



## Editorial

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IN this number, the NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY proudly announces the publication of the 2021 Colonial Society of Massachusetts Walter Muir Whitehill Prize winning essay, “The Rights of God’s Stewards: Property, Conscience, and the Great Awakening in Canterbury, Connecticut” by Erik Nordbye. The prize recognizes Whitehill’s contributions to the Colonial Society, but at the same time we acknowledge the Colonial Society’s larger contributions to scholarship on early America. Walter Muir Whitehill was, in the words of the *New York Times*, “one of Boston’s most outspoken champions of historic preservation.” Whitehill presided over the Colonial Society, managed the publication of collections of primary source documents in volumes remarkable for their editorial integrity and beauty—a practice continued, after 1978 by Fredrick Scouller Allis Jr. and, then since 1993, by John Tyler—and laid the foundation for its current programs. The establishment of the Whitehill Prize represents the extension of the Colonial Society’s mission to encourage scholarship on early American history. Readers of this journal know that the prize annually offers an honorarium to an outstanding essay on the early republic (up to 1815) which the QUARTERLY agrees to publish.

A doctoral student in theology at the Harvard Divinity School, Erik Nordbye illustrates the Colonial Society’s support of innovative scholarship. Rather than pursuing the evangelical arguments separating New from Old Light theology, Nordbye correlates institutional and structural attributes of that division with questions about the impact of the contexts of property and possessory rights in shaping the disputes of the Great Awakening and provides us with an unusual view of its

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social controversies. In brief, who owned the church, who were subject to the costs of maintaining it, and what this meant for the larger conversation about colonial Connecticut's policies regarding taxation and established religion?

Fortuitously, two other essays also provide complementary perspectives on eighteenth-century New England. Francis Russo's "Sonic Piety in New England" reviews the controversies over "Regular Singing" to recapture the significance of sound in religious life and ascertain its place in the larger story of the Great Awakening. Russo makes the case for a re-evaluation of our understanding of the function of sound in puritan or congregational piety. In our MEMORANDA AND DOCUMENTS SECTION, Leah Orr subjects bookstore owner Benjamin Guild's Daybook to an intense, deep analysis, traces the details of each transaction, and unexpectedly finds minimal changes in customer purchases in the midst of the American Revolution. In a detailed examination of the ebb and flow of Guild's custom, Orr breaks down Bostonians' book purchases and finds that interest in British fiction continued relatively unabated in this period. These three essays together argue for the need to challenge simple axioms regarding change over time and the importance of the historian's charge to ascertain the significance of its complexities.

While topically an outlier, our fourth essay, Eve Raimon's careful study of New England's hidden Black history, shows how memories allow us to elide the unpleasantness of our shared past. Examining four recent local commemorations of Black history, Raimon points to the way in which these sites impel the confrontation of the past, challenge the false pride of moral exceptionalism, and provide a sense of historical if not moral humility.

Although long thought a Chinese curse, the greeting, "May you live in interesting times," probably originated with Austen Chamberlain, the British diplomat, brother of Neville, and step-son-in-law to American Mary Endecott Chamberlain, the daughter of Cleveland's secretary of war William Crowninshield Endecott. As we approach the New Year, we express our appreciation for what seems to be the restoration of

normality—masks are optional, the pandemic is (maybe) over, and the Red Sox missed the playoffs. Here at the *QUARTERLY*, we are especially grateful for the normality that carried us through interesting times: the many scholars who submitted essays, patiently awaited our review process, which despite our best efforts, seemed slower than usual, reviewed submissions and books, our subscribers and supporters, the Colonial Society, its Council, and its president Robert Alison for their sustained support. To our delight, we continue to find readers and authors who share their great affection for the journal with us. The staff of the *QUARTERLY* wishes all of you the happiest of holidays and the blessings of a normal New Year.

—Jonathan M. Chu