

# Chebacco

A stained glass artwork featuring a pine branch with two cones and several needles. The background is a deep blue, and the pine needles and cones are rendered in shades of green and yellow. The artwork is set within a grid of dark lines, typical of stained glass windows.

The Magazine of  
the Mount Desert Island Historical Society

HARBORING RELIGION: MISSIONARIES,  
CONVERTS, AND SOJOURNERS

Volume XX 2019

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The Magazine of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society

Volume XX  
HARBORING RELIGION:  
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2019  
Mount Desert, Maine

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We would also like to acknowledge the Southwest Harbor Public Library Digital Archive and the assistance of Charlotte Morrill and George Soules in obtaining many of the historical photographs that illustrate this issue.



A close-up photograph of a stained glass window. The window is set in a dark wooden frame. The glass features a geometric, Art Deco-style design. On the left, there are clusters of red circles, possibly representing grapes, with green leaves. To the right, there are vertical bands of light blue and white, separated by dark lines, with a central vertical band of reddish-pink. The design is composed of black outlines and filled with various colors. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

Detail of south  
wall window,  
ca. 1916, artist  
unknown. *Sz.*  
*Edward's Convent,*  
*Bar Harbor (currently*  
*the Bar Harbor*  
*Historical Society)*

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## "He Has Abundantly Poured out His Holy Spirit in Eden and Mount Desert": The Baptist Connection on Mount Desert Island, 1790–1840

By Brittany Goetting

A considerable religious revival swept across Mount Desert Island between the winter of 1832 and spring of 1834. The intensity of the movement deeply impressed twenty-nine-year-old school teacher and Mount Desert resident Simeon Milliken. He remarked in his diary that, "For months past, in every prayer, I have prayed the Lord to humble me. He has abundantly poured out his Holy Spirit: in the conversion of my companions both in Eden and Mount Desert."<sup>1</sup>

The revival was led by newly settled minister Calvin L. Carey and Elder Elisha Bedell of Cooper, Maine. Bedell had travelled nearly one hundred miles to preach the word of God to the people of Mount Desert Island. The combined efforts of the two ministers reportedly led to the baptism of ninety-two converts.<sup>2</sup> The revival could not have occurred if it had not been both for the participation of the people of Mount Desert Island and the influence of Baptists from other parts of Maine.

The Baptist churches of Mount Desert Island and their members had a keen awareness of wider Baptist connections. The founding members of these churches were inspired by existing churches and missionaries and influenced by the issues and trends that affected many like-minded congregations in

New England. To understand the evolution of the Baptist churches of Mount Desert Island, one must look to this wider denominational context.

At the same time, the Baptist churches of Mount Desert Island actively participated in nearby religious societies, attended regional conferences and associations, and wrote to various publications. Members from these churches moved to other towns and regions and brought with them the traditions of their home congregations. The history of the Baptist churches helps us to understand not only the societal evolution of the island, but also the ever-evolving religious culture of northern New England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

### *The Growth of Baptists in Maine*

The rise of the Baptists on Mount Desert Island mirrored the growth of evangelical Protestantism throughout New England. Baptists had existed in North America since the seventeenth century but did not gain momentum until the eighteenth century. The Congregationalists and other denominations supported infant baptism, while the Baptists believed that only adults could be baptized and receive the eucharist. The Baptist emphasis on a "believer's baptism" paired well with the fervor of the First and Second Great Awakenings.

Congregationalists and Baptists competed for congregants throughout New England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mount Desert Island was a hotbed of denominational competition. Congregational missionaries





Nineteenth-century Baptists argued that baptism was only for adult professing believers and required full immersion. *Detail from "Bible Baptism" engraving by O. Pelton, 1843. Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

reportedly arrived on the island as early as 1792 and helped plant the Southwest Congregational Church in 1794.<sup>3</sup> They were soon followed by the Baptists in 1798. Baptist missionaries arrived on the island around 1798. Elder Isaac Case reported to the Massachusetts Missionary Society that he visited Mount Desert from 1802–1803 while Elder James Murphy of New Brunswick labored in the region in 1804.<sup>4</sup> He noted that the inhabitants of Eden "spared no pains to attend on the word, some of them coming through water and splash above their ankles, a considerable distance."<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to track membership numbers, but several residents of Mount Desert Island left Congregational churches to join with the Baptists. The Mount Desert Island Baptist Church was formed by fourteen former Congregationalists who declared that infant baptism was not supported by the Bible. Captain Davis Wasgatt, one of the founders of the Mount Desert Island Baptist Church, contended that "he had been unsatisfied with his infant baptism until he read the covenant and examined the proofs cited in said covenant, and they convinced him that infant baptism was wrong."<sup>6</sup> Those who felt compelled by the Baptist arguments left the Congregational church and did not return. The Congregationalists responded by excommunicating dissenters.<sup>7</sup> The Southwest Harbor Congregational Church grew throughout the early nineteenth century, but they continued to fear the call of the Baptist siren. The two denominations were not able to unite under a common cause until the

emergence of the benevolence movement in the mid-nineteenth century. The Mount Desert Island Congregationalists and Baptists then began to participate together in organizations like tract, temperance, and Sunday school societies.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Early History of the Eden Baptist Church*

The Mount Desert Island Baptists formed into churches to strengthen their community of believers. The Eden Baptist Church was the first Baptist organization on the island. Its first meeting was held on July 5, 1799 at the home of Levi Higgins and was attended by thirty members.<sup>9</sup> Worship at the Eden Baptist Church was primarily led by missionaries and visiting ministers until 1817. In total, sixteen ministers preached at the Eden Baptist Church during this time. They hailed from as far south as North Windsor, Maine, and as far north as New Brunswick.<sup>10</sup>

Enoch Hunting was the first long-term settled minister of the Eden Baptist Church. Hunting hailed from New London, New Hampshire, and served as a missionary for the Massachusetts Missionary Society. In 1817, he wrote to the *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer* that "I visited Eden on Mount Desert last September. Some mercy drops have fallen on this place. It is through that about 100 souls have been brought to a knowledge of the truth. I baptized a number of truly penitent sinners; and had the happiness of seeing a church of Christ established according to the apostolic plan."<sup>11</sup> Hunting was invited to be



Of the Baptist Church in Center, George Street wrote, "The present meeting-house at Center was built by this church in 1837 as a distinctively Baptist house of worship, the church rejoicing that now it had one meeting-house all its own." *Courtesy of Tremont Historical Society*

the settled minister of the church shortly after this large revival. His April 1818 ordination was attended by Elder Amos Allen of Brooksville and Elder Ebenezer Pinkham of Sedgwick. Hunting retired from the ministry in 1833, and there would not be another settled minister until 1860.

#### *Early History of the Mount Desert Baptist Church*

The Mount Desert Baptist Church was established on September 11, 1816 by fourteen members and a council of churches. The members had primarily been associated with the Southwest Congregational Church. The council included participants from Sedgwick, Eden, Bluehill, Trenton, and Readfield.<sup>12</sup>

The church was able to quickly secure a settled minister. Missionary Lemuel Norton visited Mount Desert in 1818 and noted that "there had been some religious interest among the people,





Detail of "Baptism," ca. 1908,  
Mayer & Company, Germany. *Holy  
Redeemer Catholic Church, Bar Harbor*





and a goodly number had found the Savior precious to their souls."<sup>13</sup> Norton visited the church several times and was invited to become their minister in 1820. Norton served the church until 1828 when he dedicated himself to the theology of the Freewill Baptists.

The Mount Desert congregation ordained Calvin L. Carey on July 2, 1833. His ordination was attended by representatives from Sedgwick, Brooksville, Bluehill, Surry, Ellsworth, Eden, and Deer Isle. Representatives from Hampden, Corinth, and Trenton were invited but unable to attend the ordination.<sup>14</sup> Carey served the church until 1843. Like the Eden Baptist Church, the Mount Desert congregation remained without leadership for most of the mid-nineteenth century.

#### *Growth and Connection to Regional Associations*

The Baptist churches on Mount Desert Island were deeply connected to their regional associations. Associations offered advice, financial aid, missionaries, and access to education and publications. In 1817 the Eden Baptist Church voted to join the Lincoln Association, an organization comprised of churches in modern-day Knox and Waldo counties.<sup>15</sup>

The church was instrumental in the establishment of the Eastern Maine Baptist Association, an organization that was focused on modern-day Hancock County. In 1818, Elder Enoch Hunting and a few other representatives attended "the association at Bluehill on the first Thursday after the second Wednesday in

November for the purpose of [appointing] a place to hold the association the next year."<sup>16</sup> Hunting and representatives from the church greatly affected the actions of the association. Hunting preached sermons at the association's annual meetings, served as an officer on several subcommittees, and acted as a missionary for the association.

The Eden Baptist Church even hosted the association's annual meeting in 1829. The records noted, "Many things of important interest to Zion engaged the attention and received the support of the Association among which were Bible and Tract Societies, Missions, the cause of Temperance, etc."<sup>17</sup> The church remained active in the association even after Hunting's retirement. Representatives were sent to the annual meetings until at least 1836.

The Mount Desert Baptist Church was also involved in the regional associations, but they did not adopt a leadership role. The church did not attend the conference when they were without a minister, but they did at least send yearly letters. Norton and Carey attended the annual meetings, but they preferred to absorb information and network with their colleagues.

The associations allowed Mount Desert Island churches to learn from their fellow congregations and influence regional culture. Churches that had enthusiastic ministers like Enoch Hunting could take charge of significant voluntary movements. Congregations such as the Mount Desert Church used the associations to remain connected to their fellow Baptists. The associations fostered relationships between the Mount Desert Island Baptists and their far-flung denominational compatriots.

#### *Sabbath School, Missionary, Temperance, Mite Societies*

The Baptists were active participants in a variety of voluntary societies. These organizations

suggest what forms of benevolence mattered to the community. Local societies were also connected to their sister societies and parent organizations.

Several Mount Desert Island societies were involved with domestic and foreign missions during the 1820s. Religious periodicals and the records of the Eastern Maine Baptist Association reported that missions donations were received from the Eden Female Mite Society, Eden Baptist Cent Society, Eden Religious Benevolence Society, Eden Female Primary Society, and the Mount Desert Female Mite Society throughout the 1820s. Money was collected through direct donations and fundraisers such as a concert sponsored by the Eden Religious Benevolence Society in 1821.<sup>18</sup> These funds supported missions throughout northern New England, the western United States, and the British colonies in Asia. Many of these mite societies were connected to larger regional organizations. The Hancock Auxiliary Foreign Mission Society was formed in 1827 to support the missionary movement and was endorsed by the Eden Female Primary Society.<sup>19</sup>

Temperance and Sabbath School societies received fewer donations but remained important voluntary institutions on the island. Elder Enoch Hunting organized a Temperance Society at the Eden Baptist Church in 1825.<sup>20</sup> The society comprised fourteen members and faced serious opposition from other church members. Organizations like the Eden Temperance Society encouraged Maine to become one of the first states to prohibit liquor.

The Eden Sabbath School Society was established in 1826. Sabbath schools were religious school sessions for children that were intended to teach the basics of the Bible and tenets of a good Christian life. They were often difficult to maintain because they necessitated people to select and teach curriculum, and for parents to send their children to these schools. Mount Desert resident Simeon Milliken was delighted in 1832 that Elder Calvin L. Carey was

"a thorough friend to Sabbath Schools; and all the benevolent institutions of the present day."<sup>21</sup> Many Mount Desert Island religious institutions focused on adults, but the Sabbath Schools were a way to spread the Baptist religious culture to children.

### *Baptist Publications*

The Baptists were active participants in the New England Christian print culture. Religious periodicals from the period included reports from regional associations, societies, missionaries, and letters from Mount Desert Island residents. The Baptists were able to learn what was occurring in other parts of the world and share their own news with a larger community.

Magazines were particularly eager to publish any news of a revival. Rebekah Pinkham wrote to the *Christian Watchman* in 1823 that "God was pleased to bow the heavens of his love, and come down by the influence of his Spirit, upon another isle not far distant, called Mount Desert and Eden." The periodicals allowed the Baptists of Mount Desert Island to share local developments and to connect their experiences with Baptists throughout the world.<sup>22</sup>

Several Mount Desert Island Baptists published their own autobiographies and memoirs. Elder Lemuel Norton published his autobiography a year before he died. His work included references to his travels as a young sailor, his work as Calvinistic Baptist on Mount Desert Island, and his missionary work as a Freewill Baptist in Maine. Norton's transformation from





The Eden Baptist Church issued a commemorative plate to mark its bicentennial. *Mount Desert Island Historical Society*









Altar window, date and  
artist unknown. *Eden  
Baptist Church, Salisbury Cove*

Left: Detail of altar  
window, date and artist  
unknown. *Eden Baptist  
Church, Salisbury Cove*

an irreligious young man to a fervent Freewill Baptist was likely recognizable to other New Englanders who experienced similar journeys.<sup>23</sup>

Rebekah Pinkham also published a work based on the journals of her father Simeon Milliken. Milliken frequently wrote about Mount Desert Island revivals, sermons, and voluntary societies. His journals provided readers a glimpse of religious life on the island and knitted his experience into the larger story of God's redemptive work in New England.<sup>24</sup>

Publications kept Baptists informed about the world outside of their hometowns. They were able to read about revivals, missionaries, and the social issues that affected their brethren. Nevertheless, the Baptists were not just readers. They wrote to the publications and published their own works to share their news and perspectives with the larger denomination. Publications widened the Baptist world and linked believers from around the globe.

### *Movement and Migration*

The Baptists of Mount Desert Island were connected to the greater northern New England movement not just through the leadership of their churches, but through the migration of everyday congregants. The membership records of the Eden and Mount Desert Baptist churches are rather spotty but provide a general idea of those who entered and left the churches. Members of good standing would be provided a "letter of dismissal and recommendation" if they wanted to move to a new town and attend its church. According to the records of the Mount Desert Baptist Church, the congregation welcomed members from Brooksville, Ellsworth, Sedgwick, and Surry from 1817 to 1834.<sup>25</sup> The church clerks did not report whether their dismissed members joined other congregations.

The Eden Baptist Church received members from Groton and Hebron, New Hampshire, between

1799 and 1837. They wrote letters of dismissal and recommendation for departing members to join congregations in Hampden, Lyman, Mariaville, Mount Desert, Surry, Trenton, and Waterville.<sup>26</sup> Like the Mount Desert congregation, there are gaps in the record. The church did not record whether they received letters of recommendation from other churches.

The membership records of the Eden and Mount Desert churches reveal that the Baptists were not chained to their home churches. The churches of Mount Desert Island welcomed members and sent communicants to a variety of congregations throughout New England.

### *The Baptists of Mount Desert Island*

The Mount Desert Island Baptists engaged with associations, formed voluntary societies, and read and wrote to publications alongside their fellow Baptists. The Baptist movement was quickly growing in the United States and the islanders embraced many of the wider evangelical trends of the era. However, the Mount Desert Island Baptists did not merely mimic their brethren. The Baptists were profoundly connected to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century religious culture, and contributed their own perspectives and experiences to all they were involved in.

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historical walking tour app and published in ABC-*Clio's* The World's Greatest Religious Leaders: How Religious Figures Helped Shape World History.

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Detail of south vestibule  
window, ca. 1904, artist  
unknown. *Otter Creek Hall*



The mission of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society is to foster meaningful engagement with the histories of Mount Desert Island.

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Cover design by Rebecca Hope Woods based on Jennifer Steen Booher's photograph of a stained glass window in Saint Saviour's Church, Bar Harbor.



Chebacco silhouette adapted from a photograph by Len Burgess for the Essex Shipbuilding Museum.



Our magazine, *Chebacco*, is named for a type of boat built in the eighteenth century in Gloucester, Massachusetts and nearby towns. In 1762, Abraham Somes, his wife, and four young daughters sailed in a Chebacco boat to make their home in Somesville and become Mount Desert Island's first permanent Euro-American settlers.

We invite you to voyage through the histories of Mount Desert Island in this contemporary Chebacco.



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