

JAMES PHINNEY BAXTER

Most who have spent time in the Greater Portland area are already familiar with the name Baxter. Baxter Boulevard, Baxter Elementary School, Baxter School for the Deaf, Baxter Woods, Baxter Library and the Baxter building are all prominent locations in Greater Portland. Most of these places were named for James Phinney Baxter who was born in Gorham and never forgot his birthplace.

Mr. Baxter gave the house where he was born to the town as a museum, along with a library building where he placed his personal papers, including a journal which reveals a great deal about his life and his accomplishments.

James P. Baxter was born in Gorham on March 23, 1831 "on the right hand side of South Street just beyond the railroad bridge going south," as he later recorded in his journal.

Baxter was the youngest of six children - Hiram, Hartley, William, Elizabeth and Sarah - son of Dr. Elihu Baxter and Sarah Baxter. He was named after his uncle James and was given the middle name Phinney after Deacon James Phinney, a near neighbor.

When he was a young boy his family left Gorham and moved to Stillwater which is now called Orono. He came back to Gorham to attend the Gorham Academy. He then entered the canning business and built a corn canning company. His business was very successful and he became quite wealthy. Mr. Baxter married Sarah and they had 8 children. She died in 1872 and a year later he married Mehitabel. They had 3 more children. Since he was now a wealthy man, he turned his business over to his sons and traveled throughout Europe. He was a great student of history and loved to travel around the world visiting museums and studying.

He was a generous man who left money for Gorham's public library as well as the Baxter museum.