pastor of a church at Greenbush, opposite Albany, N. Y., from 1843 until 1850.

After that he lived with his daughters in this State and died at Succasunna on December 27, 1856, in the 79th year of his age.

In person he was a man of large frame and commanding appearance. His fearlessness, joined with his honesty, made him respected by all who knew him.

He had great power in stating a proposition, and his style of argument was very simple and direct.

His pastorate in Wilton was considerably disturbed by his refusal to baptize the children of any but professed believers. His statement was, "I cannot without violating my conscience."

Rev. Barnabas King related that, both he and Dr. Fisher were invited to attend the funeral of a poor

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*Note.*—Dr. Fisher had a warm admirer and liberal supporter in Roswell L. Colt, at that time the leading citizen of Paterson. On the other hand he was extremely popular with the working people, they would do anything for him. Mr. Colt employed Dr. Fisher in five different years to compile a census of Paterson, going very particularly into industrial, educational and religious conditions—and these illustrated his remarkable industry, skill and intelligence in compiling data.

man who had been tempted by his own relations to excessive drinking for base reasons, the circumstances were well known. When Dr. Fisher arose, he thrilled his audience by his text, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also."

At the examination of a Candidate for the ministry before Presbytery, many felt that the young man was deficient, but did not wish to hurt his feelings.

Dr. Fisher was Moderator. He said, "A boy ten years old should do better, we have no right to license stupidity; my advice is to send him back to his books and if he fails then, to advise his return to some occupation for which he is better fitted."

He received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Princeton College in 1827 and was elected the Moderator of the first New-School General Assembly in 1838.

We have here a picture of the influences which produced this man of unusual character in his day and generation.

Parents who were God-fearing, faithful and industrious. The guidance of an adopted Father who was useful and upright.

A youth in touch with all that was most elevating in the community.

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*Note.*—The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church met in Philadelphia on the 17th of May, 1838, in the Seventh Presbyterian Church. They refused to place upon the roll the Commissioners from the Presbyteries which had been "excinded" in the previous year.

These Commissioners met in the aisle of the church, elected clerks, and Dr. Fisher moderator, then adjourned to the First Presbyterian Church. About one-half of the church was represented in this movement—Known as the NEW SCHOOL.

*Note.*—He lived with his son, Rev. Samuel Ware Fisher, in West Bloomfield from 1840 to 1843, and with his daughter, Mrs. Horace Kimball, in Orange from 1850 to 1855, after that with his daughter Elizabeth, wife of Rev. Josiah Fisher at Succasunna.



Education gained by hard work, and severe application.

An intimate acquaintance with cultivated friends.

And the result of these, consecrated to the service of God, and manifested in his usefulness to his fellow-men.

We find an appropriate summary of this life in the inscription which it is the pleasure of his grandchildren to perpetuate upon this tablet, an inscription written by his son, Rev. Samuel Ware Fisher, D.D., and placed upon the monument which the people of this Church erected here over his remains :

“An Orphan, whose father fell in the Revolution.

He rose to eminence as a Scholar by his own efforts.

A Minister of Christ for more than fifty years.

His Record is in the hearts of hundreds converted under his ministry.

His Memory is the precious inheritance of the churches to whom he ministered.”

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*Note.*—The Church at Ramapo had been erected in 1810 by Jeremiah H. Pierson for the benefit of his employees in the iron works. Among others in the Presbytery Dr. Fisher devoted the most time to this church.

After the peace of 1815, following the war of 1812, the industries of Paterson were so depressed that for several years the people were unable to meet their obligations to Dr. Fisher, and the church in Ramapo assisted largely in his support, as appears in the following letters :

PATERSON, November 30th, 1833.

JEREMIAH H. PIERSON, ESQ.,  
Ramapo Works,  
New York.

*My Dear Sir :*

Yours of the 26th instant I this day received. I have for several years past felt a deep and lively interest in the destitute situation of your village and vicinity in regard to moral culture.

Whenever I have preached there, and witnessed the interesting group of young persons collected, I have been pained to think that they should remain without the stated means of grace. I have felt that something ought to be done in their behalf, and have at times inquired what my own duty was in relation to them, but the many cares devolving upon me, as pastor of a large congregation, I have perhaps too much kept the subject out of mind, but of late, I have questioned with myself whether I ought not to undertake personally to gather a regular congregation there. I am fully aware that a separation from my present beloved charge to whom I have ministered, next Spring, twenty years, would be extremely painful to me, and to them, but still it may be duty.

When this place experienced a reverse after the Peace, my trustees gave me notice that they were unable to fulfill their engagements, and though unwilling to have me leave them, still could not object. I doubtless should have left, as I had at that time a favorable call from another congregation, if you had not generously engaged to divide with them the burden of my support. This was continued until they had become strong enough wholly to sustain me. They have enjoyed whatever advantage may have resulted from my continuance amongst them, through your instrumentality, and now they have become a large and flourishing congregation, able to afford a competent support to any man they may choose to call, and I have ever felt that in some degree, at least, they are indebted to Ramapo for this, though I make no pretensions to shining talents or popular eloquence.

Yet from my intercourse with all sorts of people and the knowledge of human nature thus acquired, I have been led to think that were I to remove to Ramapo, and God should spare my life and health, I might through the Divine blessing be instrumental in establishing a respectable congregation there, while some other person might be more useful here where the congregation is large and firmly established. I have preached to this people about twenty years, and though, as far as I know, there is perfect harmony, without a dissenting voice, yet, I am inclined to think that a change may be beneficial to their spiritual interests.

There may be such a thing as being loll'd to sleep by hearing the sound of the same voice for a long course of years, but you must see that the subject is a very difficult one to decide upon and I shall not think of coming to a decision without seeking counsel from God and man.

I shall endeavor, if spared, to visit Ramapo in order to have a personal interview with you on the subject.



IN MEMORY OF  
**SAMUEL FISHER D.D.**

THE FIRST AND FOR TWENTY YEARS  
PASTOR OF THIS CHURCH  
1814 — 1834

AN ORPHAN

WHOSE FATHER FELL IN THE REVOLUTION  
HE ROSE TO EMINENCE AS A SCHOLAR  
BY HIS OWN EFFORTS  
A MINISTER OF CHRIST.

FOR MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS  
HIS RECORD IS IN THE HEARTS OF HUNDREDS  
CONVERTED UNDER HIS MINISTRY  
HIS MEMORY IS THE PRECIOUS INHERITANCE  
OF THE CHURCHES TO WHOM HE MINISTERED

BORN JUNE 30. 1777  
DIED DECEMBER 27. 1856

ERECTED BY HIS GRANDCHILDREN



I have but a few years to labor in Christ's vineyard in this world and if I know my own heart, I choose to labor where I may be instrumental in doing the most good.

That your health may be confirmed and that you may enjoy the consolations of religion in your own soul, is the sincere prayer of,

Yours sincerely,  
SAML. FISHER.

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PATERSON, March 12th, 1834.

JEREMIAH H. PIERSON, ESQ.,  
Ramapo Works,  
New York.

*Dear Sir:*

Last evening my Trustees and Session met at my house agreeable to my request on the Sabbath and I made known to them the plan of my future labors. I had, a few days before, mentioned the subject to one of my session in confidence. With this exception, the matter was as unexpected as it was new. It created considerable sensation as I expected, but I think most of them felt the force of my reasons for a removal. Whether they will oppose me before the Presbytery who hold their stated meeting here the third Tuesday in April, or not, I cannot now tell, but I am inclined to think they will not.

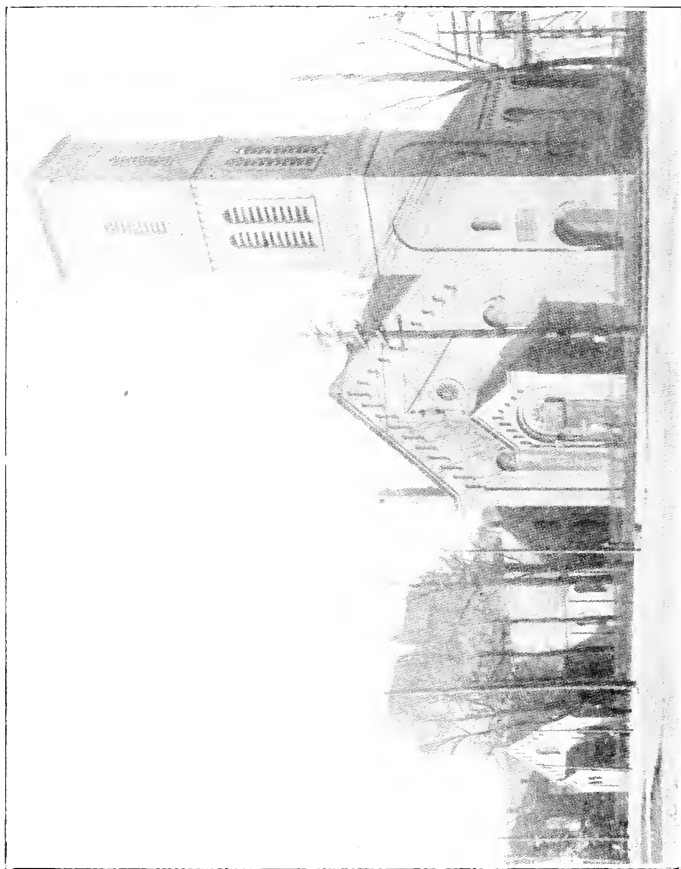
As my own mind is fully made up as to the path of duty and the thing is now made public, you may consider the exigency of secrecy as fully removed and can communicate with the people on the subject, as you think expedient.

I am very busy now visiting the congregation, as I expect for the last time, but I hope before long to be able to come up and spend a night with you and converse respecting our ulterior arrangements.

My family are in comfortable health and desire an affectionate remembrance to your self and family.

Yours with much esteem,  
SAML. FISHER.





First Presbyterian Church, Paterson, N. J.

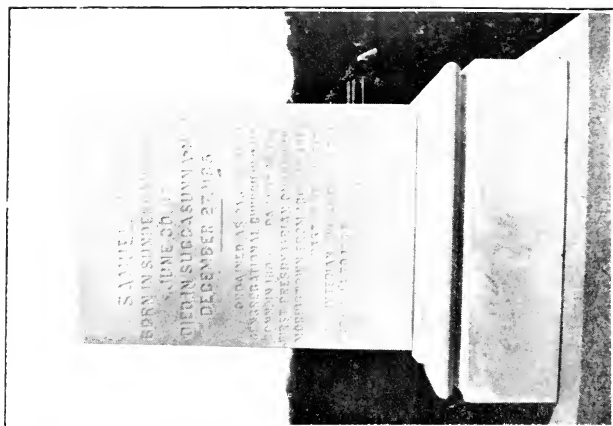
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Monument originally erected in Sandy Hill Burial Ground, Paterson.

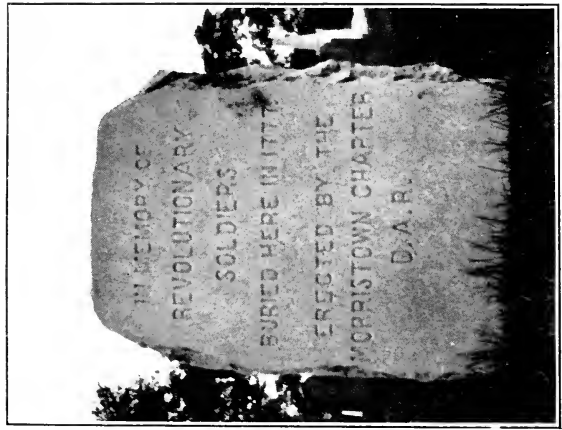


Removed to Laurel Grove Cemetery, 1889.  
Re-cut in 1901.



ALICE COCSWELL,  
*wife of*  
 SAMUEL FISHER, D.D.  
 His first and last (20 years)  
 member of the 1st Presbytery in  
 Church in Paterson, N. J.  
 She was born in New Canaan, Conn.  
 June 15th, 1777.  
 died in Orange, New Jersey,  
 May 9th, 1850.  
 Aged 72 Years,  
 10 Months &  
 26 Days.

Paterson.



Morristown, where Lieut. Jonathan Fisher was buried.

MATHARINE AVERY  
*Wife of*  
 Genl. JOSEPH FISHER,  
 of the Army of the Revolution,  
 WHO DIED & WAS BURIED IN  
 Morristown, New Jersey,  
 MARCH 10th 1777.  
 She was born in Dedham,  
 SEPT. 10th 1716,  
 and died at the Ramapo back  
 of the House of her Son  
 Genl. SAMUEL FISHER, D.D.,  
 DEC. 20th 1831,  
 aged 115 years, 3 months & 9 days.  
*"A Mother in Israel"*

Paterson.





