

Report on Difference-in-Pay Leave for Fall 2007

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A long-term National Endowment for the Humanities and Massachusetts Historical Society Fellowship for 2007/08 was awarded to me last year to support my research project “The Poor in Early Massachusetts, 1630-1830.” The fellowship made possible for me to take a difference-in-pay leave for the fall semester of 2007, when I worked at several archives in Boston from June to December.

A major benefit of the fellowship was to use the extensive archives in the Boston area, including those at the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Massachusetts State Archives, the New England Historic Genealogical Society, the Boston Public Library, and Baker Library, Harvard University, all of which are the primary repositories of early Massachusetts history.

The Boston Overseers of the Poor Records (1733-1925) at the Massachusetts Historical Society, for example, were certainly the most valuable and most relevant to my project. The 15 reel records contained rich information about how the poor were treated in colonial Boston. Robert Love’s Record Book (1765-1766) was equally valuable to understand the practice of warnings out in Boston in the 1760s. So were many other manuscript collections, such as Ezekiel Price Papers (1754-1785). The Society’s filmed collection of early prints, sermons, and newspapers was also highly useful to understanding the economic, financial, and political situations in Massachusetts. For

example, the newspaper collections were extremely valuable for me to review the demands and social sentiments during Shays's Rebellion. Materials pertaining to a surge of charitable activities and organizations were also important to help understand the changing conditions of the poor and the changing attitudes of the public toward poverty around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Society's facilities for fellows were good and its staff were always helpful. Intellectual exchanges were highly encouraged through numerous events and activities, including a series of seminars, lectures, and brown-bag lunch presentations. Thanks to the kind invitation of the Society, I gave two talks on the topics of "The Poor and the Minimum Cost of Living in Colonial Massachusetts" on November 1 and of "Poverty in Massachusetts, 1630-1830" on December 5. I also gave a talk based on the same project to an audience at the History Department of Cornell University on October 25. I appreciated the comments from Lisa Wilson (Connecticut College) and from the several audiences who attended my presentations. All provided valuable suggestions and critical insight for me to move forward.

The leave allowed me to conduct extended research and to proceed with my writing, both of which required some uninterrupted time. I wrote a chapter for every month I stayed in Boston, very much in line with what I planned prior to taking the leave. As a NEH-MHS Fellow, my leave enabled me to concentrate on the research and writing of the project at a most convenient location. I am very grateful for the opportunity and completely satisfied with what I was able to accomplish during the leave.