Determined to rescue Sacco and Vanzetti from “the domain of marginalized radicals,” Temkin concludes that the “larger point” of the affair was a story about the way the United States related to the rest of the world (p. 222). This story is an important one, and it will undoubtedly resonate with contemporary readers. How unfortunate that in the telling, Temkin renders the politics for which Sacco and Vanzetti died irrelevant.

Mary Anne Trasciatti, Associate Professor of Rhetoric in the School of Communication at Hofstra University, is writing a book on the civil liberties activism of radical socialist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.


Professor York has produced an eminently useful and exemplary historical documentary edition of the papers of a leading British official based in the American colonies during the onset of the Revolution. Henry Hulton (1730–90) was a commissioner of the American Customs Board, established in Boston in 1767 and the cause of much animus between ordinary townfolk and the British. As Hulton’s papers reveal, the ranks of the board’s enemies extended far beyond the high-profile merchants whom they pursued in the law courts, a situation that ultimately confounded as much as it troubled Hulton and his family. Hulton’s career—he was a customs official in Antigua, a treasury auditor in Hanover, and a clerk in the London Plantations Office before coming to Boston—coincided with British attempts to modernize the mercantilist system. Hulton in many ways epitomized the reformist tendencies prevalent at the center of imperial administration in London as well as among the middle-ranking administrators in the colonies who were tasked with keeping the empire running smoothly. Theirs was an unenviable predicament; the commissioners were assailed by polemicists in the press, ostracized from polite company, and verbally abused in the streets. Such was the commissioners’ fear of colonial mobs that three times the board took refuge in Castle William in Boston Harbor.

The commissioners of the customs board were major players in the delivery of British colonial policy. Responsible for seeing that the trade laws were properly enforced, they were inevitably the focus
of popular resentment—although Hulton tended to overreact in the face of crowd action, for neither he nor the other board members were seriously injured by any of the Bostonians who protested their presence. Much has already been written about colonial crowds, but Hulton’s edited papers enhance our understanding of wider questions pertaining to imperial identities; for as Englishmen like Hulton protested the behavior of Americans, Americans were protesting the rights of Englishmen. Hulton, in short, provides us with all manner of quips, anecdotes, memoirs, and essays that enrich our profile of the men who tried to run the empire.

The “writings” that York provides encompass Hulton’s private letters and personal papers in the main, a few of which were published by Wallace Brown, as well as a hitherto unpublished history of the advent of the Revolution. York also includes the correspondence of the commissioner’s older sister Ann Hulton (1726–79), who never married and who accompanied her brother to Boston, sharing travails and several tergiversations as the two tried to adapt to life in the colonies. First printed in 1927, her letters are now deservedly collated with her brother’s extant materials. Henry Hulton’s history, “Some Account of the Proceedings of the People in New England,” is really a lively personal reflection on the board’s difficulties; assembled by several scribes, it was probably never finished. For all that some sections of the “Account” resemble draft notes, it is, in my experience, one of the most valuable resources of its kind. The anecdotes are not as sharp as those in Judge Peter Oliver’s history, and the craftsmanship falls well short of Thomas Hutchinson or even George Chalmers, but the situational observations are genuinely perceptive. If you want to know how British officials felt about the imperial crisis, reading Hulton’s “Account” is a fine start.

There is also much in York’s volume revealing of the tensions within the imperial establishment—most notably between Commissioner John Temple and his colleagues in the Board and between Temple and the governor, Francis Bernard. But York did not set out to produce an institutional history, and the papers of the American Customs Board remain to be published in a documentary edition. The extant manuscript collections, in the U.K. National Archives and the Massachusetts Historical Society, among other repositories, cover operational matters from 1767 to 1775, and although incomplete, really ought to be edited for publication.

Let us hope that York’s book proves to be a trailblazer for such an endeavor. His transcriptions are presented with limited editorial
intervention, and the editorial method is clearly and succinctly explained. The introduction, nearly one hundred pages long, is as valuable a resource as the transcripts. Here we have, for the first time, a proper biography of Henry Hulton, elegantly written, superbly footnoted, and expertly located in historiographical context. Would that scholars might follow this example and produce the full-length biography of Commissioner John Temple that is long overdue.

It is difficult for twenty-first-century readers to appreciate the historical importance of Crown officials like Henry Hulton. It would be easy—and misleading—to view them as merciless placemen or dismiss them as unimportant players in the grand narrative of history, devoid of influence in London and real power in the colonies. Yet, as the history of other colonies in the British Empire has largely been rewritten, so too might we reassess our views of the history of the imperial elite in the American colonies. Men like Hulton were not unthinking, money-grabbing officials, insensitive to the people around them and uninterested in their surroundings; they were neither pseudo-orientalists nor unreconstructed colonialists. Above all, they had a job to do: how they did it depended as much upon what the colonists allowed as it did upon what London ordered. The imperialism that Hulton and his colleagues evinced was always negotiated, and always negotiable. Ultimately, then, they were more diplomats than civil servants.

Colin Nicolson (University of Stirling) is editor of the first (2007) of a projected four volumes of The Papers of Francis Bernard, Governor of Colonial Massachusetts, 1760–69; he is presently working on the second volume, which covers the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765–66.


The publication of a new book on a classic historical subject brings an added pleasure, the opportunity to re-read an old standard in the field, in this case, Benjamin Woods Labaree’s The Boston Tea Party (1964), and to assess how several generations of scholarship have changed the way we approach the American Revolution. As Carp’s title suggests, his new work takes the core narrative set forth by Labaree of the famous “Tea Party” events and adds a series of
The New England Quarterly is a peer-reviewed academic journal consisting of articles on New England's cultural, literary, political, and social history. The journal contains essays, interpretations of traditional texts, essay reviews and book reviews. The New England Quarterly was established in 1928 and is published by MIT Press for The New England Quarterly Inc., a nonprofit sponsored by the University of Massachusetts Boston and the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, and supported by the New England. Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse. For bird watchers in New England, it's not rare to see a bald eagle in the wild. It is, however, a rare treat to see newly hatched eagles still in the nest and rarer still to witness an eagle egg hatching. Thanks to this eagle cam provided by the Raptor Research Project through UStream.tv, however, birders from New England, and indeed from all Things New. Portsmouth. The New England Quarterly, founded in 1928, is best described by its subtitle, A Historical Review of New England Life and Letters. Through major essays, memoranda and edited documents, reconsiderations (of scholarly editions, influential interpretive texts, and essays published in NEO), essay reviews, and book reviews, NEO authors help readers evaluate the history of civilization in New England. NEO publishes essays covering any time period, from the presence of Native Americans through the present day, and any subject germane to New England's history, for example, the region's Trends in UK labour supply by Berry, Stuart & Corder, Matthew & Duffy, Chris & Hackworth, Christopher & Speigner, Bradley. The potential impact of higher interest rates and further fiscal consolidation on households: evidence from the 2015 NMG Consulting survey by Bunn, Philip & Drapper, Lizzie & Rowe, Jeremy & Shah, Sagar. The role of designated market makers in the new trading landscape by Benos, Evangelos & Weatherly, Anne. The Prudential Regulation Authority by Bailey, Andrew & Breeden, Sarah & Stevens, Gregory. 2012, Volume 52, Issue 3.