

## **IDEAS for Research Projects**

**Generated by Cornelia H. Dayton, 2004-**

### **New England Culture:**

John Warner Barbour: There has been no scholarly assessment or full-length study of Barbour (according to Martha McNamara, who will focus part of her current book project on New England landscapes on Barbour). Barbour created the much-disseminated series of lithographs of New England towns, shedding light on early 19c improvements and early industrialization.

Jonathan Fisher, pastor of Blue Hill, Maine from 1794 to his death in 1826. Left extensive diary (transcript is at AAS), plus more papers at the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland, Maine. See Mary Ellen Chase's biography for a sampling of the endeavors of this man of many talents—oil painter, wood engraver, poet, scientist, farmer, writer in his own shorthand, life-long student. There has been no modern, scholarly biography.

Ezra Stiles: no significant study has been done of Stiles since Edmund Morgan's terrific biography of the 1960s. A scholar could interpret his Itineraries and other papers in light of recent scholarship and new themes.

The Rider Tavern, built 1795-97 in Charlton, MA: this imposing 3-story, 22-room edifice still stands, in good condition, owned by the Charlton Historical Society. See the good description of it on their website. No scholarly study has been done. Many related documents survive. The tavern thrived up until the 1830s as a halfway point between Worcester and Stafford on the W-Hartford turnpike, until the RR went in, a mile away. The building in the early 20c served as tenement housing for migrant workers—so it has an intriguing post-1830 history, too. Decorative stenciling survives in some rooms, and several have been recently restored (the 2d-floor ballroom, the tap room). OSV attempted to buy the building in the 1970s, so their library may have files on it. It is on the National Register because Lafayette stopped for lunch there on his 1824 tour. A militia training field has been preserved, across the road. CHD's informant was Jim Moran, who works at the AAS and lives nearby the Rider tavern.

Witchcraft tales circulating in 18c and 19c: One place to start is Amos Otis's reports of the tales about "Lizzy Tower Hill" or Elizabeth (Lewis) Blachford, of Barnstable on Cape Cod. [Note that Carol Karlsen's forthcoming book may cover some of this ground.]

## **Law-related**

The figure of the constable: This could be a 17c project, or 17c-18c. David D. Hall suggested this as a much-needed project, at his AAS seminar in 2005. Model = Cynthia Herrup's book *The Common Peace*

The nature of colonial legislature: what did legislatures do? How did their mix of judicial, legislative, and executive/administrative work change over the 17th and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries? Stan Katz proposed this topic in the 1980s; one would need to check on how much Christine Desan (on the HLS faculty) in her various articles has pursued this, although her approach is via intellectual history. SNK had an undergraduate senior at Princeton ca. 1986 write a senior honor thesis analyzing one state (NJ, I think) legislative caseload.

## **Religion and Society**

Sex scandals that forced the dismissal of 18c New England clergy. There were a surprising number of these. CHD has collected notes on several. The issues to analyze might include: what behaviors did congregations tolerate from their ministers? What strategies did clerics use to resist the charges? What became of ministers who were fired or resigned due to a scandal?

## **Gender and Sexuality**

How urban elites hushed up scandals of out-of-wedlock births in the 1780s and 1790s. Notable cases, largely unexplored by historians from the viewpoint of the long history of the double standard, are the cases of Fanny Aphorpe and Perez Morton (the unmarried youth Aphorpe committed suicide in 1789, after giving birth to her brother-in-law's child) and Hepzibah Atkins Brown and Daniel Sargent (their affair produced Anne Sargent Gage, "Nancy Brown," whose father schemed to have her disappear from Boston society). For more on Anne Gage, see her correspondence at the AAS, and Phyllis Cole's biography of her adoptive aunt, Mary Moody Emerson.

How were out-of-wedlock suits for child support, a.k.a "bastardy" proceedings, handled after 1780, when most scholarly studies stop? The Chester County, Penna, and Westchester County, New York, records (among others) are intact and begging for systematic analysis. Initial work could be done using the marvelous name indexes to these collections on the pertinent public county archives' websites.

## Social History

Poverty and poor relief in New England (or other regions): we do not have any modern, sustained study of how poor relief mechanisms worked in early New England colonies and states, who the poor were—in terms of age, marital status, race, life-cycle stage. Nor has any scholar collected the available information on the buildings that housed the poor—poor houses, almshouses, houses of correction. As Ruth Herndon's book on Rhode Island sources, *Unwelcome Americans*, has shown, there *do* exist primary sources in which the voices of recipients of poor relief are directly expressed. Research would involve following clues in published town histories and Robert W. Kelso's 1922 book, reading county court records, and visiting town halls to identify surviving overseers of the poor records. [Note: Prof. David Wagner, Sociologist at Univ. of Southern Maine, has finished a new book, *Poorhouse*, on the late 19c institution; Gabe \_\_\_\_\_, a PhD student at Brandeis, is writing his dissertation on A Cultural History of the Poor in Rhode Island; and Tim Orwig, a PhD student at BU has investigated 19c almshouse architecture in an MA thesis, may pursue it (into 20c policy) for his diss.]

Acadians in Exile: Despite John Mack Faragher's 2005 narrative of the expulsion of the Acadians by the British in 1755, we still do not have a thorough or modern treatment of the conditions in which the exiles lived while in internment in Massachusetts and Connecticut towns. This would make an excellent article-length study, bearing on issues such as citizenship, humanitarianism, and Protestant-Catholic tensions. One would pursue this by reading the standard narrative histories, Acadian petitions, and legislative papers [ask CHD for her bibliography], and then by honing in on the town histories, and especially the surviving town records (selectmen's, overseers of the poor) for the places where Acadian families were assigned. And you can use your French! [See recent dissertation on Acadian experiences in 18c by Christopher Hodson]

African-Americans in the New England, life histories up through 1820: There is much promise in tracing the life histories and life chances of individual persons of African descent, building on the older work of Lorenzo Greene and William Pierson (anecdotal in approach), and linking to the more statistical work of James and Lois Horton on mid-19c Boston. We now have better genealogical tools and finding aids. Major issues are: what *were* marriage conditions for free and enslaved blacks, before the 1780s? Did curfews and other discriminatory laws, the unspoken ceiling forcing free blacks to take mostly menial jobs, and punishment in local workhouses affect the lives of all or just some blacks? How did a black man or woman achieve the status of "a respectable man of color"—as some white antiquarian historians or gravestone epitaphs hailed certain individuals? Which institutions in what towns or regions—churches, schools—were integrated by race, allowing fraternity among blacks and

whites? Law could be a recurrent theme in such a study—what are the life trajectories of those who brought freedom suits? How did individual blacks find a white lawyer? What legal issues over slavery arose in the courts of major ports with significant clusters of slaveowners and importers (Newport, Boston, Salem)? Recent studies to be aware of: Shane White's 2 books on NYC; Thelma Foote's book (Oxford UP) on blacks and slavery in colonial NYC; Scott Hancock's UNH diss. on free blacks using the law, 18<sup>th</sup>-mid-19<sup>th</sup>c; Thea Hunter's Columbia diss., (2004?) on the American ramifications of the Somerset decision; Kirsten Sword's Harvard diss. on the rhetoric surrounding and strategies used by "runaway" slaves and women; Richard Bourque's UConn research seminar paper on a big database he compiled of slaveowner ads in 18c New England newspapers; the discussion of marginal black Rhode Islanders, plus some nutshell biographies in Ruth Herndon's *Unwelcome Americans*. Note also Franklin Dorman's magnificent genealogical recovery, *Twenty Families of Color in Massachusetts : 1742-1998*. Also, every volume of town Vital Records for Mass. has separate listings of births, marriages, and deaths for "negroes", pre-1780s, from which family trees could be built.

Physique: what did it mean to have extraordinary strength, or ordinary strength? This would be a study of early white Americans' perceptions of (mostly) men's bodies and physiques. Some 19c genealogies and family history make recurrent observations about various male ancestor's height and strength: were these included because they were "safe", fairly non-judgmental? These could be compared to whites' tales about super-strong men of color, such as Venture Smith (John Sweet Wood is writing a biography of Smith). Such an inquiry would work for a research paper, not a longer study, and it would blend family history with the history of the body. (Genealogies: Cyrus Henry Brown, 2 vols (1915))