

Walter L. Powell, "The Daily Transaction of a Westfield Pastor, 1726-1740" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 14, No 2 (June 1986).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

You may use content in this archive for your personal, non-commercial use. Please contact the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* regarding any further use of this work:

masshistoryjournal@wsc.ma.edu

Funding for digitization of issues was provided through a generous grant from MassHumanities.



Some digitized versions of the articles have been reformatted from their original, published appearance. When citing, please give the original print source (volume/ number/ date) but add "retrieved from HJM's online archive at <http://www.wsc.ma.edu/mhj>.



The Daily Transactions of a Westfield Pastor, 1726-1740

Walter L. Powell

When twenty-six year old Nehemiah Bull was ordained to his first pastorate in Westfield, in October 1726, he faced the unenviable tasks of succeeding "the Aged, Venerable, Learned & Pious Pastor," Edward Taylor, who had ministered to the community for over fifty years, and dealing with a congregation noted for its bickering. Four years earlier, the town had barely resolved a heated five-year dispute over the location of a new meetinghouse, and shortly afterwards, had begun seeking another pastor in spite of the objections voiced by eighty-one year old Taylor. In this setting, and with the knowledge that two other candidates had refused the town's offer, the Reverend Bull prepared to embark upon a ministry that continued until his death in 1740.¹

If Bull chose to meet the challenge of a contentious congregation, however, it was only after the town had agreed to provide him with an advance of 140 pounds, a new parsonage and title to the lot, land in the town commons, and guarantees of an income of at least eighty-eight pounds a year. Advised of the difficulties that Taylor had frequently experienced in obtaining his salary, Bull haggled for terms that would prevent him from facing conditions that were prompting some Massachusetts ministers to complain that they would soon have to "prophecy in Sackcloth."² As the transactions in his account book from 1726 to 1740 suggest, Nehemiah Bull's expenses frequently exceeded his salary, hinting at a man jealous of appearances, and determined to preserve the dignity of his office at a time when New England ministers generally were suffering a loss of influence.

Bull began his financial record with "An account of several Journeys for which I hir'd a horse in the year 1727," noting that he owed Jonathan Ashley 3 pounds, 17 shillings, 5 pence for three trips to Springfield, two to Longmeadow, one to Deerfield, and one to Windsor.³ His travels to any of these communities took him over the most distant reaches of the Westfield town boundaries, where some 450 people in one hundred families lived at this time. The old nuclear community, established in 1669 between the Little and Woronoco Rivers, had gradually dissolved during the years of Taylor's ministry as competition for the town's shrinking natural resources forced second and third generation sons away from the village center. At the same time, a growing export market for Westfield's livestock, grain, lumber, and naval stores to ports such as Boston and New London, and to the West Indies, was leading the town

away from a subsistence agricultural economy.⁴ This commercial growth is reflected in Bull's account book, not only in its abundance of references to tradesmen, apprentices, indentured servants, slaves, and itinerant laborers, but in the variety of produce, goods and services that appear therein.

Many of the accounts with Bull were in the spring, for by custom, the townsmen approved the minister's salary at a town meeting held in late November or December, followed by settlement at the end of the town's fiscal year the next May. Though the job of "gathering in" the minister's rate fell to the Constables, many townsmen chose to settle with Bull on their own terms. By partly reconstructing Bull's accounts for just one month, it is possible to catch a glimpse of activities at the "back door" of the parsonage. In April of 1731, for example, the minister had visitors almost daily, including his brother John Bull and cousin Dr. Jonathan Bull, both from Hartford, and townsmen Joseph Dewey, David King, Captain John Ashley, David Ashley Jr., Joseph Egleston, Thomas Ashley, Sergeant Aaron Phelps, Reuben Gun, Stephen Kellogg, and James Saxton, Jr. Collectively they carted some dung one day, spread some dung and went to mill, plowed his garden "2 spells," provided "½ days work of Primus" (Capt. Ashley's slave), took an affidavit, and delivered twelve pounds of wool, nine and three quarter pounds of flax, a yard and three quarters of ribbons, thirty-one sewing needles, three quarts of vinegar, sixteen pounds of "Rhode Iland Cheese," a goose, and a "Calf 4 or 5 weeks old." On the other side of the ledger, Bull provided "a new bridle and bits" and a pound of sugar to Timothy Woodbridge of Springfield, and gave Joseph Egleston of Westfield eleven yards of an unspecified weave.

If some of the more conscientious townsmen settled their accounts with Bull on time, others did not, either because they felt unable to pay, or as a measure of their disapproval of his ministry. By withholding their rates, they exerted a kind of power that was the measure of how much the New England minister's influence had declined since the seventeenth century. If Bull believed he could change a pattern that had marked the waning years of Taylor's ministry, he was quickly disillusioned, for as his accounts for 1727 and 1728 indicate, he had trouble collecting his salary and completing the parsonage to his satisfaction. In March of 1728, Bull recorded "A faithful & true account taken out of my Pocket Book . . . of What money I received in the year 1727 for the year 1726," noting that on March 8, 1728 he "Reckon'd with Mr. John Dewey, Town Treasurer & Mr. John Madsley, Constable upon the accounts relative to the 140 pounds that was to be payd for my settlement & the 88 pound for my salary for the year 1726, & due to me 19£ 12^s 6^d."⁵

Finding a New England minister whose salary was in arrears was not unusual, but finding one whose house had not been completed after two years seems unique, and perhaps significant in assessing Bull's personality. Though the town had voted on March 8, 1726 to "Set up a house 20 foot wide and forty foot long with a Checking, and to Dig a Celor, to stone it, and to under pin the house, to Cover it out side and to build the Chimneys, and to find bords and Slitwork soficient to finish the inside work of said house," the work was still incomplete in June of 1728. On June 15, Nehemiah noted that "Cousin Moses Bull of Bolton came, he & his apprentices to do the inside work of my house for which

I have agreed to give him sixty pounds.” Moses Bull and his apprentices worked off and on for the next four months, and by the time the house was completed sometime in October, Bull had incurred debts of over one hundred pounds, nearly four times what the townsmen had given him in additional allowances to complete the work.⁶ Failing to secure a homelot near the meetinghouse, Bull seems to have sought compensation in a house built stylishly enough to reflect what he perceived as his rightful stature in the community.⁷ This extravagance could not have pleased a number of townsmen, and the fact that his building allowance was not larger may have been due to the continued opposition to his ministry by some in the town. This explanation seems very likely in view of Bull’s note in the “Church Records” that just before his ordination the church elders and pastors gathered for the ceremony chose “to examine into what opposition there was (for these just as the ordination drew in caused a great stir)”⁸

If Bull’s tastes were too extravagant, no one was in a better position to appreciate them than Captain John Ashley, for using the minister’s rate as a measure of wealth, Ashley was one of Westfield’s richest residents. In 1731, for example, his rate was 3 pounds, 4 shillings, 3 pence, more than double that of most of the twenty-six townsmen whose rates were recorded that year (see appendix). A merchant and farmer, Ashley was a prominent church member and frequent officeholder in the town. He had been part of the committee that originally called Bull to Westfield, and as a measure of his continued support, Ashley pledged an additional pound in 1728 toward finishing the parsonage. Significantly, he did not pay his rate for 1731 in cash, for when the two squared accounts, Bull owed considerably more. According to his records, Bull credited Ashley on April 15, 1731 for two shillings for “kiddle rent,” six pence for “taking an affidavit,” and two shillings for “½ a days work of Primus.” On April 12, Bull purchased “31 sewing needles” valued at 1 pound, 10 shillings, and “3 quarts of vinagar” for an unlisted price. On August 14, Nehemiah borrowed five pounds in cash, agreeing to pay twelve shillings in interest, and purchased at the same time glass for 14 pounds, 13 shillings, 6 pence—probably for his house. At unrecorded dates in September and October, Bull credited another “½ days work of Abraham & Primus” for four shillings, 5 shillings, 6 pence for “½ a bushel of salt & a pound of sugar,” nine shillings for “2 pocket Hanckerchifs,” and 4 shillings, 3 pence for some “stuff for aprons.” Finally, sometime in November he paid two shillings for a “quart of Rum”—perhaps to drown his sorrows at contracting a debt of 21 pounds, 5 shillings, 6 pence—more than eighteen pounds over Captain Ashley’s rate.⁹

Matching Captain Ashley in wealth was his older brother, David Ashley, a miller and farmer. The older Ashley was a Deacon in the church, and he had been one of the town’s most prominent officeholders in the past thirty years, at various times serving as Selectman, Constable, Surveyor, Committeeman, and Sealer of Weights and Measures. Bull’s accounts with Deacon Ashley are especially valuable because their detail provides a useful index of commodity and labor prices in the town. In October 1730, for example, Bull’s debt came to 3 pounds, 5 shillings, 6 pence for the following:

	Pounds	Shillings	Pence
Due to Deacon Ashley for a Bushel & ½ of salt	00	12	00
& about 2 hours work of Moses & the team	00	02	00
a peck & ½ of wheat meal	00	03	00
3 pecks of Indian meal	00	03	00
& a half bushel of rie	00	03	00
more for a bushel of wheat	00	08	00
more for 2 days work of Deacon Ashley & etc.	00	07	00
more for white lead	00	03	00
more for beer	00	06	06
more for 2 dry barrels	00	03	00
for keeping my mare	01	04	00
for work	00	01	00
for a gallon of molasses	00	04	00
for a bushel of Indian corn	00	04	00
for a bushel of turnips	00	02	00

Five years later, in July 1735, Bull credited Ashley with the following goods, for which he owed 5 pounds, 7 shillings:

due to Deacon Ashley for 2 bushels of oates	00	06	00
more for a half Bushell	00	03	00
more for hooping a water pail	00	05	00
more for a hogs pail	00	02	00
more by 12 Bushels of [?]	01	04	00
more by a half a bushel of buckwheat	00	05	00
more by 2 bushels of provender & ½ a bushel of Indian corn	00	09	00
more by 4 bushels of Indian corn	00	16	00
more by one bushel of wheat	00	09	00
for Provender	01	00	00
more by 2 bushels & another time 2 bushels provender	00	07	00
more for [?]	00	01	00

In both instances, Bull was indebted for more than Ashley's rate entitled him.¹⁰

Bull's overspending was not limited to the members of the town's elite, as an examination of his other accounts indicates. No doubt because of this, and because he now had a growing family (Bull married Elizabeth Partridge of Hatfield in 1728; she bore him three sons in the next five years), Bull demanded an increase in his salary. As the "Town Records" indicate, beginning in March of 1730, and continuing almost every year thereafter, Bull disputed his salary with the town. On March 9, 1730, for example, "Ensign John Gun, John Shepard, Samuell Fowler, Samuell Kellogg & Thomas Ingersole were chosen a Comitey to search into the dificulty arising about Mr. Bulls salerys for the time past," also voting to refund Bull "the forty shillings that the ministers Rate was made too big." Apart from John Shepard, all of the above committee represented the middle of the town's economic ladder (with ministerial rates averaging one pound in 1731), and they were hardly disposed to be too favorable to Bull's

complaints. Thomas Ingersole, for example, ran a tavern in Westfield, and in March of 1731 he sold his minister a gallon, three quarts and a pint of rum, and a quart of wine, for 1 pound, 12 shillings—a substantial sum for drinks. Putting this into perspective, on the basis of prices mentioned in the Ashley accounts for 1730 and 1731, the average townsman would have needed to work at least nine days in the field to pay that amount. If he had chosen to barter with produce instead, he would have needed eight bushels of Indian corn, or fifteen bushels of turnips, or thirty-two pecks of Indian meal, or four bushels of wheat.¹¹

If Bull's parishioners had reason to balk at the expense of his purchase of liquor, other evidence of his high living must have rankled them further. In addition to owning three slaves, Tamer, Phyllis, and Dido, Bull maintained a maid and an indentured servant in his household. From December 17, 1730 to June 8, 1731, for example, Mary Foot earned 4 pounds, 14 shillings, 6 pence "for serving in the family as a maid." She was replaced by Patience Stockwell, who earned eleven pounds "for serving as a maid . . . from July 12, 1731 to July 12, 1732." In the earliest reference to his indentured servant in the account book, Bull noted on March 20, 1733 that he had "Reckon'd with Moses Root & due to him 8 pounds, 3 shillings, 6 pence—one days work of J[ohn] Peirce excepted." Four years later, in an entry for March 18, 1737, Bull explained Peirce's status as a "servant to me by virtue of an Indenture assigned over to me by John Pengilly of Suffield his late Master."

In addition to these outward signs of wealth, a glance at Bull's accounts with shopkeeper Stephen Kellogg and tailor James Ashley go even further to suggest the high manner of his lifestyle. From April 1731 to February 1732, Bull ran up a debt of 6 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence to Kellogg for the following items: "1 yard $\frac{3}{4}$ of ribbons" (1 shilling 9 pence), "16 pound of Rhode Iland Cheese" (10 shillings), "6 gallons of molasses" (1 pound 7 shillings), "a stone mugg" (3 shillings), "a pek of salt" (2 shillings), "an Earthen mugg" (4 shillings), "a great wheel" (10 shillings), "2 yards & $\frac{1}{2}$ of callimanca" (1 pound 2 shillings 6 pence), "one dozen of westcoat buttons" (3 shillings), "one skein of silk" (2 shillings) and twenty pounds of sugar for 1 pound 6 shillings. From May 1731 to June 1732, Bull purchased from James Ashley "a suit of Cloaths" (1 pound 13 shillings), two suits of clothes at 3 pounds 6 shillings, "a silkenape garment" (10 shillings), a "Banyan" (9 shillings), "boys lether breeches" (3 shillings), and had "furring a coat" done for thirteen shillings—a total debt of 6 pounds 14 shillings. Five years earlier Bull had ordered "a suit of silk camlet cloathes" for 1 pound, 14 shillings, 6 pence, very likely to wear at his ordination, for the account was dated the same month.¹²

Though Bull might have termed some of these items necessities, one might well ponder how the men at the bottom of Westfield's economic ladder viewed them—men like Joseph Segar, Philip Tremain, or John Negro. Segar, a turner, had done some work on Bull's house, but no further record of him appears apart from a town vote in May of 1718 granting him "a little bit an acre or 2 between his howse & the highway which leads out onto the plain." Similarly, there is little record of Philip Tremain and his family beyond a town vote in March of 1719 granting him liberty to set up a "litle dwelling house in the highway near

the cider press," and a credit of five shillings by Bull on May 27, 1737 "for digging a grave." Perhaps the most interesting person was John Negro, a freeman and apparently the oldest member of Westfield's small black community. On March 9, 1725 the town voted to give him twenty-three shillings a year "to beat the drum on the sabbath & other days as ocation may serve." The following year, on April 1, 1726, the town voted him "liberti to finish his howse & to live in it peaceably in the place where it now standeth so long as himself & his wife lives." Bull makes no mention of him in his accounts, though he certainly saw him often, for John attended church regularly, and he outlived his pastor by nine years.¹³

Regardless of what men like Joseph Segar or John Negro thought, by the fall of 1735 Nehemiah Bull was demanding help beyond the 150 pounds he was already receiving. In December of that year the town "voted to choose a Committee to Discorse with the Reverand Mr. Bull Consarning his being unease with what the Town doose for him," and on February 6, 1736, agreed "to raise 125 pounds to help the Reverand Mr. Bull to pay his Debts . . . upon Condition that the Rev'd Mr. Bull gives an acquittance under his hand whereby the Town shall be Discharged of all arrearedge and Defictiencies . . . for the time past." In 1737 the town raised Bull's salary to 200 pounds, but he was still not satisfied, and in the spring of 1738 took the matter to the Court of General Sessions in Springfield, threatening at the same time to leave Westfield. After considerable debate, the town reluctantly agreed on December 9, 1738 to raise his salary to 240 pounds, nearly three times what it was in 1726, noting in a separate vote "that the Rev'd Mr. Bull's Conduct and treatment of the people of this Town to be Matter of greavance to them." This was the last vote on the matter, for the following winter Bull became ill, and he died on April 12, 1740.¹⁴

Bull's difficulties over salary were not unique to Westfield. One of his neighbors in the pulpit, the Rev. Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, had similar problems with his congregation; in 1742 he was forced to itemize his expenses for the town's scrutiny, much to his embarrassment. Moreover, as a number of scholars, including William T. Youngs, Stephen Botein, and Richard Bushman have observed, rapid inflation of paper currency in the 1730s and 1740s made ministers on fixed salaries especially vulnerable, and to this extent at least, Bull was justified in demanding more money.¹⁵ What is striking about Bull's case, however, is the degree to which his account book shows his effort to maintain a lifestyle that rivaled that of the wealthiest townsmen. Perhaps because of his Yale training, his upbringing in a prominent Hartford family, and his marriage to Elizabeth Partridge, he felt he was entitled to what Jabez Fitch called maintenance "not only for necessity, but also for delight."¹⁶ Just as likely, however, Bull's behavior can be explained as an illustration of the growing insecurity of New England pastors who felt powerless to reverse the change from Puritan to Yankee. Though he could not have read it, he might have been struck by the irony of the sentiments expressed by his predecessor, Edward Taylor, in the first stanza of Meditation 2.42, written in 1701:

I fain would prize thee, Lord, but finde the price
Of Earthy things to rise so high in mee
That I no pretious matter in my choice
Can find within my heart to offer thee.
The price of worldly toyes is grown so deare,
They pick my purse. Thy Gaine is little there.¹⁷

NOTES

1. For a discussion of events in Westfield leading up to Bull's ordination, see Walter L. Powell, "Edward Taylor's Westfield: An Edition of the Westfield 'Town Records,'" Ph.D. Diss. Kent State University, 1982, pp. 101-121. Hereafter cited as Powell. Rev. Nehemiah Bull, born in 1701, was the son of Thomas and Esther Bull of Hartford, Connecticut. He graduated from Yale in 1723, and after about a year teaching on Long Island, came to Westfield as a schoolmaster in the spring of 1725.
2. John Tufts, in his work *Anti-Ministerial Objections* (Boston, 1725), advised that ministers "chuse to Prophecy in Sackcloth all their Days or betake themselves to the Field . . . rather than Sue their People at the Common Law" (p. 26). Despite admonitions of this kind, over twelve percent of the New England clergy were involved in financial disputes with their congregations between 1680 and 1740. See Clifford K. Shipton, "The New England Clergy of the 'Glacial Age,'" *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, XXXII (1937), p. 50.
3. *Nehemiah Bull Account Book: 1726-1740*, Ms, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield, Massachusetts, p. A. Bull's pagination was rather capricious, starting with letters A-Z, followed by arabic numerals, not wholly consecutive.
4. For a discussion of Westfield's economy, see Powell, pp. 32-51. Westfield's growth and population shift paralleled that of other Massachusetts towns such as Andover and Dedham. See Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York, 1970), and Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, New York, 1970).
5. *Account Book*, p. 80. Rev. Edward Taylor had major salary difficulties with the town starting in 1696, and continuing off and on for the rest of his ministry. Bull could not have been unaware, for example, that the town had failed to pay most of the maintenance it promised Taylor after he left the pulpit. In 1730, Taylor's son Eldad sued the town. See Powell, pp. 72-75.

6. Powell, p. 382; Bull included a list of thirty-four townsmen who gave him an additional allowance of 28 pounds, 11 shillings, 6 pence (see p. 4). This was far short of his actual expenses, which included sixty pounds for the work of his cousin and apprentices, 6 pounds, 6 shillings for boarding them as well as "Mr. Prat the Joyner" and "Joseph Segar, Turner," 12 pounds, 9 shillings, 10 pence for boards, nails, shingles, lime, and brick, and 43 pounds, 15 shillings, 4 pence for Rev. Bull's "bord & other things which I have not paid for." (See Account Book, pp. W-Z).
7. The position of a homelot in New England towns was a significant indication of the owner's status. See Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations*, p. 45. Of twenty-five Westfield estate inventories I surveyed between 1684 and 1724, none had a building valued at more than 136 pounds (including lot), suggesting that Bull's house was one of the most lavish constructed up to that time. See Powell, pp. 36-38.
8. Cited in John H. Lockwood, *Westfield and Its Historic Influences* (Springfield, 1922), I, p. 321. Hereafter cited as Lockwood.
9. Account Book, p. 4B.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
11. *Westfield Town Records: 1696-1765*, Ms, City Clerk's Office, Westfield, p. 162; Account Book, p. E.
12. References to Bull's estate are in Lockwood, I, p. 336. Based on my survey of Westfield's black community, Bull was one of the largest slaveowners in town; Account Book, pp. 1, 5A, 6, 31, 76.
13. Powell, pp. 327, 331, 375, 385; Account Book, p. 42. Records of Westfield's black community are fragmentary, but an examination of the Town Records, Church Records, Vital Statistics and Bull's Account Book indicate a population of nineteen people in 1740. Most were slaves or indentured servants.
14. Westfield Town Records, pp. 190, 192, 202.
15. See Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York, 1941), p. 216, Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor* (New York, 1980), pp. 157-160, J. William T. Youngs, Jr., *God's Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England, 1700-1750* (Baltimore, 1976), Stephen Botein, "Income and Ideology: Harvard-Trained Clergymen in the Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 13 (1980), pp. 396-413, and Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee* (New York, 1970). Botein notes that the worst inflationary period was 1733 to 1737, when "the real worth of clerical contracts . . . declined to an average of 32£ (pp. 400-401).
16. Jabez Fitch, *A Plea for the Ministers of New-England* (Boston, 1724), p. 12.
17. Donald Stanford, ed., *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (New Haven, 1960), p. 157.

APPENDIX

Record of the Minister's Rate for the Town of Westfield, 1731

Name	Amount			Occupation (if listed)
	Pounds	Shillings	Pence	
Deacon David Ashley	02	13	09	Miller
David Ashley, Jr.	00	18	10	
James Ashley	01	08	03	Tailor
Captain John Ashley	03	04	03	Merchant
Thomas Ashley	00	18	05	
Abel Cadwell	00	13	03	Joiner
David Dewey	00	17	01	
James Dewey	00	15	07	
Rebecca Dewey, widow	00	10	09	
Samuel Fowler, Sr.	01	07	02	
Samuel Hanchet	00	16	08	
Thomas Ingersoll	00	09	00	Tavernkeeper
Samuel Kellogg	01	01	00	
John Lee	01	05	02	Miller
Hannah King, widow	00	02	00	
Edward Martindale	01	04	00	Weaver
John Moseley	02	05	10	
Matthew Noble	01	11	00	Shoemaker
Jonathan Phelps	00	13	09	
Nathaniel Phelps	00	12	06	
Thomas Pixley	00	19	06	
James Saxton, Jr.	00	07	09	
Sergeant John Shepard	02	10	03	
Mr. Mark Warner	00	15	03	
Sergeant Eliezar Weller	03	12	10	
Nathaniel Williams	01	03	00	

The above list was compiled from rates scattered throughout the *Account Book*, and does not constitute a complete record of all townsmen who were "rated." Though representative, the absence of many names suggests the possibility that at least one other account book is no longer extant.