



## Editorial

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SOCIAL history, Charles McLean Andrews warned, lends itself toward provincialism—to describe without understanding the implications of changes in social habits, customs, and living. Regional history shares similar proclivities toward provincialism, that it too would be content with looking inward and having a static, rigid view of history. In the three-quarters of a century since Andrews made his observation, social and cultural historians have produced work that, while narrowly focused, is more robust, dynamic, and outward-looking as they learned to use small details to document larger thematic generalizations.<sup>1</sup> When done well, regional history, like social and cultural history, is a resilient medium that takes narrowly focused studies and broadens their perspectives to provide the evidentiary base that makes more nuanced generalizations possible. Our three essays in this issue illustrate the ways in which the interrogation of small things in New England leads to imaginative ways of accessing the past, explaining patterns of cultural change, and exposing the complexities of historical generalizations. Kate Silbert's essay provides us with a visually rich analysis with her examination of the embroidered samplers and diaries of young women to discover the geography of social networks in early national Providence. Adrian Chastain Weimer studies the petitions of Massachusetts towns to shed light on the colony's local political activism and its implications for conceptual, political, and constitutional adjustments to the

<sup>1</sup>Charles M. Andrews, "On the Writing of Colonial History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 1 (1944): 32. See also, Gordon S. Wood, "A Century of Writing Early American History: Then and Now Compared: Or How Henry Adams Got It Wrong," *The American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 689–90.

Restoration of Charles II. Our final essay by Theodore Delwiche, to be found in our Memoranda and Documents section, subjects a late seventeenth-century schoolboy's commonplace book to deep, textual inquiry. In Silbert and Delwiche small, individual personal sources uncover significant meanings for society and education; for Weimer, local petitions to the General Court reveal early consensus in defense of an enduring American liberty, the right to petition government in defense of one's rights.

When recounting the contents of this issue to my wife Maryann Brink, a medievalist, she pointed out that in the 1070s Bishop Odo commissioned a history of the Battle of Hastings. We know the text as the Bayeux Tapestry. Our lead essay, "Needle, Pen, and the Early Geography of Early National Providence" by Kate Silbert, examines the heirs to Bishop Odo's embroiderer-historians: young women whose samplers help document the history of Providence, Rhode Island. Silbert uses a layered analysis of the origins and content of late-eighteenth-century samplers to supplement her examination of diaries, invitations, and other sources to reconstruct the social and cultural geography of Providence. Demonstrating an imaginative analysis and synthesis of the diverse materials used in her essay, Silbert illustrates the social life of young women in Providence, charts their movements and tastes, and treats us to compelling images of the city, among them, our earliest images of the First Congregational Church, the First Baptist Meeting House, and, for Old Brunonians, Brown's University Hall.

Adrian Chastain Weimers, "The Resistance Petitions of 1664–1665," offers a new perspective on what has been a surprisingly neglected area of scholarship: Massachusetts responses to the Restoration of Charles II. Written in response to the appointment of a royal commission of inquiry led by Massachusetts nemesis Samuel Maverick, the petitions originated within towns and urged the defense of charter privileges. Subjecting the petitions to close scrutiny, Weimer demonstrates their larger significance for documenting local political action. In her analysis of the petitions and its signatories, her essay illustrates popular political action in seventeenth-century

Massachusetts and provides a perspective on the recent scholarly interest in constitutionalism, the evolving, informal political actions that helped to define, legitimate, and thus enshrine constitutional practice and structures. She finds a remarkable unanimity among freemen and non-freeman alike with regard to attitudes towards the General Court, the defense of the Massachusetts Bay Charter, and assertions of its “priviledges.”

Theodore Delwiche’s essay, “An Old Author in the New World,” is a cautionary tale to parents who lovingly preserve their children’s school work as memorials to their intellectual achievements. Samuel Melyen was, at best, an indifferent scholar. Delwiche recounts his plea to Increase Mather to raise his class rank so he would not graduate last at Harvard; Mather declined, and Melyen, alas, was last in his graduating class. Melyen left a notebook documenting his life as a Boston Latin student that Delwiche uses to establish how the school taught Latin and which texts it used to instruct students. Comparing the English sources of the assigned Latin texts and the variations in students’ (mis)translations of the Roman playwright Terence, Delwiche unearths the late seventeenth-century functionalism of education in the humanities in Boston: blending the classics, language, and religious piety. Delwiche’s narrow focus on a single student commonplace book still allows him to have a transatlantic view of how an English intellectual heritage was transferred to Massachusetts and how Bay Colony students interacted with, adapted, and learned the classics.

We are also pleased to announce, although belatedly, the New England Historical Association’s award of the 2018 James P. Hanlan Prize to Richard D. Brown, Distinguished Board of Trustees Professor (Emeritus) of the University of Connecticut and president of our parent organization, New England Quarterly, Inc., for his book *SELF-EVIDENT TRUTHS: CONTESTING EQUAL RIGHTS FROM THE REVOLUTION TO THE CIVIL WAR*. We not only offer Dick our congratulations for a fine book but our personal thanks for his sustained and active support of the *QUARTERLY*.

—Jonathan M. Chu