I'm Warning You!
The Poor and Impoverished in New England Colonial Times

Peggy Clemens Lauritzen, AG, FOGS MissPeggy55@gmail.com

The Practice Was Brought From England

Settlement records: people are examined when they want to settle some new place. • Do they have funds to keep themselves and their family, or a trade? In England, poor relief was part of the Poor Law System. • 1597 – Act for the Relief of the Poor. Overseer duties included: • How much poor relief money was needed. • Collect the poor rate. • Distribute poor relief. • Supervise the poorhouse.	**Removal orders**: if they fall foul and must be removed back from whence they came. *Information in bold courtesy of Kirsty Gray, founder of FamilyWise Limited, Wiltshire, England.* *family-wise.co.uk* Overseers were often reluctant, unpaid, and worked under a Justice of the Peace. • Two overseers were elected every Easter. • Managed a budget by collecting poor tax for the area. • Churchwardens and landowners often selected.

Warning Out

- Replaced an earlier practice of applying for admission to a town. Required a vote of current inhabitants or the Board of Selectmen.
  - Entering as an inhabitant
  - To purchase property
- As cities grew, it became harder to enforce.
  - Had to make a distinction between residency and inhabitancy.
  - Residents who were not admitted to inhabitancy could be warned out.
  - Town is spared from having to care for them in case of poverty.
  - Towns were small, so even a few applicants could overwhelm the budget.
- Time limit – if they hadn't been warned, they would automatically become an inhabitant.
- To pressure "outsiders" to settle elsewhere. Notice ordered by the Board of Selectmen of a town, served by the constable upon any newcomer who might become a town charge. Not necessarily forcibly removed.
- Frequent requests for aid could result in being sent to the poor farm.
  - Expected to work to support themselves, handicapped, and elder residents.
- Served as a registration system for those on the move.
  - Allowed labor to come into areas such as a port town, but prevented the town from having to pay for relief if the transients needed help and commodities.
- Many New England towns hold these records.

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- Can provide information on ages, hometowns, children's names, and places of origin for the family.

Where Do You Find Poverty Records?

Town Record Books	**Town Reports**
• Stranger notifications • Warning out notifications • Items for poor relief	• Almshouse and poorhouse residents • Poor expenses

Was It Legal?	**Are the Records Useful?**
• Towns felt they had the right to "warn out" transients based on the theory of common law duty to care for inhabitants who couldn't support themselves. • In accordance with the law, residents couldn't sell their homes and property to strangers without town permission. • Sometimes there was no reason given. • Town warnings can be found as early as mid-1700s – 1818. • Originals kept by the town clerk of each town.	• The practice, and its enforcement, varied from state to state, and even within communities.. Refer to the *FamilySearch* Wiki. • They can be a tool for tracking movements of individuals and families, and women on the fringe of society. • Often mention the previous community where they resided. • If our ancestors were poor, and would not appear on land, tax, vital and probate records, tracking can be difficult. • Warning out records may helpful in piecing their lives together.

STATE OF VERMONT, } To either Constable of Rockingham in
WINDHAM COUNTY ss } the County of Windham. *Greeting.*

You are hereby required to summon Joseph Bellows and Mary Bellows his wife and George Bellows, Henry A. Bellows and Fanny A. Bellows, their children, now residing in Rockingham to depart s'd Town.

Hereof fail not, but of this precept & your doings herein due return make according to law.

Given under our hands at Rockingham this 30 day of May 1813.

JONATHAN BARRON
SAM'L W. PULSIPHER
ELIAS OLCOTT
} Selectmen of Rockingham

From the book, *Warning Out in New England, 1656-1817,* by Josiah Henry Benton – listed in the Bibliography.

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