Salem Witch Trials

Salem, Massachusetts

1692
Why Salem Still Haunts Us

- Fascination with Witches
- A Stain on American History
- How Could an Entire Community Engage in Such Horrific Acts?
- Legal ramifications guilty until proven innocent...versus today.
Witches and Europe

The 17th century in Europe was a time of religious confusion, thousands of suspected witches lost their lives.

It was believed that some people possessed special powers that could cause good or harm.
In times of hardship, in tight-knit communities, people began to look for people to blame for their problems.

**Hardships Blamed on Witches:**

- Failed crops
- The death of livestock
- People becoming ill
- Sudden accidental death

People believed that witches had a secret pact with the devil. Most often the people accused of being witches were widows and single women.
Society centered around the church. The younger generation did not share the same strict religious views. “Halfway Covenant”
The Accused

Tituba is a foreigner, given to storytelling, confessed, perhaps because of fear for her life and the enjoyment of being the center of attention.

Sarah Osborne was an elderly woman who hadn’t been to church in years and may have been considered rather crotchety.

Sarah Good was homeless, a social misfit who would mumble incoherently when someone failed to be charitable, and the death of livestock was attributed to her curses.
Strange Behavior

In January of 1692, a group of girls in Salem Village, MA began to exhibit strange behavior, such as blasphemous screaming, convulsive seizures, trance-like states and mysterious spells.

Physicians concluded that only the influence of Satan could be responsible for the girls’ afflictions.

Pressured to identify the source of their affliction, the girls named three women as witches: Tituba (the pastor’s Caribbean-Indian slave), Sarah Good & Sarah Osborne.
Map of Salem

Can any deductions be made from this map?
The Examination of a Witch
T.H. Matteson 1853
Indictments:
Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey

At the trial of Rebecca Nurse jury first acquits, then told to reconsider.
The sentences are carried out.

August 19: George Burroughs, John Proctor, John Willard, George Jacobs, and Martha Carrier are hanged. Elizabeth Proctor is spared because she is pregnant.

September 9: Six more tried and sentenced to death, including Martha Corey.
Giles Corey was a prosperous, uneducated, eighty-year-old farmer and full member of the church. He and his wife Martha lived on a farm in the southwest corner of Salem village.

In March of 1692, Martha Corey made the mistake of publicly questioning the sincerity of the accusations of the afflicted girls.
Giles Corey refused to give testimony at the 1692 Witch Trials.

He would neither confess nor deny the charges brought upon him.
So, in order to obtain a statement, he was taken outside, a board placed across his body, and heavy stones piled on top. It is said that his only words before he was crushed to death were: "More weight!"
Hanging of George Burroughs

George Burroughs recites Lord's Prayer perfectly at hanging.
Mather, a minister of Boston's North Church, was a prolific publisher of pamphlets and a firm believer in witchcraft.
Results of the Hysteria

- 140 people had been accused of practicing witchcraft in Salem, including a 4 year old girl and a man in his 80s.
- Twenty accused witches were executed, fifteen women and five men.
- Nineteen were hung following conviction. A dog and a pair of cats were executed.
- One was pressed to death for refusing to enter a plea.
Why the hysteria ended

1. Doubts grow when respected citizens are convicted and executed.
2. Accusations of witchcraft include the powerful and well-connected.
3. The educated elite of Boston pressure Gov. Phips to exclude spectral

Increase Mather points out the Devil could take the shape of an innocent person: "It were better that 10 suspected witches should escape than one innocent person should be condemned."
Arthur Miller’s *Crucible*
Composition Book

- The Examination of a Witch
  T.H. Matteson 1853

- Portrayal of townspeople looking for evidence of witchcraft.

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The Crucible by Arthur Miller is a play based upon the events in 1692, which led to the Salem Witch Trials.

The play was written in the early 1950s during the time of McCarthyism, when the US government blacklisted accused communists.

Memorable Providences

A book by Cotton Mather that describes witchcraft and how to determine who is a witch.
The Salem Witch Trials vs. *The Crucible*
Salem Witch Museum

In Salem, Massachusetts, the witch-on-a-broomstick image is everywhere—it even appears on the badges of the town's police officers.

Indeed, this site of colonial-era witch hysteria is a modern-day magnet for all things Halloween, all year long.

Psychics and tarot card readers flock to the town, and there are numerous ghost tours and haunted houses.
Potential Answers?

- Rye-rot theory
- Economic hardship gone awry
- Loss of religious conscience in Salem
- Hysteria