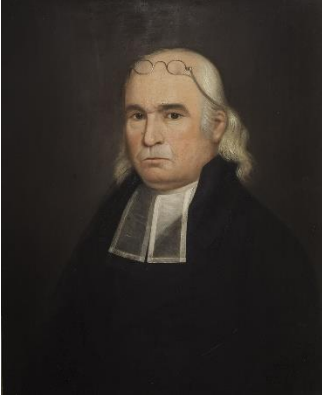


# Laban Ainsworth

Robert B. Stephenson '63



Jaffrey has had its share of Dartmouth alumni over the years but without question the most prominent—and the earliest—was Laban Ainsworth (1757-1858). He was born in Woodstock, Connecticut, about 30 miles from Lebanon where Moor's Indian Charity School was founded in 1754 by one Eleazar Wheelock. Laban attended the Tisdale School, also in Lebanon, so he must have been known to Wheelock and Laban must have known about the plans to relocate to Hanover what would become Dartmouth College.

Laban entered Dartmouth in 1775 as a sophomore, class of 1778. He set out north from Woodstock on a horse that would serve as transport to Hanover but also aid in his escape should Indians or the British confront him along the way and serve as capital to be sold to cover his student costs. At that time, 1775, there were some hundred students including a score of Indians at the College. It was truly "in the woods." There were bears and wolves on the outskirts of the campus and only a handful of buildings.

He received his degree, along with 16 others, on August 26, 1778. (Three years later the College conferred on him a Master of Arts degree.)

What can be described as his first real job, Laban was called to Jaffrey and was ordained on December 11, 1782. He would remain Jaffrey's first and only 'settled' minister for 76 years, a span thought to be the longest in Congregational history.



In the spring of 1784 construction began on The Manse, the minister's new home across from the Meetinghouse. On December 4, 1787, Laban married Mary Minot, and they moved into their new home. A few weeks later, in the dead of winter, it tragically burned to the ground. Re-built quickly, it still stands at the corner of Main Street and Gilmore Pond Road and ownership still resides with the family.

The Ainsworth-Dartmouth connection did not begin and end with Laban. His brother, Andrew, graduated in 1794; his son, William, in 1811; William's son, Frederick, in 1840. All commencements were attended by Laban.



Jaffrey's most prominent Dartmouth graduate died on the 17th of March, 1858 at age one hundred years, seven months and twenty-eight days. He and many of his descendants rest peacefully in the Old Burying Ground behind the Jaffrey Meetinghouse where he preached for so many years.

For more on Laban and early Jaffrey see the recently published *Laban Ainsworth: A Life* by Jean Parker Waterbury, with supplementary material & images (Jaffrey: Jaffrey Historical Society, 2019).

Also, see <http://www.rs41.org/jhs/laband2.htm>

Prepared by Robert B. Stephenson  
October 2020