

*Wheelock's World: Letters and the
Communication of Revival in Great
Awakening New England*

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ELEAZAR WHEELOCK (1711–1779) is known best as the Indian missionary, educator, and founder of the school that became Dartmouth College in 1770. His well-known native converts to Christianity—such as Samsom Occom—and his voluminous collection of personal papers make him a dominant personality in any account of early American Indian history. Yet Wheelock's well-chronicled ventures into the education of Indians cannot be grasped fully without an appreciation of his participation in the awakening of religious concern that pervaded New England in the early 1740s. As an itinerant preacher and a settled minister whose Lebanon Crank, Connecticut, congregation experienced a revival of its own, Wheelock forged a regional network of New Lights that would become foundational to the economic and religious support of his Indian schools. While historians have been long aware of the links between the Great

Versions of this essay were delivered in July 1996 at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publication at the American Antiquarian Society and at the 1998 Meeting of the Organization of American Historians in Indianapolis. I am grateful to Richard D. Brown, Charles E. Clark, David D. Hall, Timothy D. Hall, Kevin Gumienny, Ned Landsman, Sheila McIntyre, Eric J. Miller, Donna Rilling, Caroline Sloat, Nancy Tömes, and an anonymous reviewer for their advice, assistance, and encouragement.

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Awakening and colonial Indian missions, they have generally ignored, or simply brushed over, Wheelock's role in the New England religious world prior to 1745. Such an approach neglects the deeply embedded evangelical roots of Wheelock's missionary career.¹

Wheelock was a prolific religious communicator—a 'chief intelligencer of revival news.'² It was in this capacity that he made his greatest contribution to the spread and preservation of the Great Awakening in New England. Wheelock sent and received news of local awakenings occurring throughout the countryside with remarkable frequency. Ministers and lay people from all parts of the region wrote to the Connecticut clergyman to describe their local revivals, invite him to preach, request spiritual counsel, or discuss religious politics. William Gaylord, Congregational minister at Norwalk, Connecticut, began a 1740 letter to Wheelock by remarking that 'Since we can see one another but seldom, I am glad to do my part toward supplying . . . a frequent exchange of letters.' Numerous New Englanders during the Great Awakening could echo the words of Eldad Tupper of Sandwich, Massachusetts, when he thanked Wheelock for 'the things you acquaint me with being Glorious things Concerning the city of God.'³

This essay thus is concerned not with Wheelock the Indian school principal, but with Wheelock the Great Awakening letter writer. While scholarship on religious communication in early

1. Biographical accounts of Wheelock include James Dow McCallum, *Eleazar Wheelock* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Publications, 1939; reprint New York: Arno Press, 1969); Frederick Chase, *A History of Dartmouth College and the Town of Hanover, New Hampshire* (Brattleboro, Vt.: Vermont Publishing Co., 1928); James Axtell, 'Mr. Wheelock's Little Red School,' in *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 87–109; Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 204–15. Chase, *A History of Dartmouth*, 4, had suggested the links between Wheelock's Great Awakening networks and his Indian school networks.

2. Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 74.

3. William Gaylord to Eleazar Wheelock (hereafter EW), November 24, 1740, Wheelock Papers (Microfilm edition), Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H. (hereafter WP). Eldad Tupper to Eleazar Wheelock, June 6, 1740.

America has flourished in the last two decades, much of the attention has been paid to the role of print, orality, and itinerant preaching as a means of diffusing information, spreading revival, and creating regenerate communities.⁴ Few scholars, with the exception of Richard D. Brown, in his work on eighteenth-century ministerial networks, and Susan O'Brien, in her article on transatlantic letter writing, have examined correspondence as an important cultural medium in the early New England religious world.⁵ In an attempt to help fill this historiographic void, I have examined over 150 personal letters that Wheelock sent and received between 1739 and 1745, the height of the Great Awakening in New England.⁶ My concern is with how correspondence served

4. For an introduction to scholarship on American religious communication and an extensive bibliography, see Leonard I. Sweet, ed., *Communication and Change in American Religious History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993). See also Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 65-81; Francis Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610-1692* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994); David Cressy, *Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Susan O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755,' *American Historical Review* 91 (October 1986): 811-32; Michael Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in its British Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991); Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Timothy D. Hall, *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).

5. Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 65-81; Brown, 'Spreading the Word: Rural Clergymen and the Communication Network of 18th Century New England,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 94 (1982): 1-14; O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints.' See also Sheila McIntyre, 'This Loving Correspondency: New England Ministerial Communication and Association, 1670-1730' (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1996). For two accounts that do not deal with letter writing specifically, but are sensitive to the role of correspondence in communicating revival, see Hall, *Contested Boundaries*, 30, 33, and Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*.

6. My database consists of only those Wheelock letters that make reference to the religious revivals. The majority of Wheelock's surviving letters are housed at the Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, New Hampshire. I have supplemented these letters, which I viewed on microfilm, with unpublished Wheelock correspondence and letters in the possession of the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia and the Simon Gratz Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For a guide to the Dartmouth Collection, see *A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Papers of Eleazar Wheelock* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Library, 1971). Also see tables 1 and 2 in this article.

as an agent in the creation, preservation, definition, and redefinition of a revival community. Using Wheelock's network as an interpretive window, it is my contention that letters were a significant means of spreading news of the revival and linking New England to a more widely shared evangelical experience. Furthermore, Wheelock used correspondence to help define and redefine his own ministry specifically, and the revival community of ministers generally, after the Great Awakening took a radical turn in 1742.

The majority of Wheelock's Great Awakening letters were exchanged with New England ministers who were either undergoing revivals in their congregations or had not experienced such an awakening but longed to ignite one. For clergymen, letter writing was an indispensable aspect of professional development. The practice provided an opportunity to converse with like-minded clerics on issues of practical theology—the discipline of contextualizing and communicating one's formal divinity training to unschooled parishioners. Ministers were often the only educated members of New England communities and thus, through whatever cosmopolitan connections they maintained, important nodes of communication.⁷

Clerical letters were the products of overlapping networks of professional associations, college friendships, or family connections and could touch upon an array of topics ranging from church business to matters of doctrine. Wheelock was a member of the Windham Association of Ministers, a fellowship of Congregational clergy that met regularly to discuss matters of theology, polity, and other church-related business. He communicated frequently with members of the Association, including Benjamin Pomeroy, his closest clerical colleague and the minister of the Hebron Society, and Solomon Williams, who settled across town

7. Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 65–66; Darrett Rutman, 'Assessing the Little Communities of Early America,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 43 (1986): 175, 176. For example, of the 156 names listed on the Lebanon North Society's ministerial rate bill in 1741, none was college educated. See 'Rate Bill for the Parish of Lebanon (Now Columbia), Conn., For the Year 1741,' *New England History and Genealogical Record* 20 (1866): 45–47; Bruce Stark, 'Lebanon, Connecticut: A Study of Society and Politics in the Eighteenth Century' (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1970), 256–57.

at Lebanon's First Society. Between meetings, these clergymen penned letters, both formal and informal, seeking advice on an array of matters pertinent to the pastoral ministry. For example, Wheelock sought the guidance of Williams regarding his unsuccessful attempts at employing a Presbyterian form of church government within his congregation. On other occasions, Williams asked Wheelock to come across town and pray with him over the various illnesses afflicting Lebanon.⁸

Wheelock also made acquaintances with clergymen outside his sphere of professional accountability. Many of these ministers had met Wheelock during his itinerant preaching tours, but others, who had only 'heard' of his ministry, wrote to him. John Graham, the Scottish Congregationalist minister in Southbury, Connecticut, for example, had heard that Wheelock 'has been much in itinerant labours.'⁹ Like the clergy in the Windham Association, these ministers shared spiritual concerns, trials, and queries with Wheelock. John Norton, the minister at Falltown, Massachusetts, wrote to Wheelock about Eady Newcombe, a former member of the Lebanon Crank church who had been disciplined by Wheelock for lying. Norton asked Wheelock if Newcombe's 'breath is hot' because she had moved to Falltown and Norton intended to restore her to communion.¹⁰ As a popular Congregational minister, Wheelock was often called upon to provide advice on such ecclesiastical affairs.

A more intimate network of Wheelock correspondents consisted of members of the clergy with whom he shared familial and kinship ties. He communicated with this group more than with any other. Wheelock found himself connected, via marriage, to the first families of New England congregationalism. In 1735 he wed Sarah Maltby, the widowed daughter of John Davenport of

8. EW to Solomon Williams, November 7, 1740, in E.W. Gillett, 'President Wheelock and Contemporaries,' *American Presbyterian Review* 1 (1871): 289; Solomon Williams to EW, October 25, 1740, *WP*; Williams to EW, November 11, 1743, *WP*. On clerical associations see J. William Youngs, *God's Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 69-78.

9. John Graham to EW, February 12, 1742, *WP*.

10. John Norton to EW, September 9, 1742, *WP*.

Stamford, Connecticut, the grandson of the founder of the New Haven Colony. Wheelock's marriage to Maltby gave him loose ties to several ministers who would play significant roles in the Great Awakening. His new wife was the sister of James Davenport, one of New England's best known New Light preachers. Sarah Maltby's sister was married to Stephen Williams, the veteran pastor of the Congregational Church at Longmeadow, Massachusetts, and a member of the well-respected Williams family of eighteenth-century New England religious life. Another of John Davenport's daughters had married William Gaylord, a classmate of Wheelock's at Yale and a staunch New Light pastor in Norwalk, Connecticut. Wheelock's sister, moreover, had married Benjamin Pomeroy, the minister at Hebron. This small network of ministerial family connections cannot be underestimated in understanding the spread of the Great Awakening, especially in New England. Though Wheelock would develop a quite extensive circle of correspondents and ecclesiastical acquaintances during his tenure at Lebanon Crank, it was these familial connections that would become the important core of his communication network.¹¹

During the Great Awakening, such networks were important conduits for spreading revival news. Though Wheelock often broadened participation in these scribal circles by including various lay acquaintances he had made on his itinerant tours, his letters were ultimately the reflection of their authors, an elite class of educated clergymen. Reports of local awakenings were validated through the social standing of Wheelock and his correspondents. A letter signed by an ordained minister brought instant credibility to such news and confirmed the authenticity of revival reports. At a time in New England religious culture when clergymen were in search of 'Distinguishing Marks' of God's handiwork, letters were important agents for quantifying and qualifying the spiritual excitement.

11. McCallum, *Eleazar Wheelock*, 8; Chase, *A History of Dartmouth College*, 1, 2. For the Williams family, see Kevin Sweeney, 'River Gods and Other Related Minor Deities' (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986).

Wheelock wrote to ministers in small towns, most of which were situated outside New England's major communication routes. Remote communities were generally exposed to information in proportion to their geographical distance from commercial centers. Those hinterland villages such as Bethlehem, Woodbury, or Sharon, Connecticut, received news at a slower and less frequent rate than did larger coastal towns. While most remote towns were eventually exposed to information, they were normally among the last to receive it.¹² How then did the 'ruralness' of these communities to which Wheelock wrote affect the way they received news about revivals? If historians are correct in employing hurricane metaphors to describe the way the Great Awakening spread through New England society, how did contemporary ministers understand the relationship between their local revivals and this tumultuous shower of God's spirit? Did rural clergymen presiding over revivals realize that they were part of a 'great and general awakening'? How did New Englanders, who did not have immediate or regular access to books and newspapers or who did not experience the preaching of a prominent itinerant, become informed of the spiritual storm pounding the region? Letter writing provides some of the answers.¹³

The means by which religious revival has been communicated and disseminated has drawn a great deal of scholarly attention in the past several years. Frank Lambert, in his study of religious

12. On the relationship between commercialization and communications see William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 54; Charles E. Clark, *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665-1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Ian K. Steele, *English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). My analysis of the relationship between rural New England towns and market centers is based on Bruce Daniels, *The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development: 1635-1790* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1979); Edward M. Cook, Jr., *The Fathers of Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth Century New England* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); and Jackson Turner Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985). Daniels argues that 90 percent of Connecticut colonists were 'rural dwellers.' p. 162.

13. For a brief analysis of 'hurricane metaphors,' see Jon Butler, 'Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,' *Journal of American History* 69 (1982-1983): 305-25.

print culture and the ministry of George Whitefield, has called our attention to the ways in which the Grand Itinerant used strategically placed distribution agents—mostly ministers—to sell his literature throughout the New England countryside. His networks extended as far north as the Reverend Nicholas Gilman's parish in Durham, New Hampshire.¹⁴ Borrowing from the work of anthropologist Benedict Anderson, Lambert shows how print could create a community of readers united around a common cause—in this case the support of a Great Awakening throughout the colonies—without the participants in such a community ever meeting face to face. Lambert is correct, and convincing, in his emphasis on print. Between 1741 and 1750, New Light preachers Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent, and Jonathan Edwards (in that order) were the most published authors in the colonies.¹⁵ By 1740, newspapers, which were slowly becoming focused less on European news and more concerned with the provinces, also covered certain aspects of this revival of religion in great detail.

Those who study the Great Awakening, however, should approach the recent application of Anderson's work on third-world nationalism to the study of colonial print culture and the 'public sphere' with a certain degree of caution. It has become fashionable to argue that print fostered an 'imagined community' of readers who were increasingly conscious of their ties to other readers through shared language, tradition, political and national loyalties, and especially print. Such communities were imagined in the sense that individuals could feel included in a common fellowship and maintain a sense of belonging without knowing all of the other members personally. Anderson's construct is a useful one, but it must be employed here in a limited way. His nationalistic communities were organic and naturalized, while Wheelock's community of letters was understood by its members to be

14. Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, especially 101, 109–10, 122.

15. Figure 9, 'Leading Authors By Decade, 1701–1790,' in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, vol. 1 in *A History of the Book in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

providential and supernatural—the product of revived religious faith. While Anderson's imagined nations were boundless and democratic, 'Wheelock's World' emerged because of an elite social class that authenticated the information provided and consumed by its participants.¹⁶

Furthermore, though printed materials were consumed by the colonial public and fostered a sense that a region-wide awakening was occurring, the diffusion of Great Awakening news and the creation of a revived community should not be credited to Whitefield alone or to other well-published itinerants. Print had limits in its effectiveness at spreading news and connecting people to a common religious event. First of all, much of the historiography of the Great Awakening has focused on the exploits of evangelical celebrities. Such an emphasis can lead us to overlook the fact that the ministers who triggered most of New England's revivals were not well-known. When Whitefield departed the region in October of 1740, he entrusted the work of revival to a host of young evangelicals, including Wheelock, who would extend the general religious concern into hinterland towns. While New Englanders could continue to keep abreast of Whitefield's exploits elsewhere in the British world through his published journals and accounts in newspapers, they seldom read about the local revivals that followed in his wake. These smaller community revivals, which were no less part of the 'Great Awakening' than Whitefield's well-attended performances, were presided over by the ground troops of the movement—clergymen concerned foremost with winning converts and reviving individual congregations, who had little time and few resources to write and publish accounts of their experiences.¹⁷

A similar interpretive warning should be issued in regard to preaching as a means of spreading revival and creating community. Harry S. Stout's biography of Whitefield argues convinc-

16. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Press, 1983), especially 41–48.

17. On the cadre of 'lesser lights' who followed Whitefield in New England, see Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 127.

ingly that the Grand Itinerant's sermons and expertise in oral persuasion were powerful tools for spreading his evangelical message.¹⁸ But while Whitefield certainly drew thousands of listeners wherever and whenever he preached, it is likely that most New Englanders had no opportunity to hear one of his sermons. We cannot quantify or provide names for those who heard Whitefield preach, thus making it impossible to gauge the depths of his popularity. For instance, it can be doubted whether the romanticized and oft-cited account of Nathan Cole, the Connecticut farmer who raced twelve miles across the countryside on horseback to hear Whitefield preach, was more than an isolated case.¹⁹ Whitefield spent the bulk of his New England tour preaching in larger port towns. His itinerary followed the Atlantic coastline, the shores of Long Island Sound, and the banks of the Connecticut River. Though he had originally scheduled sermons in remote eastern Connecticut villages such as Lebanon, Voluntown, and Hebron, he cut his tour short before arriving in these communities. He did make brief stops in such towns as Sutton and Northampton, Massachusetts (in the latter place he seems to have been motivated more by conversing with Jonathan Edwards than preaching), but many of the inhabitants of New England villages situated away from commercial routes did not get the opportunity to hear him preach.²⁰

Even newspapers, at times, did not have the effectiveness of a personal letter for spreading revival news. By 1740 there were presumably few parts of New England outside the reach of one of five Boston weeklies. Delivery was slow to towns not located along major post routes, but generally any colonist who subscribed to a newspaper, borrowed one from a friend, or attended

18. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 127.

19. Michael Crawford, 'The Spiritual Travels of Nathan Cole,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser. 33 (1976): 89-126.

20. For Whitefield's scheduled itinerary see issues of the *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, September 18, 1740 through November 6, 1740. Whitefield arrived in New England at Newport, Rhode Island, on September 14, 1740, and remained in the region until October 29, 1740. For the individual towns in which he preached, see *George Whitefield's Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 451-83.

a public reading in a tavern or church, could eventually receive news.²¹ Newspapers, however, reported primarily on the 'big events' of the Great Awakening, narrowing their focus to Whitefield's tours, the atrocities of New Light itinerants such as James Davenport, and other important ecclesiastical issues and controversies in major port towns. None of the Boston newspapers chronicled rural revivals in small outposts such as Bethlehem, Connecticut, or Taunton, Massachusetts. A rough survey of material published between 1739 and 1744 in all five Boston newspapers reveals little, if any, news of post-Whitefieldian revivals or awakenings in remote communities. Few of the revivals occurring in the churches of Wheelock's network of clergymen received any coverage. Thus, though ministers such as Nicholas Gilman could peruse the *Boston Gazette* in Durham, New Hampshire, they could not find news of the smaller, scattered revivals taking place in rural communities similar to their own. This analysis supports the findings of several scholars, most recently and notably Charles E. Clark, that newspapers in the first half of the eighteenth century were supplements to oral communication and personal letters as a means of spreading news. Correspondence and face-to-face exchanges still dominated the way that information flowed through society.²²

It was not until 1743, when Boston minister Thomas Prince began publishing his *Christian History*, that accounts of New England's smaller, local revivals began to find their way into print. Prince published reports from such communities as Middleborough, Massachusetts, Westerly, Rhode Island, and Lyme, Connecticut. But even *Christian History*, a periodical devoted solely to re-

21. Clark, *Public Prints*, 255.

22. Clark, *Public Prints*, 88, 91, 170, 251; Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 17. While his work focuses on print culture, Warner does note that 'local news could be had through hearsay faster than weekly newspapers could print it.' Similarly, Michael Crawford argues that personal letters were the primary means of spreading revival news in the years between the First and Second Great Awakenings, but also places a much greater emphasis than I do upon the importance of evangelical magazines such as *Christian History*. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 234.

vival narratives, could not deliver news as quickly as a personal letter. At times, the narrative of a given awakening would not appear in Prince's journal until years after the revival occurred. By this time, word of the awakening had already spread through ministerial networks, making the *Christian History* account 'old news' to its clerical readers.

A distinction must be made here between the formal revival 'narratives' printed in religious magazines such as *Christian History* and revival 'reports' that circulated through letters. Narratives almost always appeared well after a revival had occurred and included accounts of local awakenings that could not possibly have been communicated in the limited space of a letter. (It does appear, however, that British religious magazines published revival narratives much sooner after the revival than American periodicals.) Revival reports, or at least the kind that appeared in Wheelock's letters, were brief paragraphs designed primarily to alert readers to the mere existence of a revival and perhaps provide a few sentences of detail. Only rarely (as in the case of the East Lyme, Connecticut, reports noted below) would letters contain much elaboration about a revival. It is thus my contention that although print and revival narratives helped 'invent' a Great Awakening in the minds of New Englanders after the revival fires cooled, letters served as a legitimate means of providing news during its course.²³

23. For discussions on these themes see Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*; Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 223-39; Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*; Joseph Conforti, 'The Invention of the "Great Awakening," 1795-1842,' *Early American Literature* 26 (1991): 99-118. Lambert's assertion that fifty local revivals occurred during the Great Awakening in New England is based entirely on published sources, specifically *Whitefield's Journals* and *Christian History*. None of the revivals reported in Wheelock's network are noted by Lambert, unless they were also included in these two publications. See Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 23-24.

An underlying interpretive current guides much of the recent work on print and communities of readership during the Great Awakening. Each study, either directly or indirectly, offers a challenge to Jon Butler's interpretation of the Great Awakening. In his now classic essay, Butler argued forcefully that what historians have long labeled the 'Great Awakening' was not a unified, intercolonial religious 'event,' but rather a series of local or regional revivals with very few links to one another. Thus, according to Butler, the 'Great Awakening' was little more than a scholarly exercise in 'interpretive fiction,' a construction of nineteenth-century historians seeking to bring unity to these otherwise scattered re-

One example of the delay involved in Prince's publication of revival accounts is the case of the awakening in East Lyme, Connecticut. Whitefield had passed through East Lyme in 1740, and the minister there, Jonathan Parsons, noted that the 'frequent Accounts of the Success [Whitefield] had in many Places were serviceable among us.'²⁴ On April 20, 1741, nearly six months after Whitefield's departure, Captain John Lee of East Lyme reported to Wheelock that Parsons had preached to 100 congregants, and 'a great number cried out with such anguish as I never See it.' Many were 'greatly wounded,' and '11 or 12 persons fainted or nearly fainted.' The very next day, Wheelock received a letter from Parsons himself, reporting that, 'I have seen more of the Power of divine impressions in 10 days past then ever I saw in all my life.' Parsons went on to describe in detail the events of the revival. Approximately two weeks later, Lee informed Wheelock that '20 persons were under Convictions,' including Lee's thirteen-year-old daughter.²⁵ The reports of the East Lyme revival are clear and descriptive, but most important for our purposes, they were transmitted through Wheelock's communication network two years before a full account was recorded in *Christian History*. News of this revival was probably then passed from Wheelock to other correspondents throughout New England. Thus, revival magazines such as Prince's *Christian History*, al-

vivals. Current work on the Great Awakening attempts to counter Butler's thesis by arguing that through print and the public sphere (among other factors, including itinerant preaching), colonists were able to connect their local revivals with a revived and 'imagined' community of believers all experiencing these revivals in the same way. See Butler, 'Enthusiasm Described and Decried.'

24. Cited in Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 127.

25. J. Lee to EW, April 20, 1741, *WP*; Jonathan Parsons to EW, April 21, 1741, *WP*; J. Lee to EW, May 8, 1741, *WP*. The revivals at Taunton, Bridgewater, Middleborough, and Wrentham were all reported by Wheelock to Joseph Bellamy at least one year before a full account was published in the *Christian History*. (Bellamy to EW, December 27, 1741, Bellamy Record Book, Presbyterian Historical Society [hereafter PHS], Philadelphia.) Stephen Williams informed Wheelock concerning the Northampton revival nearly three and a half years before the account was published in the *Christian History*. (Stephen Williams to EW, March 16, 1741, *WP*.) On the *Christian History* and other eighteenth-century evangelical magazines, see Susan Durden (O'Brien), 'A Study of the First Evangelical Magazines, 1740-1748,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976).

though they have preserved revival narratives in printed form for future generations, did not have the same potential as personal letters for spreading current news of revivals.

Wheelock's letters were also employed to define and redefine the boundaries of a revival community in which he was a major participant. The Great Awakening was arguably the most divisive event in New England history. Revivals divided local congregations and towns, created new allegiances among ministers, empowered lay leaders against their clergymen, and generally created a religious climate where Congregationalists became more cognizant than ever before of their differences. New methods of labeling those differences emerged from the religious politics of the period. While 'Old Light' and 'New Light' were often nothing more than rhetorical tools used by ministers to pin down their opponents, at the most basic level they represented a commitment to, or rejection of, this religious event. Revival-friendly churches in search of new ministers specifically set out to retain the services of a 'New Light' clergyman, while ministers began to identify their colleagues with these new labels. In the early stages of the Great Awakening, 'New Lights'—a far from monolithic group of revival supporters—shared a sense of Christian fellowship through their participation in and association with this spiritual outpouring. Pro-revival ministers defined the membership of this regenerate community through the testimony of shared evangelical experience.

Some of this process of definition was carried out in print, especially after 1741, when the course of the Great Awakening took a disturbing and radical turn that caused many of its most ardent early supporters to moderate their zeal. A host of controversial preachers began engaging in a series of disruptive acts that, from the perspective of many clergymen, did not promote true religion and served as little more than fodder for an increasing number of Old Light assaults on the Awakening.²⁶ New Lights, of whom

26. See my analysis of these changes in the context of my discussion of Wheelock's career below.

Jonathan Edwards was the most prolific, appeared in print to separate themselves from the extremists and preserve the revival from its radical dross. Their writings redefined the bounds of the community in such a way that membership became based less on evangelical experience and more upon certain canons of acceptable ministerial behavior. While these printed sermons, discourses, and declarations were important means of redeeming and defending the revivals, the redefinition process was also conducted through letter-writing networks such as the one presided over by Wheelock. As ministers witnessed revivals in their churches and on their itinerant travels, and reported the news to one another through correspondence, they also shared their concerns over specific and local elements of the revival that did not seem right. Through these networks they alerted one another to radical activity, corrected one another for dabbling in unwarranted practices, and provided rebukes to those whom they felt were hindering the greater cause of the gospel. In the process, they renegotiated the boundaries of a New Light community and dealt with day-to-day revival concerns in a way that could not be accomplished through print.

Thus, focusing solely on printed works and their links to the more prominent revivalists such as Whitefield provides only a partial understanding of the spread of the Great Awakening and the preservation and definition of a revival community. Letters were also an important part of the communicative process. Unlike a newspaper or periodical, personal correspondence could not create a public sphere based on its readership of printed materials, or reach thousands quickly and in the same place as a sermon might, but letters had certain advantages that print and sermons did not possess. As Wheelock's Great Awakening career—which is chronicled below—indicates, eighteenth-century evangelical religion could be propagated through a variety of cultural forms and mediums.

Born in Windham, Connecticut, Wheelock entered Yale College in 1729 in preparation for a ministerial career. While at Yale, he

was a member of a circle of pious students influenced by David Ferris, a twenty-five-year-old undergraduate noted for his claim to have received direct revelation from God and for his leadership of a group of New Medford Congregationalists who established one of Connecticut's first separatist churches. Ferris led informal meetings at the college with those students attracted to his overtly pietistic and enthusiastic version of evangelicalism. This student group was exposed in 1743, by Charles Chauncy, acting on a report from an anonymous student who matriculated at the college during the Ferris years. They were described in Chauncey's definitive attack on the Great Awakening, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*. Seeking to discredit the New England New Lights by linking them to a Quaker (Ferris converted to the Society of Friends upon leaving Yale), Chauncy named Wheelock, James Davenport, Benjamin Pomeroy, and Daniel Bliss as members of the Ferris camp. Wheelock would later deny vigorously his association with Ferris, but not until the link had a direct affect on his religious reputation and, consequently, on the fortunes of his Indian school.²⁷

After graduating from Yale, Wheelock was licensed to preach by the New Haven Ministerial Association. In June 1735 he accepted a call from the Second Society of Lebanon (Crank), Connecticut. In his first year of ministry at 'the Crank,' Wheelock presided over a revival in the congregation that caught the attention of Jonathan Edwards, who mentioned the awakening in his chronicle of New England revivals, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*.²⁸ Later, in January 1739, Wheelock experi-

27. Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1743): 209-12. On Yale in the eighteenth century, see Robert Warch, *School of the Prophets: Yale College, 1701-1740* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973). For Wheelock's battle with Chauncy over Indian education, see Frederick Mills, 'The Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge in British North America, 1730-1775,' *Church History* 63 (March 1994): 15-30; Charles Lippy, *Seasonable Revolutionary: The Mind of Charles Chauncy* (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1981), 64, 74; EW to Ebenezer Pemberton, October 1759, *WP*; EW to Charles Chauncy, March 13, 1769, *WP*.

28. Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* . . . (Boston: Kneland and Green, 1738).

enced another revival in his congregation (see below); this one coincided with the arrival in the colonies of George Whitefield. As news of Whitefield's ministry reached Lebanon, Wheelock came to realize that his local stirring was part of a region-wide event. And when further reports of an awakening at the Congregational church in Southold, Long Island—the parish of Wheelock's brother-in-law James Davenport—arrived in Connecticut, the Lebanon minister and his associate Benjamin Pomeroy, the minister at nearby Hebron, went there to experience the excitement first hand. Their journey also took them to New York City, where they were inspired by the preaching of Whitefield, and Wheelock reported that of the Grand Itinerant's 8,000 listeners, 'many were affected.'²⁹ Wheelock returned from New York as one of New England's strongest supporters of Whitefield. His labors attracted the notice of Whitefield, as well. He described Wheelock and Pomeroy, after meeting them for the first time in Wethersfield, Connecticut, in October 1740, as 'two zealous ministers of Jesus Christ.'³⁰ Wheelock became so linked with Whitefield in the imagination of Connecticut Congregationalists that a 'revived' twelve-year-old girl in Lebanon, under the influence of supposed enthusiastical 'trances' and dreams, claimed that she had a 'vision of Christ and read in the book of life in Golden Capitals several names—Mr. Whitefield's first, and then Mr. Wheelocks. . . .' Whitefield was still the most prominent New Light, but Wheelock appeared to be his local representative.³¹

At times during the Great Awakening, Wheelock preached almost daily, either at Lebanon or on the itinerant trail. His tours of the region encouraged revivals in the Connecticut River Valley, eastern Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Boston. Peter Onuf

29. EW to Stephen Williams, March 16, 1740, *WP*; EW to Sarah Maltby Wheelock, April 28, 1740, *WP*; EW to Stephen Williams, May 22, 1740, *WP*; EW to Sarah Maltby Wheelock, May 5, 1740, *WP*.

30. George Whitefield, 'A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal,' in *George Whitefield's Journals*, 479.

31. E. H. Gillett, ed., 'The Diary of Jacob Eliot,' *The Historical Magazine* 2d ser. (December 14, 1869), 38.

has found, in his study of revivalism in Connecticut, that a visit from Wheelock produced on average a 50 percent increase in church admissions, second in this category only to Davenport.³² Wheelock became consumed with spreading the Great Awakening to every corner of New England. It did not take him long to realize that by reporting what he had seen, heard, and experienced in his travels, he might encourage other ministers seeking to propagate revivals in their own congregations and in itinerant stops. With a network of fellow ministers already in place through his professional and familial associations, and a host of new correspondents enlisted through his travels, Wheelock began to write.

Wheelock's letters reflect the incredible impact that the Great Awakening had upon the religious lives of New England ministers and lay people. By comparing the letters he received and sent between 1739 and 1750 with his correspondence in other years, one is struck by shifts in both the quantity and content of the letters in the years surrounding the Awakening. His infrequent, pre-awakening correspondence centered on business and disciplinary proceedings within his Lebanon Crank congregation, while his letters after 1744 began to focus increasingly on the establishment of his Indian school. But in the years of the Awakening, Wheelock seems to have presided over both a religious and a letter-writing revival. He swept aside all other epistolary concerns during this period in order to focus his writing on revival news and other awakening-oriented correspondence. (See Tables 1 and 2.)

A large number of Wheelock's letters reported on various revivals that were occurring throughout the region. This form of correspondence, as Susan O'Brien has noted for transatlantic religious communication during the Awakening, 'helped establish the authenticity of the revival.'³³ Revival reports drew ministers out of the daily, mundane grind of their pastoral duties and into a

32. Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf, 'James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London,' *Journal of American History* 71 (1983): 573, n. 41.

33. O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints,' 811-32.

TABLE I
NUMBER OF KNOWN LETTERS EXCHANGED
BY ELEAZAR WHEELOCK, 1728-1750

<i>Year</i>	1728	1729	1730	1731	1732	1733	1734	1735	1736	1737	1738	1739
<i>Letters Exchanged</i>	1	0	0	3	2	2	4	9	1	8	4	24
<i>Year</i>	1740	1741	1742	1743	1744	1745	1746	1747	1748	1749	1750	
<i>Letters Exchanged</i>	24	50	45	38	17	12	17	10	5	22	15	

TABLE 2
WHEELOCK LETTERS WITH REVIVAL CONTENT, 1739-1750

<i>Year</i>	<i>Letters Exchanged</i>	<i>Letters Exchanged with Revival Content</i>	<i>% of Letters Exchanged with Revival Content</i>
1739	24	0	0%
1740	24	19	79%
1741	50	47	94%
1742	45	42	93%
1743	38	22	57%
1744	17	10	58%
1745	12	3	40%
1746	17	2	12%
1747	10	1	10%
1748	5	0	0%
1749	22	3	14%
1750	15	0	0%

Source: *The Papers of Eleazar Wheelock*, Dartmouth College, Microfilm edition; *A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Papers of Eleazar Wheelock* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Library, 1971), 3-17.

more exciting, 'revived' religious world that existed outside their localities. News of religious stirrings in other places furthered the impression that God was indeed doing a 'great and mighty work' among His people.³⁴

Wheelock's letters created a community among New England revival supporters by 'publishing' news and linking other ministers and lay people to a shared experience. Literary critic Harold Love has argued that unprinted manuscripts (a category in which personal letters safely fall), despite their small numbers of copies and poor distribution, could be categorized as 'publications' in the sense that they contained information and literature that was consumed by a reading public. The exchange of these letters among clergymen, as in the case of Wheelock, created what Love has called a 'scribal community.' This construct of scribal publication also explains the possibility that the information about revivals contained in the letters could be disseminated beyond the original readers, either orally or in print, thus expanding the limits of Wheelock's fellowship.³⁵

From 1739 to 1744 Wheelock sent and received detailed reports of revivals occurring throughout the region. He was first made aware of the spiritual stirring in Southold, Long Island, through a 'New York man' who happened to be passing through Lebanon after visiting Davenport's parish. Shortly after hearing

34. Scholar James Carey has noted that communication can serve the purpose of both 'transmission' and 'ritual.' As transmission, which deals with ideas such as 'imparting' or 'sending,' the information in Wheelock's letters moved through time and over distance and space. As 'ritual,' his letters fostered 'sharing,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of a common faith.' Carey further notes that news as a cultural form centers on a 'hunger for experience,' similar to the thirst for revival portrayed by the churches and ministers that wrote to Wheelock. See James W. Carey, *Communication and Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge Press, 1989), 15-22. Timothy Hall makes a similar case for itinerants in *Contested Boundaries*.

35. Communities of the imagination, as described by Benedict Anderson, could be fostered by both letters and print, calling into question the popular historiographical marriage between Anderson and the print public sphere as articulated by Jurgen Habermas. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). For a helpful work on ministerial letters as scribal publications in seventeenth-century New England see McIntyre, 'This Loving Correspondency.'

the news, Wheelock sent off a letter to Stephen Williams at Longmeadow with word that 'they got distracted again at Southold about religion, By this I would hope religion has got a revival. . . .'³⁶ News of the revival prompted Wheelock's visit to Southold in the spring of 1740. While he was away, he reported what he had experienced to his wife, Sarah, who most likely relayed the news to his congregation at Lebanon. Wheelock informed Sarah that Davenport was engaged in a 'wonderful visitation of God and is full of Life and Zeal and God is in an extraordinary manner at work among his People.' Days later, Wheelock relayed news concerning the 'many conversions of late' at Southold, the progress of the 'Work of God . . . in many parts of the Jersies,' and the 'appearance of Religious Concern' in New York triggered by Whitefield's preaching.³⁷ Wheelock also sent firsthand accounts of the Southold revival to Williams, specifically mentioning an 'Extempore Sermon 2½ hours long' with 'several ministers present.' In the same manner that news from Southold linked Wheelock's Lebanon revival to a larger religious event, it also connected the awakening in Williams' congregation at Longmeadow to the region-wide movement of God's spirit.³⁸ New England Congregationalists prayed regularly for special seasons of divine favor in their churches, and many saw the itinerant tours of Whitefield and the revivals in places such as Lebanon and Longmeadow, as answers to those supplications.

After Wheelock returned from New York, he continued to keep abreast of happenings in Southold through his correspondence with Davenport. Yet something did not seem right about the way the religious revival was being conducted in Southold. On one occasion, the Southold minister sent word that 'the

36. EW to Stephen Williams, March 16, 1740, quoted in Gillett, 'President Wheelock and his Contemporaries,' *American Presbyterian Review* 1 (1871): 286.

37. EW to Sarah Maltby Wheelock, April 28, 1740; EW to Maltby Wheelock, May 5, 1740; EW to Stephen Williams, March 16, 1740, quoted in Gillett, 'President Wheelock and His Contemporaries,' 286.

38. EW to Stephen Williams, April 22, 1740, *WP*; EW to Williams, June 6, 1740, *WP*; Gregory Nobles, *Divisions Throughout the Whole: Politics and Society in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1740-1775* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 44.

difficulties of the work (of revival) are great' and described a sermon in which 'the Lord opened my mouth so that I scarcely knew how to shut it.'³⁹

As Wheelock and his correspondents spread news about the revival in the Long Island town, others became troubled by reports that Davenport was engaging in some unusual practices. His extemporaneous preaching and claims to have received special revelations from God were practices that did not conform to the ordered and rational preaching of educated clergymen or the bibliocentric faith of the Congregational heirs of Puritanism. Many clergymen were unsure of what to make of Davenport's reported behavior. Some continued to rejoice in what God was carrying out through him, while others hesitated to throw their complete support behind his ministry.

While he did occasionally express concern about ministers who promoted their evangelical commitments with too much zeal, Wheelock did not condemn Davenport's enthusiasm outright and made several efforts to convince his ministerial colleagues that what was occurring in Southold was a legitimate work of God's spirit. He believed firmly, at least in 1740, that 'there is vastly less hurt by some degrees of enthusiasm, where there is a fervent love to God and souls, than there is by the lukewarmness and coldness that does so generally obtain among ministers.'⁴⁰ Wheelock was especially upset with those ministers who, he believed, hindered the rapid spread of revival because they approached it with undue caution. He rebuked Stephen Williams for his circumspection, 'You speak concerning intemperate zeal. I acknowledge there is such a thing as being over zealous, and carried on with too much fierceness and eagerness. But let me tell you with all humility that I think your zeal is generally intemperate; by yours I mean not only yours, but the common zeal of the country is very intemperate, and that in regard of its coldness. It is so cold that it does little or no good. I think a zeal of God that arises from a work of

39. James Davenport to EW, October 5, 1740, *WP*.

40. EW to Stephen Williams, June 9, 1740, *WP*.

God's Spirit and grace in the heart, from divine light and teaching, though it may be overheated, and carrying men on with too much eagerness and engagedness for a while, is vastly less hurtful to religion and less dangerous than yours that moves you to do nothing out of your old path.⁴¹ Wheelock defended Davenport against charges that his reportedly extemporaneous preaching, singsong cadence, and wild gestures were signs that he was mentally ill. Again he turned to Williams to assure him that 'the reports you have heard that he (Davenport) is Delirious I believe is not true. I was with him almost a fortnight and perceived nothing of it.'⁴² When Davenport took his revival-charged ministry to Connecticut in 1741, several ministers reported favorably on his activity. After Davenport preached in Norwalk, William Gaylord wrote to Wheelock with 'great hopes and expectations' for the return of 'Dear Brother James' to the region. Wheelock, in turn, reported Davenport's activities at 'Mohegan, Nihantichk [*sic*], and Stonington.'⁴³ The Lebanon minister did, however, have some concerns about Davenport's behavior. He expressed them in a letter to his wife written from Southold: 'there are some things uncomfortably here which I shall wholly admit, only that I fear sathan has and will Get advantage of the work of God here.'⁴⁴ Yet, as long as Davenport remained committed to the goal of promoting revival, he would have Wheelock's public support despite some private reservations.

While a generally cautious sentiment had emerged among New England ministers concerning Davenport, it did not stop Wheelock from furthering his own agenda. He continued to send and receive news of revivals from all corners of the region including Hartford, Lyme, New Haven, Guilford, Woodbury, and Plainfield, Connecticut; Providence, Rhode Island; and Concord, Massachusetts. Stephen Williams, responding to a letter from Wheelock,

41. EW to Stephen Williams, June 9, 1740, *WP*.

42. EW to Stephen Williams, May 22, 1740, *WP*.

43. William Gaylord to EW, November 24, 1740, *WP*; EW to Daniel Rogers, January 18, 1742, *WP*.

44. EW to Sarah Maltby Wheelock, April 26, 1740, *WP*.

lock, wrote that 'I have heard some news from other hands' concerning revivals and that 'Several are under concern about there souls and are saying "what must I do to be saved."' After a preaching trip of his own, Williams informed Wheelock of 'wonderfull things I hear of in other places—I have larger accounts of Godly doings—in one place or another.'⁴⁵ Ebenezer Wales, the minister at Windham, Connecticut, described a 'boys meeting' in which '14 or 15 were much affected.'⁴⁶ Benjamin Cary at Providence, Rhode Island, wrote to Wheelock to inform him 'that the work of God's Spirit is Striving With us, this knight We had . . . twenty young people and six or seven of them are Crying out in Great Distress.'⁴⁷ Wheelock even received news of a revival from Solomon Williams, who served in the same town, at Lebanon's First Church. 'My hands are full night and day with People under Conviction & some I hope have been Savingly Enlightened this week.' Williams concluded his letter with news of revivals at Newtown and Norwich, Connecticut.⁴⁸ Other reports, from those who preached to the scattered New England native population, were probably of special interest to the future Indian school principal. Benagali Case relayed news of a revival in Woodbury, Connecticut, and further informed Wheelock of his journey to 'preach to Indians at Cantakook [*sic*].' Daniel Rogers also stirred revival sentiments among New England Indians, writing to Wheelock of his work among the natives at Mohegan, 'Nihantuck,' and Stonington, Connecticut.⁴⁹

A letter that Wheelock wrote to Joseph Bellamy in December 1741 was full of revival news and information. He began by noting how 'the work of the Lord spreads gloriously in the land; *we bear almost every week* of its being spread into one place and another where it has not been before (*italics mine*).' He then pro-

45. Stephen Williams to EW, March 16, 1741, *WP*; Williams to EW, April 15, 1741, *WP*.

46. Ebenezer Wales to EW, June 1, 1741, *WP*.

47. 'Benj.' Carey to EW, November 25, 1741, *WP*.

48. Solomon Williams to EW, May 8, 1741, *WP*.

49. Benagali Case to EW, October 25, 1741, *WP*; EW to Daniel Rogers, January 18, 1742, *WP*.

vided Bellamy, who was settled in the remote northwestern Connecticut village of Bethlehem, with a roster of towns that had experienced revivals. 'It is very great at Taunton, Bridgewater, Middleborough, Raynham, Attlebury, and Wrentham, Massachusetts.' He added that 'there is a concern among the Indians at Mohegan and Stonington and ye work is very great at Stonington, Groton, Voluntown, Preston [Connecticut], and many others.' The majority of the aforementioned towns had been visited by Wheelock on a trip to Boston that had concluded in November, a month before writing to Bellamy. Joseph Fish of the Stonington North parish had informed Wheelock by letter earlier that month about 'a good and Glorious Work of God' in the town. Revival news from Fish's letter was thus passed along by Wheelock almost immediately to Bellamy, in the Lebanon minister's role as a local communication node in the transmission of revival news.⁵⁰

Wheelock's church at Lebanon was no stranger to revival. In fact, the congregation appears to have been in a constant state of spiritual vibrancy. Several months before Wheelock's 1740 trip to New York he wrote to Stephen Williams: "There is an evident revival of religion among my people. There has been more appearance of conviction work here within these six weeks than there has before in three years, put all together; and one very remarkable instance of the death bed conversion of a young woman, the account of which is not too long to write."⁵¹ Nearly a year later, he informed Bellamy that 'there are upwards of 300 people converted in this place God brot home to himself by his allmighty arm.'⁵² News of the revival at Lebanon spread rapidly, as evidenced by letters Wheelock received from ministers who mentioned it. Jonathan Martin at Windham, Connecticut, heard

50. EW to Joseph Bellamy, December 27, 1741, Bellamy Letter Book, Presbyterian Historical Society; Joseph Fish, to EW, December 3, 1741, *WP*. On Wheelock's itinerant trip during the fall of 1741, see William Allen, ed., 'Memoirs of Eleazar Wheelock,' *American Quarterly Register* 10 (August 1837): 12-15.

51. EW to Stephen Williams, January 30, 1740, cited in Gillett, 'President Wheelock and his Contemporaries,' 289.

52. EW to Joseph Bellamy, December 27, 1741, Bellamy Letterbook, Presbyterian Historical Society.

'something of the wonderful work of God in your parish in the conversion of so mane souls.' Seth Young in Hartford began a May 1741 letter with a word of thanksgiving that 'the wonderful work of God is still carrying on amongst you.'⁵³

While his congregation continued in its revived state, Wheelock used reports from his own itinerant journeys to keep churchgoers informed of similar awakenings elsewhere in New England. Writing from Windsor, Connecticut, he informed his flock of his evangelistic success, reporting '13 or 14 saved' and enough converts 'for 10 ministers.' He also sent news of revivals in 'Suffield, Enfield, Long Meadow, and Springfield.' Wheelock asked the church to 'pray' for him, requesting that his congregation perform a religious ritual that emotionally and spiritually linked them to his successes and served as a tangible means of supporting their minister. Prayer provided the laity with an opportunity for active participation in the larger, revived world. Reports from Wheelock identified them with and linked them to their pastor's long distance converts and gave them an indirect role in the 'work of God' in distant regions.⁵⁴

Many of the letters Wheelock received were preaching invitations from other societies. Timothy Hall notes that the laity often preferred to hear strangers preach because this offered them experiences with the larger 'regenerate world.'⁵⁵ Wheelock's successful itinerant tours made him a highly sought after speaker among New England New Light Congregationalists. He was able to fulfill many of the requests for his services, but during the height of the revival it was impossible to meet them all. Many clergymen eagerly awaited a chance to have Wheelock minister to their congregations. The Reverend David Jewett of New London, Connecticut, who himself was converted during a revival in his town, informed Wheelock that he had waited for his parish's 'turn to come.' And Peter Thatcher of Middleborough, Massachusetts, would 'entreat' Wheelock with the 'utmost importance

53. Jonathan Martin to EW, April 27, *WP*; Seth Young to EW, May 22, 1741, *WP*.

54. EW to North Society of Lebanon, 1743, *WP*.

55. Hall, *Contested Boundaries*, 77.

to allott some considerable portion of Your time' to preaching in his congregation.⁵⁶

Such invitations held important spiritual significance for the congregations that sent them. A church's letter of invitation could become an entrée into the New England revival community, assuming that the invitation was accepted and an awakening occurred as a result. Sharon, up near the New York border, was one of the remote Connecticut towns that pinned part of its revival hopes on such an invitation to Wheelock. Cognizant of his 'glorious and happy Success in the Gospel Ministry,' the church requested Wheelock's services in a petition signed by twenty-four congregants. Invoking a passage from the Acts of the Apostles, they entreated Wheelock to 'come over into our Macedonia and help us' and to bring 'any servant of Christ with you who may be of Service to promote the work of the Lord.'⁵⁷

Such calls upon Wheelock reveal that the New Light community fostered by his letters had well-defined boundaries. Congregations yet to experience evangelical revival believed that they were clearly outside the awakened fellowship until they could obtain access. For example, David Moore, a layperson from Newport, Rhode Island, was distressed by its lack of revival fires. This can most likely be attributed to the fact that one of the town's settled ministers, Joseph Gardner, was of the Old Light persuasion. 'I may venture to tell you that religion Loses Ground in this town, most people that comes from places where the works of God is a-curring on stands amaz'd to See So little stir about religion.' Moore feared that Newport was 'abandoned from God's presence,' an outcast rebel town unwelcomed in the New Light fellowship. Inspired by news of awakenings from other locales, this layperson saw no other alternative but to seek the services of Wheelock to revive what he thought to be his spiritually dead

56. David Jewett to EW, July 4, 1741, *WP*; Peter Thatcher to EW, November 2, 1741, *WP*. For a mention of Jewett's conversion, see Joseph Bellamy to EW, January 7, 1741, Bellamy Letterbook, Presbyterian Historical Society. Preaching invitations are so ubiquitous and formulaic in Wheelock's revival correspondence that citing or quoting them would prove redundant.

57. Israel Gillett et al. to EW, May 10, 1742, *WP*.

community.⁵⁸ Like Moore, Seth Young of Hartford was a layman who was fighting an uphill battle against the Old Light influences in his town, which he described as a 'stronghold of Satan.' Young held private meetings in his home, but still realized that the anti-revival sentiment of the Hartford ministerial fellowship had kept the town outside the bounds of the New England revival community. He thus turned to Wheelock for help, noting that 'I hope you will come up amongst us again in a Little time[.] we have Room enough for you to preach (at) our meeting house. . . .'⁵⁹ Jonathan Edwards, whose published defenses of the revival helped to define the parameters of this awakened community of saints, realized that doctrinal quarrels within his father Timothy's congregation had kept that church outside of the revived fellowship. Edwards asked Wheelock to travel to 'Scantick' (East Windsor, Connecticut) and preach to his father's parish in hope that revival might soon come, 'The special occasion of my now writing to you is a desire I have . . . that you and your brother Pomeroy would go to Scantick, my Father's parish and preach there as often as the People will be willing to hear you, and Continue so doing as Long as the Concerns of your Parishes will allow of your being about. You know the wretched circumstances of that Society and if ever they are healed I believe it must be more open to your preaching than to my Father, against whom they have a personal prejudice.' New England evangelicals realized that to secure the services of an itinerant with Wheelock's reputation was a near guarantee that revival, and thus participation in the awakening experience pervading the region, would soon follow. Indeed, Edwards concluded his letter by observing that Wheelock's 'labours' in the 'work of the Lord' were 'much more remarkably blessed than mine.'⁶⁰

Many of the churches that sent Wheelock invitations had already experienced the throes of revival and thus sought his aid in

58. David Moore to EW, May 6, 1742, *WP*.

59. Seth Young to EW, May 22, 1741, *WP*.

60. Jonathan Edwards to EW, June 9, 1741, *WP*.

the further enhancement of the work. Revival reports often accompanied such invitations and gave Wheelock a greater incentive to answer the requests affirmatively. Joseph Fish wrote that he was 'earnestly requesting your Company and Assistance at Stonington North Parish where there have been for some time a hopeful appearance of a good and Glorious Work of God. . . .'⁶¹ Daniel Russell wrote to Wheelock while the Lebanon itinerant was preaching at Wethersfield, Connecticut, in the hope of convincing him to stop at Stepney on his way home. He informed Wheelock that 'God is in such a wonderful and extraordinary and powerfull manner carrying on his own work in this town which hath for so long a time layn as it were in a dead sleep and as I am persuaded it cannot but be matter of great rejoycing to you to see such happy fruits and effects of your labors . . . the work of God is carried on in such a powerfull manner so I cannot but think that it gives matter of encouragement to you to preach where you are called to preach the gospel.' Russell concluded his letter by noting that 'it gives incouragement to me to renew my request to you that you would come and preach to my people before you return home.'⁶² Timothy Allen, the minister at West Haven, Connecticut, and a regular Wheelock correspondent, described the state of religion at the Fourth Society of Guilford as a congregation without 'a settled ministry,' but yet 'under Strong convictions.' Allen and other 'neighbouring ministers' had been preaching to them 'transiently,' and he thus requested that Wheelock and Pomeroy 'come if you possibly can.'⁶³

These invitations illustrate what Richard D. Brown has called the 'contagious' nature of news and provide a further glimpse of how Wheelock's letter-writing network promoted and communicated revival.⁶⁴ An invitation might lead to a visit from Wheelock, who would create an awakening and then spread the results

61. Joseph Fish to EW, December 1741, *WP*.

62. Daniel Russell to EW, January 7, 1741, *WP*.

63. Timothy Allen to Benjamin Pomeroy and EW, December 28, 1741, *WP*.

64. Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 245-67.

through a revival report or by word of mouth to another village. For example, in mid-December 1741, James Lockwood, minister at the Congregational church in Wethersfield, informed Wheelock that God had been 'Awakening Many dead Sinners to fly from the wrath to come' and urged Wheelock to come and preach to his revived congregation. Complying with the request, Wheelock went to Wethersfield and greatly enhanced the already existing awakening there. He then spread news of this local revival via his communication network. Just over one month later, he informed Daniel Rogers, the minister at Littleton, Massachusetts, that in Wethersfield the 'whole town is shaken.' He added that he 'preached to the negros where also I could not go thro' with my sermon their outcry was so great their distress was astonishing, their agony, groans & etc seam'd a lively emblem of the damned.' Wheelock concluded that 'Between 30 or 40 I hope were converted while I was in town and many hundreds I believe were under concern.' Several months later Rogers responded to Wheelock's report by describing revival activity in Boston, where he was preaching, and asking the Lebanon minister to 'pray for this poor place.' This series of letter exchanges reveals how reports of a revival in Wethersfield, instigated by Lockwood's original invitation to Wheelock, spread to Lebanon and Littleton. News was then exchanged later for revival intelligence from Boston.⁶⁵

In a similar fashion, the Reverend Peter Reynolds of Enfield, Massachusetts, informed Wheelock in a letter dated July 6, 1741, that 'the blessing of God that I hear That I Believe Follows your Labours has made me Delirious for some Time' for his possible visit to Enfield. Two days later, Wheelock was in Enfield where he, along with several other New Light ministers, heard Jonathan Edwards deliver his now-famous sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.' Edwards's sermon was published, and news of his preaching that day was relayed from Wheelock to Benjamin

65. James Lockwood to EW, December 10, 1741, *WP*; EW to Daniel Rogers, January 18, 1742, *WP*; Daniel Rogers to EW, April 21, 1742, *WP*.

Trumbull, a historian, minister, politician, and friend who included the detailed accounts of the Enfield sermon in his published history of Connecticut.⁶⁶

In addition to revival reports and invitations, Wheelock received letters requesting spiritual comfort and exhortation. Such letters reveal the role of the Lebanon minister in strengthening the revival community through individual attention to the religious lives of its members.⁶⁷ Acquaintances and converts from his itinerant tours and many of his fellow clergymen sought continued pastoral care long after he left town. These letters extended Wheelock's parish, in an imagined sense, throughout the region. Evangelical laity toiling to maintain a sense of personal piety under the ministry of Old Light ministers could write to Lebanon and receive words of encouragement on revival-oriented themes that were perhaps unavailable in their local parishes. Others, who did have the privilege of listening to the preaching of a New Light clergyman, wrote to Wheelock for added spiritual exhortation in order to supplement the pro-revival sermons that they already heard regularly each week.

A number of letters came from lay people at a distance from Lebanon to whom Wheelock had ministered during his itinerant visits. His most prolific correspondent in this regard was Hannah Huntington from Norwich, Connecticut, who exchanged letters with Wheelock over the course of several years. The content of these letters normally had to do with doubts concerning her salvation. In February 1741 she wrote, 'Oh! that I may walk Worthy of the Vocation where with I am Called—I was ready to make a good Resolution when I heard Mr. Whitefield in Boston—but am

66. Peter 'Raynold' (Reynolds) to EW, July 6, 1741, *WP*; Jonathan Trumbull, *A History of Connecticut: Political and Ecclesiastical*, 2 vols. (New London, Conn.: H. D. Huxley, 1898) 2: 254–56. Enfield was part of Massachusetts until 1749, when the boundary line between Massachusetts and Connecticut was resurveyed and the town joined Connecticut. [However, there was also an Enfield, Mass.]

67. For an analysis of the Great Awakening ministers as pastors see George Harper, 'Clericalism and Revival: The Great Awakening in Boston as a Pastoral Phenomenon,' *New England Quarterly* 57 (December 1984): 554–66.

as Ready to break them now. I desire you would Continue your prayers for me and advice to me by Letters although I am ashamed to answer them.⁶⁸ Despite the fact that Norwich was the home of three Congregational churches, all with a New Light bent, Huntington chose to request spiritual counsel from Wheelock by letter. Hannah Huntington never expressed dissatisfaction with the Norwich New Light ministers, nor is there evidence in her letters that she was unhappy as a member of her congregation. Her decision to seek exhortation from Wheelock on a regular basis confirms the power of the laity to choose from a host of evangelical ministers within the larger revival community and the importance of letter writing in exercising such options.⁶⁹

Wheelock also exchanged letters with the evangelical community at Newport, Rhode Island. He had apparently visited Newport on an itinerant journey, as David Moore had thanked him for his 'faithful labors among us.'⁷⁰ Pious women from the town used communication with Wheelock as a long-distance supplement to their local religious diet. Sarah Osborn, who would play an important role in the extension of the Newport revival, thanked Wheelock for her personal victory over sin. Sarah Lifford wrote to Wheelock with a concern over the validity of her conversion. She also provided him with a progress report on the spiritual status of other Wheelock converts in the town.⁷¹ Susanna Anthony, another of Wheelock's Newport followers, responded to an earlier letter of spiritual exhortation from Wheelock by asking the Lebanon minister to pray for her spiritual condition.⁷² Newport

68. Hannah Huntington to EW, February 4, 1741, *WP*.

69. On the revival convictions of the Norwich ministers, see the data on New England clergy in Cedric Cowing, *The Saving Remnant: Religion and the Settling of New England* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 222.

70. Moore to EW, May 6, 1742, *WP*.

71. Sarah Osborn to EW, May 5, 1742, *WP*; Sarah Lifford to EW, October 17, 1742, *WP*. On this community of evangelical women in Newport see Sarah Osborn and Susanna Anthony, *Familiar Letters* (Newport, R.I.: Newport Mercury, 1807); Mary Beth Norton, 'My Resting Reaping Times: Sarah Osborn's Defense of Her "Unfeminine" Activities,' *Signs* 2 (1976): 515-29; Charles Hambrick Stowe, 'The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn (1714-1796),' *Church History* 61 (December 1992), 408-21.

72. Susanna Anthony to EW, January 15, 1743, *WP*.

had a substantial Old Light presence that included the ministers at both the First Baptist Church and the First Congregational Church. Samuel Maxwell, another layperson, wrote that 'there have been additions to the churches,' but they were 'small in Compare [*sic*] with others.'⁷³ Newport was the home to six Protestant congregations and one imagined community under Wheelock's long-distance pastoral care.

Wheelock was well aware that conservation of an awakening's results relied upon the careful preservation of spiritual vibrancy in everyone 'revived.' Revivalism was a religious phenomenon that began with the very personal spiritual stirrings of laity who listened to preaching. Wheelock knew that the general religious concern would last only as long as the spiritual condition of each individual remained heightened. While much of the nurturing of personal piety was performed by local ministers, Wheelock made time in his busy schedule at Lebanon to perform this pastoral duty with his distant adherents, strengthening in the process the roots of the community that his ministry and letters helped to foster. The laity themselves, for whatever reasons, chose to exercise membership in a community that transcended their isolated towns and villages by confiding in Wheelock as a long-distance pastor.

Ministers, like the laity, also wrote to Wheelock seeking fellowship and the comradery of another clergyman. Requests for prayer and religious advice promoted a sense of spiritual kinship among New England ministers—especially for those laboring in remote and rural parishes and in need of religious counsel that could only come from a clerical colleague. Clergymen had many of the same spiritual concerns and longings as the people to whom they preached and thus needed to receive the same sense of support and comfort that they provided for their own congregations. Furthermore, many clergymen struggled with small, hostile congregations that were not always eager to follow the exhortations of their minister. Churches were often divided into

73. Samuel Maxwell to EW, May 6, 1742, *WP*; Cowing, *Saving Remnant*, 311-16.

Old and New Light factions, leaving ministers with the Herculean task of healing wounds and restoring unity to congregations already known for anticlericalism and schism. Reuben Ely of Springfield, Massachusetts, wrote to Wheelock, distressed over his congregation's lack of response to his evangelical preaching and other 'enemies of the cross of Christ' who were hindering his ministry. He asked Wheelock for advice, noting that he was 'striving to promote Religion, but . . . some say I am mad.'⁷⁴ Enoch Ward, a tutor and Harvard graduate from Newton, Massachusetts, turned to Wheelock for counsel during spiritual low points in his life. In May 1740 he wrote despairingly that 'I am in a very poor State of Health, and under apprehensions of approaching Death, and alas I greatly fear I am not prepared for it. I had great hopes of my Conversion but alas I fear the work was not thoroughly wrought. The Spirit of God made great impressions on my Soul. I was humbled greatly and resolved upon a Life of Religion, and afterwards I had peace and Joy . . . But alas all is gone: God's spirit has forsaken me. I have grieved him, and I fear He will never visit me again, My heart is hard, I can't pray, my mind is blind and Conscience is stupefied. O I am in an infinitely dreadful condition.' Ward added that he 'earnestly' hoped that 'the intercourse may not cease between us' and, noting that he had been 'greatly blessed' in reading Jonathan Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, recommended it to Wheelock.⁷⁵

Between 1740 and 1742, the height of the New England's Great Awakening and a time when Wheelock conducted many of his itinerant travels, his letters reveal the rapid spread of religious revival throughout the region. Some ministers continued to express concerns about enthusiasm and questionable ministerial practices, but formal opposition to the Great Awakening was only beginning to coalesce. Most New England ministers embraced the revivals, understanding them as a badly needed outpouring of God's spirit. As historians J. M. Bumsted and John Van

74. Reuben Ely to EW, March 4, 1741, *WP*.

75. Enoch Ward to EW, May 28, 1740, *WP*.

de Wetering have argued, in the earliest stages of the revival 'almost anyone might have been a radical.'⁷⁶ After 1741, however, the content of Wheelock's awakening correspondence began to shift. He still received revival reports, preaching invitations, and letters requesting counsel and spiritual guidance, but an increasingly greater number of letters began to focus on ministerial concerns over the radical turn that the revival was beginning to take. The general religious climate of evangelical activity began to cool as growing anxiety over certain manifestations of revivalism emerged. Radical ministers became even more sensational and controversial, and practices that were viewed as enthusiastic and socially disruptive increasingly drew attacks from Old Lights. Revivalism could no longer continue as freely and unencumbered as before. Criticism forced those ministers who supported the Great Awakening, but decried its excesses, to think seriously about what constituted a true religious revival. New England's New Light community—once a fellowship of all ministers and lay people who supported evangelical revival—began to take a more moderate and respectable approach to the Awakening and define itself against the radical edge. In response to Old Light critiques that many of the pro-revivalists deemed legitimate, New Lights redefined the boundaries of this fellowship. 'How' the Awakening was promoted now took center stage in ministerial discourse.

If the initial outbursts of revival sentiment associated with Whitefield and those itinerants who preached in his wake brought considerable changes to the spiritual landscape of New England, the Old Light backlash ushered in yet another significant period of change. Old Lights did not necessarily oppose revivals of religion; in fact, most Congregationalists prayed regularly for seasons of spiritual concern. Many clergymen supported itinerants such as Whitefield in the earlier stages of the revival, only to turn against the movement later. These ministers were less troubled by the theology behind the revivals than by the way the revivals were conducted. Both New Lights and Old Lights be-

76. J. M. Bumsted and John Van de Wetering, *What Must I Do to Be Saved?: The Great Awakening in Colonial America* (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1976), 107.

lieved that Protestant religion was to be practiced in an orderly and rational fashion, rooted firmly in a reformed interpretation of the Bible. The practices of some of the more enthusiastic revival preachers were seen as disruptive of Congregational order and resulting in social chaos not unlike the disorders commonly associated with some of Europe's more radical religious sects.

Old Light criticisms consistently touched on four or five common practices of New Light radicals. First, settled clergymen questioned the idea of itinerant preaching. Itinerancy violated parish boundaries and posed a direct and immediate threat to the authority of local ministers. New England Congregational clergymen had always preached in one another's churches or supplied empty pulpits, but only when invited by another ordained minister. In May 1742, Old Lights in control of the Connecticut General Assembly responded to the itinerancy menace by passing an 'Act for Regulating Abuses and Correcting Disorders in Ecclesiastical Affairs,' which levied heavy fines upon anyone who preached in the colony without an invitation. In some cases, the Connecticut General Court refused to enforce the collection of the salaries of ministers convicted under this law.⁷⁷ Some revival preachers not only arrived in parishes unannounced, but took matters one step further by publicly declaring settled clergymen to be 'unconverted.' Some revivalists also encouraged evangelical churchgoers to leave their congregations and form 'separatist' churches under the preaching of a converted (pro-revival) minister. Old Lights fought hard to forbid separatists from receiving the support of colonial taxes and even passed a law that denied them the right to claim religious toleration for their congregations.⁷⁸

Still other radicals asserted that they obtained special knowledge about the spiritual condition of local ministers in the towns

77. E. J. Hoadly, ed., *Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1735-1743* (Hartford: Lockwood and Brainerd, 1874) 8: 482, 483. On itinerancy see Hall, *Contested Boundaries*.

78. Hoadly, *Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* 8: 521-22. For a discussion of these laws see Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800: Strict Congregationalists and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962), 63-64.

where they preached. This knowledge, they believed, stemmed from a revelation received directly from God, a claim that was quite troubling to those heirs of the Puritan faith who rested their entire system of religious understanding and knowledge of God's will on the Scriptural text. Furthermore, while many of the radicals were ordained Congregational clergymen, they were known for encouraging lay men and women to 'exhort,' a practice that undermined the educational and ordination requirements of New England ministers. Finally, Old Lights grew upset with the tenor of revival meetings. Sermons were preached extemporaneously, in the open air, and were normally accompanied by shrieks, cries, and other disturbances of those converted.⁷⁹

Radicals never formed anything close to a formal ministerial party or association, but they did gather around the increasing number of separatist churches and a seminary in New London—called the Shepherd's Tent—which was designed to train like-minded revivalists. Preachers such as Andrew Croswell of Groton, Timothy Allen of West Haven, James Davenport, and a host of uneducated lay exhorters were moving throughout New England, stirring controversy at every turn.⁸⁰ For Old Lights, it was Davenport, more than any other minister, who embodied everything that was wrong with the Great Awakening. Wheelock's brother-in-law became notorious for raucous revival meetings that included singing and extemporaneous preaching, accompanied by wild gestures and impassioned pleas for converts. Davenport declared ministers unconverted and encouraged ecclesiastical separation at virtually every itinerant stop he made. For example, in September 1741 he

79. The best treatment of the radical branch of the Great Awakening remains Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*.

80. Studies on New Light radicals include Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*; Christopher Jedrey, *The World of John Cleaveland: Family and Community in Eighteenth Century New England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979); Peter Onuf, 'New Lights in New London: A Group Portion of the Separatists,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 37 (1980): 627-43; Leigh Eric Schmidt, 'A Second and Glorious Reformation: The New Light Extremism of Andrew Croswell,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 43 (1986): 214-44; Richard Warch, 'The Shepherd's Tent: Education and Enthusiasm in the Great Awakening,' *American Quarterly* 30 (1978): 177-96.

arrived at New Haven, announced that Joseph Noyes, the minister at the First Church, was unconverted and convinced the laity to file a list of grievances against their minister, resulting in the formation of a separatist congregation.

Davenport was among the first preachers convicted under Connecticut's new anti-itinerancy law. Colonial officials sent him back to Long Island, but not before his followers started a small-scale riot during his trial in Hartford, at which Davenport prayed publicly for the immediate death of the sheriff supervising his arrest.⁸¹ He went to Boston in the summer of 1742 and held open-air services on the Common that led to mob-like hysteria and his eventual arrest for disturbing the peace. A council of Boston ministers declared him 'Non compos Mentis' and sent him back to Long Island with a warning not to return again.⁸² Although Davenport never went back to Boston, he did return to Connecticut in March 1743 in direct defiance of the anti-itinerancy law under which he had been convicted nine months earlier. In perhaps the most sensational event of the Great Awakening, Davenport encouraged followers to set fire to all their earthly possessions as a public testimony against materialism. This display included the burning of books authored by leading Puritans and revival opponents such as Charles Chauncy.⁸³

In response to this turn, many ministers began, as early as 1741, to rethink their approach to the revivals, disassociate themselves from radicals such as Davenport, and form new coalitions to defend the Great Awakening against both its critics and the radical fringe. For Wheelock, this process would not be easy. He had supported Davenport's Southold revivals and even encouraged him to make his first trip to Connecticut. Furthermore, Wheelock himself was receiving criticism for some of his own activity

81. *Boston Post Boy*, June 21, 1742.

82. *Boston Post Boy*, August 23, 1742; *Boston Weekly Newsletter* August 19-26, 1742; Benjamin Colman et al., *The Declaration of a Number of the Associated Pastors of Boston and Charleston Relating to the Rev. Mr. Davenport and his Conduct* (Boston: Kneland and Green, 1742).

83. Stout and Onuf, 'James Davenport and the Great Awakening.' On the backlash from the New London incident, see Eugene F. White, 'The Decline of the Great Awakening in New England, 1741-1746,' *New England Quarterly* 24 (1951): 35-52.

in the pursuit of revival. Some Old Lights saw little difference between him and Davenport. Chauncy, in his account of the David Ferris circle at Yale in the 1730s, described Wheelock and Davenport as ministers who 'live'd with this Ferris most familiarly and have since divulg'd his Errors and fill'd Places where they have preached with the Superstitions and groundless Opinions, they learn'd from him.'⁸⁴ Many Old Light ministers suspended church members from receiving the Lord's Supper because they had attended Wheelock's meetings. While preaching in Voluntown, Connecticut, in October 1741, Wheelock noted in his journal that one woman had traveled from Kingston, Rhode Island, to hear him preach 'against a great deal of opposition on purpose to hear me.' In other parts of Connecticut he was labeled an 'Enthusiast madman and Dunce.' Sutton, Massachusetts, minister David Hall praised Wheelock for his revival successes but was disturbed by 'very unpleasant' reports concerning Wheelock's ungentlemanly propensity to 'yell' and 'pound the pulpit' while preaching. He also accused Wheelock of declaring ministers 'unconverted.'⁸⁵ When Wheelock supplied the vacant pulpit of the new separatist church in New Haven, Yale president Thomas Clap forbade his students from hearing Wheelock preach. It also appears that Wheelock was convicted in New Haven under the Connecticut anti-itinerancy law.⁸⁶

After this New Haven excursion, Wheelock began to rethink his approach to the Great Awakening. He had engaged in or associated himself with religious practices that were now being openly condemned by Old Lights and an increasing number of

84. Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 212.

85. Gillett, ed., *The Diary of Jacob Eliot*, 13; Trumbull, *A History of Connecticut*, 2: 140; John Lee to EW, December 5, 1740, *WP*; David Hall to EW, September 23, 1741, *WP*.

86. Solomon Williams to EW, June 2, 1742, *WP*; Thomas Clap to Solomon Williams, June 8, 1742, Simon Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Trumbull, *A History of Connecticut*, 2: 285-94; EW to Sarah Maltby Wheelock, June 28, 1742, *WP*; EW to Thomas Clap, September 1742, *WP*. On the Great Awakening in New Haven see Stephen Nissenbaum, ed., *The Great Awakening at Yale College* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishers, 1972); David W. Stowe, "The Opposers are Very Much Enraged": Religious Conflict and Separation in New Haven During the Great Awakening, 1741-1760,' *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 56 (1991): 211-35.

moderate New Lights. While Wheelock sympathized with many radical practices, he also realized that they were now hindering, not advancing, the gospel cause. He thus began to use his letter-writing network to redefine his own evangelical identity and participate in the more general, region-wide redemption of the Great Awakening.⁸⁷ As might be expected, Davenport's ministry was of particular interest to Wheelock and his correspondents. Lebanon Crank became a virtual clearinghouse of information concerning the Southold itinerant. In contrast to the earlier stages of the Great Awakening, when clergymen wrote to Wheelock cautiously embracing Davenport's revival-charged ministry, most of the letters he now received opposed Davenport's tactics. John Lee, who previously had written glowing reports about Davenport's ministry at East Lyme, commented that the itinerant was 'condemning particular Members as Carnall . . . which things is Liked by but few.'⁸⁸ Wheelock's letter-writing circle became actively engaged in the task of proposing methods for dealing with Davenport's behavior. Solomon Williams, motivated by a deep concern for the success of the revival, asked Wheelock to meet with the Southold itinerant 'to see if you can't convince him . . . to act otherwise and (to tell him) that his Zeal is out of bounds.' Williams informed Wheelock that many ministers who 'were well affected to the Glorious work of God are (now) . . . against' his ministry. He added that 'I Perceive your Good Br___ Davenport has come over to New London and he goes Singing to Meeting and about the Streets with his Armour bearer and by some other oddities. The people in new London are led into a Mighty Ruffle and disturbance, but especially by his treating Mr. Adams as an unconverted man and praying for him Publicly—as such as he did . . . People talk all manner of Stuff—Some say he is Distracted

87. For the emergence of a 'moderate' approach to the Great Awakening, see Bumsted and Van de Weterig, *What Must I Do to Be Saved*, 98–106; Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and Social Order in Connecticut* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 209–20; Cowing, *The Saving Remnant*; Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, 61–79; Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 34–35; Hall, *Contested Boundaries*, 91–97.

88. John Lee to EW, September 18, 1741, *WP*.

and some say he is deluded and possessed with the Spirit of Sathan.⁸⁹ Jacob Elliott of Pomfret, Connecticut, informed Wheelock that Davenport had 'occasion'd much disorder and Confusion in some part of this Government.' He suggested that ministers should avoid such behavior and particularly exhorted Wheelock to advise fellow clergymen to 'keep to their notes' and avoid the uncontrolled style of preaching practiced by Davenport.⁹⁰ The Southold itinerant was seen as out of control, and New England's concerned New Lights wrote letters to discuss the best way to quiet him. Indeed, Wheelock wrote to Solomon Williams that he had for 'many months' considered how to 'calm his boisterous Spirit's.'⁹¹

The Davenport problem illuminates how select letters between ministers, when employed to enhance, define, or redeem the revival, might find their way into print.⁹² Wheelock not only wrote to other ministers about Davenport's behavior but also wrote to Davenport himself to try to convince him of his errors. His letter of reprimand to Davenport could have focused on any numbers of issues, but he chose to concentrate on Davenport's lack of respect for the ministerial 'commissions' that were so central to New England Congregational life. Wheelock reminded Davenport that a minister of Christ could only 'preach in his name' if he received a 'solemn investiture' from fellow ministers through the 'laying on of hands.' This letter shows his displeasure with Davenport's practice of encouraging uncommissioned and untrained 'lay exhorters' and further reveals Wheelock's attempts to move away from his own radical reputation. Prompted by a host of epis-

89. Solomon Williams to EW, August 17, 1741, *WP*; Solomon Williams to EW, July 17, 1741, *WP*.

90. Jacob Elliott to EW and Joseph Meacham, August 25, 1741, *WP*.

91. EW to Solomon Williams, February 3, 1742, *WP*.

92. For instance, Jonathan Edwards's now famous *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* began as a 1735 epistolary report to Boston minister Benjamin Colman. See Jonathan Edwards to Benjamin Colman, May 30, 1735, in *The Great Awakening*, C. C. Goen, ed., 4 vols. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972): 4: 99. For a discussion of the close links between letters and print during the Great Awakening see McIntyre, 'This Loving Correspondency,' 248-68.

tulary exchanges from other ministers concerning Davenport, Wheelock's correspondence was published along with a similar letter from Solomon Williams and became influential in convincing the Southold radical to admit to his errors and seek forgiveness.⁹³

The Davenport case was not the only one in which Wheelock and his correspondents employed scribal publication to try to purify the Great Awakening from radical dross. Ministers expressing like-minded concerns met to define the theological and ecclesiastical characteristics of a true revival. In 1743 clergymen who had experienced 'a happy Revival of Religion thru an extraordinary divine Influence, in many Parts of the Land' convened at Boston and published a statement decrying the controversial practices of radical itinerants. While Wheelock was not present at this meeting, he did, along with several other Connecticut ministers, sign a letter of approval, which was appended to the published declaration.⁹⁴ Similar meetings and statements were arranged and discussed by letter. Joseph Bellamy proposed such a conference to Wheelock in December 1741. 'What if the Brethren whom the world calls New Lights sho'd have a meeting in some convenient place, in order that we may be agreed among orselves & etc.'⁹⁵

In 1742 a letter was circulated through Wheelock's communication network declaring that 'Conversion, holiness, and Salvation of immortal Souls is the great Business of the Ministers of the Gospel,' but also raising concerns about how the gospel was being presented by some ministers. In a clear reference to the radical fringe, it warned clergymen to guard against 'Trances, Visions, immediate Revelations, and extraordinary Impressions . . . which may be of dangerous Tendency to the Ruin of Souls.' The signers

93. *Rev. Mr. Williams and Wheelock of Lebanon to the Rev. Mr. Davenport* (Boston: Kneland and Green, 1744). Davenport eventually retracted his errors in response to pressure from Wheelock and Williams. See James Davenport, *The Reverend James Davenport's Confession and Retractions* (Boston: Kneland and Green, 1744).

94. *The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly of Pastors of Churches in New England at a Meeting in Boston July 7, 1743 Occasion'd by the Late and Happy Revival of Religion in many Parts of the Land* (Boston: Kneland and Green, 1743).

95. Joseph Bellamy to EW, December 17, 1741, *WP*.

of the letter included Daniel Humphrey, Joseph Bellamy, Ebenezer Mills, Benjamin Lord, Ebenezer Wright, Joseph Meacham, Solomon Williams, Ebenezer Pemberton, Jedidiah Mills, and William Gaylord—all regular Wheelock correspondents.⁹⁶ The process of redefinition, for both Wheelock personally and moderate New Lights generally, was underway. These changes are seen clearly in a letter from Nathaniel French to Wheelock, written in 1744. French, a lay preacher and enthusiast from Plainfield, Connecticut, first encountered Wheelock when the itinerant visited his town in the fall of 1741. Three years later he lamented that the Lebanon minister had been ‘deluded by the devil and a hypocrite,’ had spurned the ‘Extraordinary gifts of the holy ghost,’ and was ‘strangely fallen from what you seemed to be two or three years ago.’⁹⁷

While Wheelock used letters to help redefine himself and the Great Awakening in general, his move toward a more ‘moderate’ position was quite complicated. It was not easy for Wheelock to simply cease correspondence with ministers now associated with the radical camp. He believed that they were still servants of God, motivated by a pious and otherworldly desire—no matter how controversial—to promote the revival. He thus continued corresponding with separatists, enthusiasts, and radicals even as he was continually at work with other correspondents in redefining the New Light experience in such a way that it no longer included ministers of such persuasions. While the behavior of radicals ultimately hurt the revival movement, Wheelock the pastor did not abandon those clergymen and lay people who, during its earliest months, were his faithful co-laborers. For example, he maintained correspondence with the New Haven separatist church despite the remorse he expressed to Thomas Clap for ‘whatever I had done to prejudice others against the truth’ while preaching in New Haven. A ‘Mr. A’ kept him abreast of the ‘state of affairs’ in New Haven, describing progress in the construction of a new

96. Daniel Humphrey et al. to EW, 1742, *WP*.

97. Nathaniel French to EW, August 13, 1744, *WP*.

meetinghouse and venting about the congregation's strained relationship with the First Society.⁹⁸ Moreover, Wheelock regularly provided ministerial advice and encouragement to separatists. In 1745, when John Cleaveland, a young ministerial candidate with great potential for an evangelical ministry, was expelled from Yale for attending a separatist meeting, Wheelock offered him pastoral support and counsel.⁹⁹ And Wheelock continued to exchange letters with the Reverend Timothy Allen, the controversial leader of New London's 'Shepherd's Tent.' Allen described the 'distinguished teaching' of the faculty at the seminary, informed Wheelock of the revival sweeping his town, and even asked the Lebanon itinerant for financial help in obtaining school supplies.¹⁰⁰

Wheelock used his letter networks to serve as a religious broker of sorts between New England's New Light community and those radical clergymen who had been ostracized from traditional channels of ministerial association. When the Reverend Benjamin Lord criticized him for preaching to separatist congregations, Wheelock, in a clear articulation of his role as such a mediator, responded by referring to his participation in the Davenport case. He reminded Lord of his efforts to 'stop and diswade Mr. Davenport from . . . setting up lay teachers,' asserting that 'I spent week after week labouring in publick and private to convince and reclaim Separates an thro' the blessing of God I trust my labors have not been wholly fruitless. . . .'¹⁰¹ Timothy Allen looked to Wheelock for help in cultivating a spirit of repentance after he was deposed from his West Haven pulpit for his association with

98. 'Mr. A' to EW, March 28, 1743, *WP*; James Pierpont et al. to EW, November 24, 1742, *WP*. In September 1742 Wheelock wrote Clap: 'When I look back upon my own contact in the Late Season I can see many steps which it seems I could mend had I the opportunity again; and I Desire ever to be humbled for whatever I have done to prejudice others against the truth.' Wheelock may have been writing to Clap to plead for mercy concerning his own censoring under the Connecticut anti-itinerancy law, but regardless of motive, he seems to have been expressing regret over his involvement with the separatist congregation (EW to Thomas Clap, September 1742, *WP*).

99. EW to John Cleaveland, 1745, cited in Nissenbaun, *The Great Awakening at Yale College* (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishers, 1972), 245-46. On Cleaveland see Jedrey, *The World of John Cleaveland*.

100. Timothy Allen to EW, February 27, 1742, *WP*.

101. EW to Benjamin Lord, December 7, 1759, *WP*.

the 'Shepherd's Tent' and was appointed, ironically, to James Davenport's vacant Southold pulpit. Wheelock used his connections with two Southold elders for the purpose of 'removing the above objections' to Allen's appointment and affirming the credibility of his repentance and his membership in the New Light community.¹⁰² He labored to bring his radical friends and acquaintances to repentance and consequently into this redefined and more moderate revival fellowship.

By 1745, the Great Awakening was in decline, and so was the volume of Wheelock's correspondence. Those letters that continued to pass through his network were dominated by themes of declension and last-ditch efforts to reignite the revival. Joseph Fish mentioned in a 1743 letter to Wheelock and Benjamin Pomeroy that the work of God was in a 'Declining state.'¹⁰³ Revival reports were few, and invitations now requested Wheelock's presence at meetings of 'fasting and prayer' over the 'present divided circumstances.'¹⁰⁴ While the presence of enthusiasts, separatists, and other radicals continued to agitate the clerical establishment, others became full-fledged members of the moderate Great Awakening community. Timothy Allen wrote to Wheelock from his new Southold pulpit to reflect on how 'the Lord has dealt with me' and others who now 'seem to have humbling Apprehensions of their Departures from the Truth.'¹⁰⁵ James Davenport wrote in 1749 to remind Wheelock 'How good and how pleasant' it is 'for Brethren to dwell together in Unity.' He condemned 'Separates' for their 'Unscriptural way of thinking, speaking and conducting' and added that he hoped his attempts 'to check the spread of Separation at Enfield have not been altogether in vain.'¹⁰⁶ Whee-

102. Timothy Allen to EW, February 2, 1743, *WP*. Thomas and James Reeve to EW, November 21, 1744, *WP*; Timothy Allen to EW, November 11, 1744, *WP*; Warch, 'The Shepherd's Tent,' 181-82.

103. Joseph Fish to EW and Benjamin Pomeroy, 1743, *WP*.

104. Henry Wiles to EW, August 22, 1743, *WP*.

105. Timothy Allen to EW, November 26, 1744, *WP*.

106. James Davenport to EW, January 25, 1749, *WP*.

lock's network did remain in place, but its theme shifted from revival to the formation of 'Moor's Charity School,' founded for the education of Indians. Many of the members of the New Light community were moving on to new ventures. While scattered revivals would continue to occur in the region, and debates stemming from awakening politics would persist through much of the colonial era, New England would never be able to sustain the spiritual intensity that it experienced during the 1740s.

By no means was Eleazar Wheelock the only evangelical minister who wrote letters during the Great Awakening. Most New Lights avidly exchanged revival news. Wheelock, however, provides us with a particularly prolific correspondence, large enough to reveal the important role that personal letters played in fostering a revival community. New England New Lights seldom wrote theological treatises or published sermons because they were too busy traversing the region to preach, preside over revivals, and serve local churches. Wheelock's letters, then, must be treated as both historical sources and historical agents. As sources, they shed light on both the activity of those overlooked Congregational ministers who labored in obscurity to promote evangelical revival in the spiritual lives of the lay people to whom they ministered. As agents, these letters helped to inaugurate and define a New Light community—a fellowship entered only through the door of revival experience. Membership in this community changed with the Great Awakening, and Wheelock and his correspondents were at the center of the project of redefinition in response to radical practices and Old Light criticisms. Though many of Wheelock's correspondents may have never met face to face, ministers and lay people could share similar experiences of God's universal work and discuss the various means to redeem and defend the Great Awakening. These letters served as the catalyst by which New England evangelicals transcended their geographical isolation and entered a new and exciting revived world—'Wheelock's World.'

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