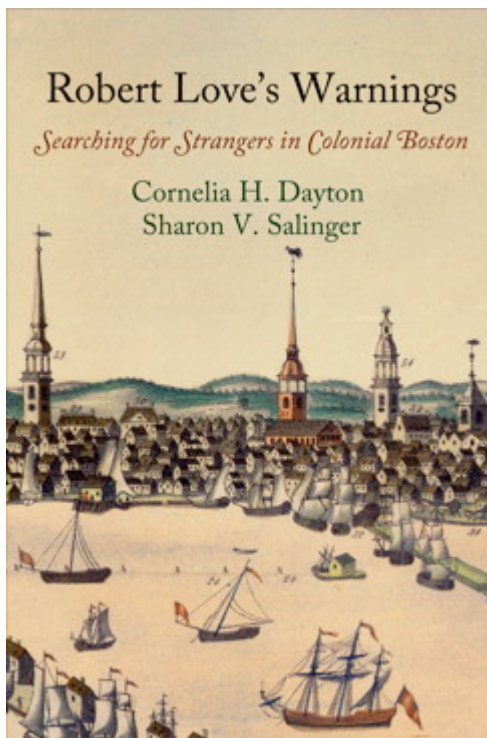
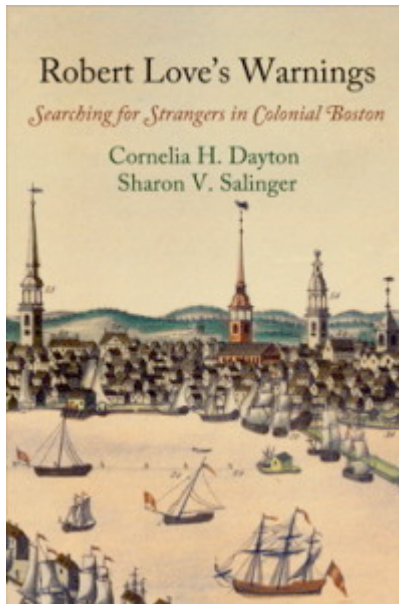


# Sojourners and Strangers in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic



The cast of characters in *Robert Love's Warnings* is astonishing. William Collier, a British veteran of the Seven Years' War, journeyed to Boston from as far as South Carolina and East Florida in hopes of obtaining passage back to England. Scipio Fayerweather, a former slave who owned two houses in Boston, sheltered blacks who passed through the bustling port. Elizabeth Simmons, a transatlantic traveler widowed upon her arrival in Boston, made ends meet by marketing her expertise in London fashion and lodging boarders in the spare rooms of the house she rented. Joseph LeBlanc, an Acadian exiled from Nova Scotia during the Seven Years' War, awaited passage to Quebec in cramped quarters on the outskirts of town after the war's end. Nell Puce and Peggy Carpenter, wives of British soldiers who evacuated the port in the early 1770s, kept themselves from starvation by gathering wild dandelions on Boston's Fort Hill to sell to their neighbors. Michael Hogan, a peddler circulating New England, arrived in Boston with a box of goods he intended to "Sell upon a WheleBarrow" and managed to establish a shop in town before his untimely death from heatstroke after a string of sweltering summer days (120).



New Englanders were no xenophobic penny-pinchers ... on the contrary, the region's warning system was integral to what was arguably the most generous welfare system in the British Empire.

Cornelia H. Dayton and Sharon V. Salinger tell the stories of hundreds of marginal and ordinary people in their ambitious book, relying heavily on the records produced by a little-known clerk in pre-Revolutionary Boston named Robert Love. Love emigrated from Ireland to New England as a young man, ultimately settling in Boston. There, like many lower-middling urban dwellers, he pieced together a living to support his growing family, working alternately as a tailor, a small-scale trader, and a retailer in liquor. At the age of sixty-eight, Love added a new post to his patchwork of occupations: he began to walk the streets of Boston in search of strangers to "warn" from the town. For nine years he perambulated the port, telling some 4,000 men, women, and children "in His Majestys Name to depart the town of Boston in 14 days" (57).

Love's words sound harsh to modern ears. And, indeed, they have been interpreted that way by many a chronicler of New England's history. Historians have perceived warning, which was distinctive to New England, as an expression of the region's distaste for outsiders and stinginess with relief for the poor. Some scholars have interpreted the concept literally—as physical banishment of those who did not have legal habitancy in the towns from which they were being warned. Other scholars have recognized that warning did not require eviction, but they have nonetheless misunderstood its purpose, presuming that declarations like Love's were intended to inform sojourners that they were not legal inhabitants of the town and therefore could not receive poor relief. Dayton and Salinger, however, expose the limits of these conventional interpretations of warning. New Englanders were no xenophobic penny-pinchers, they argue; on the contrary, the region's warning system was integral to what was arguably the most generous welfare system in the British Empire.

Centering their analysis on Massachusetts—"the province that originated the warning system used throughout New England"—Dayton and Salinger call attention

to a largely overlooked feature of the Bay Colony's relief system: the province account (4). Taxpayers across the colony contributed to this account, which provided aid to needy persons who did not have legal habitancy in Massachusetts. Thus, when Love tracked strangers on Boston's wharves and in its alleys, his job was to determine their place of legal settlement: if in Boston, they would be entitled to local poor relief should they fall on hard times; if elsewhere in the colony, the town to which they belonged would be legally responsible for their support; if anywhere outside of Massachusetts, the province account would pick up the tab. Love's warnings, then, were not intended to evict itinerants from the port (though removal warrants did follow warnings on rare occasion). Nor were they used to exclude outsiders from poor relief. Rather, they were meant for "fiscal accounting": they "establish[ed] the line between a town's budgetary responsibilities and the province poor account" (20). Better understood as a bureaucratic mechanism than an exclusionary measure, the warning system in no way hampered people from crossing town or colony borders, as some historians have supposed. In contrast, this system actually promoted movement by allowing Bostonians to hire, house, feed, and befriend sojourners without worrying that they were exposing the town to undue financial risks; should newcomers encounter hardship, the burden of their care would be shouldered by taxpayers across the province.

*Robert Love's Warnings* is composed of nine chapters. The first sets the stage for the story of Love and his strangers by examining how the warning system functioned in Massachusetts. Here Dayton and Salinger explore the regional particularities of warning in the colony and trace its evolution from the late seventeenth century to the 1760s, when rates of warning in New England peaked and Love undertook the daunting task of distinguishing newcomers from settled inhabitants on the streets of Boston. The first chapter also lays out the various paths to attaining legal settlement status in the Bay Colony, which largely revolved around one's place of birth or the legal settlement of one's household head. Those who wished to change their place of settlement could do so in two ways: by petitioning the town selectmen (an approach that yielded success only to wealthy or highly skilled sojourners) or by residing in the town for a year without being warned (a route to settlement that Dayton and Salinger term the "backdoor method"). One of the reasons Boston's selectmen hired Love to scan the town's streets and frequent its inns was to keep sojourners from gaining habitancy via that backdoor method. If Boston's many newcomers—particularly its economically marginal ones—became eligible for local rather than provincial aid, the port's relief system would be swamped.

The second chapter tells Love's story, illuminating why he would have desired the warning post and why he succeeded so brilliantly in it. Chapter three traces the origins of New England's warning system to seventeenth-century English settlement law, and it explains the genesis of the province account—a New England innovation that emerged in the late seventeenth century when the province maintained white settlers throughout the colony whose homes had been burned in King Phillip's and King William's wars. The chapter also reveals the liberality of New England's poor relief practices by situating them in the

context of welfare regimes in England, Continental Europe, and Britain's American colonies; "Nowhere else in the West" were taxpayers "willing to pay what was in effect two poor rates," Dayton and Salinger argue (54). The fourth chapter describes the daily realities of Love's job on the streets of Boston: where the man found strangers to warn; what his encounters were like; and how he managed to obtain information when he came upon defiant or deceptive visitors.

The first four chapters serve as a prelude of sorts to the following five, which in many ways comprise the heart of the study. Here Dayton and Salinger transition from examining the history, purpose, and practice of warning to investigating the warned themselves: Who were they? Why had they come to Boston? How did their sojourns fit into their broader life trajectories? In answering these questions, Dayton and Salinger reveal gendered patterns of movement and poverty as well as expose the influence of race on geographic circulation in the region. And they correct the longstanding assumption that the warned were destitute, or nearly so; over four-fifths of those Love warned were economically stable migrants who moved for work or training. Dayton and Salinger also shed light on the ways in which disruptions wrought by imperial policies influenced individuals' lives, examining in depth the plights of three groups of people dislodged by imperial crises in the Anglo Atlantic: British veterans of the Seven Years' War stranded in the mainland colonies; exiled Acadians seeking passage to French communities; and women and children deserted by the British soldiers who occupied Boston in the early 1770s.

Chapters five through nine provide remarkable insight into who was moving and why during the turbulent period between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. But these chapters are most striking for the stories they tell. Dayton and Salinger have contextualized Love's detailed warning records with a wide array of contemporary historical sources, producing hundreds of biographies of people who left only the faintest of tracks in the historical record. The stories of these individuals appear on nearly every page of the book's latter half. Thanks to the fruitful collaboration of two meticulous historians and the diligent efforts of an obscure town official in pre-Revolutionary Boston, *Robert Love's Warnings* peoples the streets of an eighteenth-century city as few studies have.

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