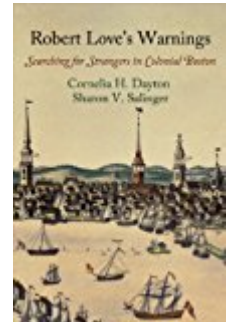


Cornelia H. Dayton, Sharon V. Salinger. *Robert Love's Warnings: Searching for Strangers in Colonial Boston.* Early American Studies Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. 272 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4593-6.



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Published on H-War (November, 2016)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Robert Love's Warnings begins not with an overarching question but with an exceptionally evocative document: the personal logbook, supplemented by copies he made for the town clerk, of Boston's leading "warner" during nine eventful years (1765-74) between the end of the Seven Years' War and the beginning of the American Revolution. Robert Love's job was to warn newcomers "in his Majesty's name" to "depart this town of Boston" within fourteen days (p. 1). He recorded the names of every "stranger" he encountered, along with their backstories, occupations, physical descriptions, and future plans. Cornelia H. Dayton and Sharon V. Salinger make the most of Love's meticulous record-keeping, combining rigorous social and legal history techniques with graceful prose. The result is an extraordinarily evocative and deeply insightful account of ordinary people on the move, cycling in and out of an important colonial city at a critical moment in its history—and in the history of the British Empire and the Atlantic World.

Much hinges, for Dayton and Salinger, on the legal niceties of "warning out." Rooted in a variety of historical European practices for making sure that newcomers did not overwhelm a town's capacity for poor relief, warnings came to serve a unique role in Massachusetts (and eventually in other New England colonies). Those warned were not actually expected to leave within two weeks, and were usually neither stigmatized nor ever genuinely threatened with expulsion. If they later required public assistance, though, the town clerk's record of the warning certified that Massachusetts's provincial funds, not those of Boston, would cover the expense. Far from being an instrument of New Englanders' stereotypically flinty, insular character, then, warning-out was a central element of an unusually generous system of poor relief in Massachusetts.

By the time he became a warner, the Ulster-born Love, already about sixty-seven years old, had lived in New England for some forty years. He had likely been warned himself on arrival in Boston in 1727 or 1728. Firmly part of the lower-

middle “sort,” Love pieced together a living as a tailor, petty trader, liquor retailer, and eventually land speculator. He left only a modest estate when he died in 1774.

As Boston’s leading, and later only, warner, Love was conscientious and highly effective at his job. Exploiting his deep familiarity with the city, he tracked down most strangers shortly after arrival: 20 percent of them within two days of their arrival and 63 percent within a month—well within the one-year window required by law. Although some of the 688 migrants he warned were driven to Boston in desperation, many more were “betterment” migrants seeking to work, to acquire training through apprenticeships, to join family already living in town, or to take passage on a ship from Boston to pursue opportunities elsewhere. The great majority were from Massachusetts or elsewhere in New England, and traveled alone. Many were quite “respectable”; a few were already prosperous.

Rather than focusing on a single dimension of Boston society, Dayton and Salinger treat Love’s inventory of Boston’s newcomers as part of a comprehensive, organic whole; thus they weave gender, the economy, Native Americans, African Americans, northern slavery, and a variety of other themes into their analysis. Although the book is not conceived of as military history, war and soldiers are central to the authors’ narrative. The all-important distinction between local and provincial poor relief originated in response to the flood of refugees into Boston during King Phillip’s War (1675-77) and King William’s War (1689-97). The record of Love’s warnings in the 1760s and 1770s tracks the turbulence of the decade preceding the American Revolution, from “demobilized regimentals” in the wake of the Seven Years’ War, to French Acadians expelled from Nova Scotia by the English during the war, to soldiers’ wives who came to Boston during the army’s occupation of Boston beginning in 1768. Former soldiers, mostly regulars but also some provincial troops, ap-

peared in Love’s records as job seekers, as beggars, as the mentally ill, or as drunks—that is, for the same reasons as many non-soldiers. They also had chronic injuries and illnesses suffered in the field. Fittingly, the record of Love’s warnings ends just before his death in 1774, on the eve of yet another war.

Robert Love’s Warnings has already won two major prizes (the Merle Curti Award and the Littleton-Griswold Prize), and deservedly so. More than a few scholars will both cite it in their own work and assign it to undergraduates, for it is simultaneously an informative monograph, an implicit reminder of the continuing relevance of social and legal history, a model of deep inquiry centering on one particularly rich source, and a great read.

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Citation: James D. Rice. Review of Dayton, Cornelia H.; Salinger, Sharon V. *Robert Love's Warnings: Searching for Strangers in Colonial Boston*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. November, 2016.

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