

Reverend Joshua Hartt (1738-1829)

The “Marrying Minister” of Northport

The legacy of Reverend Joshua Hartt in the Northport region during the Revolutionary War period and afterwards is a strong and diverse one – with “Preacher” Hartt's accomplishments touching on everything from the war effort to religious and social life, not to mention his work as a surveyor of Eatons Neck Lighthouse and other areas.

But perhaps the most heartwarming legacy of Hartt, who lived until the age of 91, was his role as the “marrying minister.” It seems during the course of his life, he married 1,000 couples in the small rural area of early Northport.

Hartt was born on a farm in Dix Hills in 1738 and by the age of 32, was ordained as a minister, taking up a post at the Smithtown Presbyterian Church in 1774. It was from this pulpit that the preacher, said to have been an imposing 300 pounds, began his fiery sermons against British rule, calling on parishioners to take up arms in the patriot cause through aphorism and allegory.

After the British occupation, Hartt was summarily thrown in jail for his efforts – in fact, he was placed in chains, thrown in a wagon and hauled to Provost Prison in New York City. There, according to local lore, he met Ethan Allen, whom he befriended.

Hartt survived the experience, and after the Revolution, returned to his work. Among his accomplishments was the surveying of vast areas of the Mohawk Valley in western New York, but after a few years in what was then the frontier, he returned to his home and provided a lot of pressure for the federal government to build a lighthouse off the hazardous coastline of Eatons Neck.

Moreover, Hartt established the Presbyterian Church at Fort Salonga, later to be removed to the Northport area, from which much of his “marrying work” was carried out.