

The Trial of Sarah Good

Salem, Massachusetts – c. 1692



FIGURE 1: Examination of a Witch, by T.H. Matteson 1853.
Courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum

Salem Witch Trials: The Trial of Sarah Good

Workshop Contents

Overview

From June through September of 1692, people were tried for practicing witchcraft in the township of Salem, Massachusetts (currently known as the town of Danvers, Massachusetts).

By the end of the Trials, 24 people had died; 19 of those were hanged.

Explore on the Web

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schooladventures/salemwitchtrials/>

Visit this website for an interactive exhibit of the Salem Witch Trials.

Document Anno

Summary of evidence presented against Sarah Good. This is the actual transcript from the proceedings in 1692. It is important to note that there was no standard for the spelling of many English words at the time.

National Archives Document Worksheet

Complete the worksheet to help you analyze the document.

Historic Summary

This section provides a quick summary and its significance. You may find this helpful to gain an understanding of the context.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE V. SARAH GOOD (1692)

(Summary of Evidence v. Sarah Good), from

http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/ASA_GOOD.HTM

Titables Confession & Examinacion ag't. her selfe & Sarah good abstracted

Charges Sarah Good to hurt the Children & would have had her done it 5. were with her last night & would have. had her hurt the Children w'ch she refused & that Good was one of them

Good with others are very strong & pull her with them to Mr. putnams & make her hurt the Child. Good rode with her upon Apoole behind her, takeing hold of one another doth not know how they goe for she never sees trees nor path but are presently th -

good [ther] tell her she must kill some body with a knife & would have had her killed Tho: putnams Child last night the Child at the same time affirmed she would have had her cutt of her own head if not Titabe would doe it & complained of a knife cutting her

Good came to her last night when her Mr. was at prayer & would not let her hear hath one yellow bird & stopped her Eares in prayer time, the yellow bird hath been seen by the Children & Titubee saw it suck Good between the forefinger & long finger upon the right hand

Saw Good [ther] practice witchcraft.

Saw Good have a Catt besides the bird & a thing all over hair [ther]

Sarah Good appeared like a wolfe to Hubbard going to proctors & saw it sent by Good to Hubbard

good [ther] hurt the Children again & the Children affirme the same Hubbard knew th[em] not being blinded by them & was once or twice taken dumb herslefe i:e: Titube

Good cause her to pinch the Children in their own persons

Saw Goods name in the booke, & the devell told her they made these marks & said to her she made ther marke & it was the same day she went to prison

Good [ther] came to ride abroad with her & the man shewed her Goods mark in the book

Good [ther] pinched her on the leggs & being searched found it soe after confession

Nota S. G. mumbled when she went away from Mr Parrass & the children after hurt

Dorothy Goods Charge ag't. her mother Sarah Good. That she had three birds one black, one yellow & that these birds hurt the Children & afflicted persons.

her own Confession

Nota None here sees the witches but the afflicted & themsleves Charges Sarah Osburne with hurting the Children -- looking upon them at the same time & not being afflicted must consequently be a Witch

Deliverance Hobs Confession

being at a meeting of the witches in Mr: parisses feild when Mr. Burroughs preached & administred the sacram't to them saw Good amongst the rest & this fully agrees with what the afflicted persons relate. 22th. Apr(92)

Abigaile Hobbs' Confession

was in Company with Sarah Good & knowes her to be a witch & afterwards was taken deafe & Mary walcott [ther] saw Good & osburn run their fingers into this d_poits ears a little after she spoke & s'd Good told her she sh'd not speake

Mary Warren's Confession

That Sarah Good is a Witch & brought her the booke to sighe to.

Elizabeth Hubard

mary Walcott

Ann puttnam

Mercy Lewis

Sarah Vibber

Abigail Williams afflicted by S. Good & saw her shape.

Richard Patch

W'm Allen that she app'rd to him when abed

W'm Good. that she hat a strange Tett or wort

John Huges that he saw strange sights.

Sam; Braybrooke that she siad she would not confess unless proved ag't her & that ther was but One Evidence & that an Indian & ther for did not fear

Indictm'ts No. 1

Witnesses v. Sarah Good

against Sarah Wilds John Andrews William Perkins Joseph Andrews

& also for Sundry other Acts of Witchcraft by S'd good Comitted & done before & Since that time

the Jurors for our Sovereigne Lord and Lady the King and Queen: presents That Sarah Good wife of William Good of Salem Villiage in the County of Essex Husbandman the Second Day of May in the forth year of the Reigne of our Soveriegne Lord and Lady william and Mary by the Grace of Godd of England Scotland France & Ireland King and Queen Defenders of the faith &c: and Divers other Dayes and times as well before as after, certaine Detestable arts called Witchcrafts and Sorceries, Wickedly & felloniously, hath used Practised, & Exersised at and within the Township of Salem in the County of Essex aforesaid in upon and against one Sarah Vibber wife of John Vibber of Salem aforesaid Husband man, by which said wicked Arts: she the said Sarah Vibber, the said Second Day of May in the fourth year abovsaid and divers other Dayes and times as well before as after was and is Tortured Afflicted Pined Consumed wasted and Tormented, -- and also for Sundry other Acts of witchcraft by said Sarah Good committed and done before and since that time ag't: the Peace of our Sovereigne Lord & Lady the King & Queen, their Crowne and dignity and ag't the forme of the Statute in that case made and Provided:

Witnesses

Sarah Vibber Jurat

Elizabeth Hubbard Jurat

Abigall Williams Jurat

Ann Putman Jurat

Jno. Vibber -- Sowrne

The Jurors for our Sovereigne Lord and Lady the King and Queen: p_'esents That Sarah Good Wife of William Good: of Salem Villiage in the County of Essex husbandman the first Day of March in the forth year of the Reigne of our Soveriegne Lord and Lady William & Mary by the Grace of God of Engalnd Scotland France and Ireland Defenders of the faith &c and divers other Days, and times, as well before as after certaine Detestable artes called witchcrafts & Sorceries: wickedly and felloniously hath used Practised & Exercised: at and within the Towne Ship of Salem in the County of Essex aforesaid. in upon and ag't: one Elizabeth Hubbard: of Salem aforesaid Single woman: by w'ch: siad wicked arts the said Elizabeth Hubbart, the said first Day of March in the fourth year aforesaid: and at Divers other Days and times as well before as after, was and is Tortured Afflicted : Pined, wasted and Tormented as also for Sundry other acts of witchcraft by s'd: Sarah Good committed and done before and since that time ag't the Peace of our Sovereigne Lord and Lady King & Queen of England, and ag't the forme of the Statute in that case made & Provided

Witnessed Elizabeth Hubbard Anne Puttman Jurat Mary Wallcott Jurat In Curia June 28th 1692. Abigaill Williams Jurat

(Samuel Abbey and Mary Abbey v. Sarah Good)

Samuel Abbey of Salem Villiage Aged 45. Years or thereabouts and mary Abbey his wife aged 38 years or thereabouts, Deposeth and Saith:

That about this Time three Years past W'm: Good and his wife Sarah Good being destitute of an house to well in these Deponents out of Charity, they being Poor. lett them live in theirs some time, untill that said Sarah Good was #[of] so Turbuland a Spirritt, [Spirritt,] Spitefull and so Mallitiously bent, that these Deponents could not suffer her to Live in their howse any Longer; and was forced for Quittness sake to turne she the said Sarah, with her husband, out of their howse ever since, which is about two years ½ agone; the siad Sarah Good, hath carriedit very Spitefully & Mallitiously, towards them, the winter following after the said Sarah was gone from our hose, we began to Loose Cattel, and Lost severall after an unusuall Manner, in drupeing Condition and yett they dould Eate: and your Deponents have Lost after that manner 17 head of Cattle within two years, besides Sheep, and Hoggs; and both doe believe they Dyed by witchcraft, the said William good on the last of may, was twelve months, went home to his wife the s'd Sarah Good, and told her, what a sad-Accident had fallen out, she asked what, he answered that his neighbour Abbey had lost two Cowes, both dying within halfe an hour of one another; the s'd Sarah good said she did not care if he the said Abbey had Lost all the Cattle he had, as the said Jno. Good told us. Just that very Day, that said Sarah good was taken up, we yor Deponents had a Cow that could not rise alone, but since presently after she was taken up, the said Cow was well and could rise so well, as if she had ailed nothing: she the said Sarah Good: ever since these Deponants turned her out of their howse she hath behaved her selfe very crossely & Mallitiously, to them & their Children calling their Children vile Names and hath-threatened them often

(Sarah Gadge v. Sarah Good)

The deposition of Sarah Gadge the wife of Thomas Gadge aged about 40 years this deponent testifeith and saith that about two years & an halfe agone; Sarah Good Came to her house & would have come into the house, but s'd. Sarah Gadge told her she should not come in for she was afraid she had been with them and that had the Smallpox: & with that she fell to mutring & scolding extreamly & soe: told s'd Gadge if she would not let her in she should give her something; & she answered she would not have any thing to doe with one of s'd Gades Cowes Died in A Sudden, terrible & Strange unusuall maner so that some of the neighbors & said Deponent did think it to be done by witchcraft farther saith not

(Thomas Gadge v. Sarah Good)

And Thomas Gadge husband of s'd Sarah: testifeith that he had a Cow soe Died about the time abovementioned & though he & some neighbors opened the Cow yet they Could find no naturall Cause of s'd Cowes Death & farther saith not.

Thomas gadge and sarah gadge owned this to be the truth on their oath. before us; the Juriars for Inquest this 28. of June 92.

(Joseph Herrick, Sr., and Mary Herrick v. Sarah Good)

The Deposition of Joseph Herrick senr. who testifieth and saith that on the first day of March 1691/2: I being then Constable for Salem: there was delivered to me by warrant from the worshipfull Jno. Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin Esqrs. Sarah good for me to cary to their majesties Gaol at Ipswich and that night I sett a gard to watch her at my own house namely Samu'l: Braybrook mischaell dunnell Jonathan Baker. . and the affore named parsons Informed me in the morning that that night Sarah good was gon for some time from them both bare foot and bare ledge: and I was also Informed that: that night Elizabeth Hubbard one of the Afflicted parsons Complained that Sarah Good came and afflicted hir;being bare foot and bare ledged and Samuell Sibley that was one that was attending of Eliza Hubbard strock good on the Arme as Elizabeth Hubbard said and mary Herrick and wife of the abovesaid Joseph Herick testifieth that on: the 2th: March 1691/2 in the morning I took notis of Sarah Good in the morning and one of hir Armes was Bloody from a little below the Elbow to the wrist: and I also took notis of her armes on the night before and then there was no signe of blood on them

Joseph herrick senr and mary herrick appearid before us th Jury for Inquest: and did on the oath which the had taken owne this their evidense to be the truth; the 28: of June 1692

Sworne in Court

(William Batten and William Shaw v. Sarah Good and Lydia Dustin)

The testimony of Willam Batten aged 76 years or their abouts and william shaw aged about 50 years and Deborah his wife aged about 40 years, these all testifie and say that this day was a weeke agoe. Susannah shelding being at the

house of william shaw shee was tied her hands a cross in such a manner we were forced to cut the string before we could git her hand loose and when shee was out of her fit she told us it [was] Goode dastin that did tye her hands after that manner, and 4 times she hat been tyed in this manner in towe weeks time the 2 first times shee sayth it was good dastin and the 2 last times it was Good that did tye her, we furder testifie that wen ever shee doeth but touch this string shee is presently bit.

We furder testifie that in this time there was a broome carried a way out of the house in visibble to us and put in a apple tree two times and a shirt once and a milke tube once was carried out of the house three poles from the house into the woods and she sayeth that it

thes parsons a bove named upon their oath ownid this their tistimony to be the trugh before us the Juriars for Inqwest this. 28. of June: 1692

(William Allen, John Hughes, William Good, ans Samuel Braybrook v. Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba)

March 5th 1691/2

Wm Allin saith that on the 1st of march att night he heard a strange noyse not usually heard, and so continued for many times so that hee was afrighted and coming nearer to it he there saw a strange and unuseall beast lying on the Grownd so that going up to it the s'd Beast vanished away and in the s'd place starte up 2 or 3 weemen and flew from mee not after the manner of other weemen but swiftly vanished away out of our sight which weemen wee took to bee Sarah Good Sarah Osburne and Tittabe the time was a bout an hour within night and I John Hughes saith the same beeing in Company then wth s'd allin. as wittness our hands

* william Allen

* john hughes

William Allen further saith tha on the 2^d day of march the s'd Sarah Good vissabley appeared to him in his chamber s'd allen beecame and sate upon his foot the s'd allen went to kick att her upon which shee vanished and the light with her

william Good saith that the night before his s'd wife was Examined he saw a wart or tett a little belowe her Right shoulder which he never saw before and asked Goodwife Engersol whether she did nhot see it when shee searched her

John Hughes. further saith that on the 2^d day of march that comeing from Goodman Sibleys a bouthe Eight of the clock in the night hee saw a Great white dogg whome he came up to but he would not stire but when He was past hee the s'd dogg followed him about 4 or 5 pole and so disappeared the same night the s'd John Huges beeing in Bed in a clossd Roome and the dore being fast so that no catt nor dogg could come in the said John saw a Great light appeare in the s'd Chamber and Risseing up in his bed he saw a large Grey Catt att his beds foot

March the 2^d Sam'l Brabrook saith that Carrieng Sarah Good to ippswich the said Sarah leapt of her horse 3 times which was Between 12 and 3 of the clock of the same day w'ch the daughter of Thomas Puttman declared the same att her fathers house the s'd Brabrook further saith that s'd Sarah Good tould him that shee would not owne her selfe to bee a wicth unless she is provd one shee saith that there is but one Evidence and thats and Indian and therefore she fears not and so Continued Rayling against the Majestrates and she Endevered to kill herselfe

(Elizabeth Hubbard v. Sarah Good)

The Deposition of Elizabeth Hubbard agged about 17 years who testifieth and saith that on the 28 February 1691/92 I saw the Apperishtion of Sarah good who did most greivously afflict me by pinching and pricking me and so she continewed hurting of me tell the first day of March being the day of her examination then she did also most greivously afflict and tortor me also dureing the time of her examination and also severall times sence she hath afflicted me and urged me to writ in her book: also on the day of hir examination I saw the Apperishtion of Sarah good goe and hurt and afflict the bodies of Elizabeth parish Abigail williams and Ann putnam jun'g and also I have seen the Apperishtion of Sarah Good affecting: the body of Sarah vibber

mark

Eliz: B Hubbard

also in the Night after Sarah goods Examination: Sarah Good came to me barefoot and bareledged and did most greivously torment me by pricking and pinching me and I veryly beleve that Sarah good hath bewicked me also that night Samuell Sibley that was then attending me strok Sarah good on hirArme

(Ann Putnam, Jr. v. Sarah Good)

The Deposition of Ann putnam Ju'r who testifieth and saith, that on the 25th of February 1691/92 I saw the apperishtion of Sarah good which did tortor me most greivously but I did not know hir name tell the 27th of February

and then she tould me hir name was Sarah good and then she did prick me and pinch me most greivously: and also sense severall times urging me vehemently to writ in hir book and also on the first day of march being the day of hir Examination Sarah good did most greivously tortor me and also severall times sence: and also on the first day of march 1692 I saw the Apperishtion of sarah good goe and afflect and tortor the bodys of Elizabeth parish Abigail williams and Elisabeth Hubburd also I have seen the Appershtion of Sarah good afflecting the body: of Sarah vibber
mark

Ann B putnam

ann putnam owned this har testimony to be the trugh one har oath, before the Juriars of Inqwest this 28: of June 1692

And further says that shee verily beleives that Sarah Good doth betwitch & afflicte her
Sworn before the Court

(Susannah Sheldon v. Sarah Good)

The Deposition of Susannah Shelden aged about 18 years who testifieth and saith that sense I have ben afflicted I have very often ben most greivously tortured by Apperistion of Sarah Good who has most dredfully afflicted me by biting pricking and pinching me and almost choaking me to death but on the 26. June 1692 Sarah good most violently pulled down my head behind a Cheast and tyed my hands together with a whele band & allmost Choaked me to death and also severall times sence the Apperistion of Sarah good has most greivously tortured me by biting pinching and almost Chaoking me to death: also william Battin and Thomas Buffincgont Juner ware forced to cutt the whele band from afe my hands for they could not unty it.

And farther s'd Sheldon upon giving in this testimony to the grand jury was sezxed with sundry fits w'ch. when she came to her self she told the s'd jury being aske that it was s'd. Good that afflicted her & a little after Mary Warren falling into a fit s'd. Sheldon affirmed to the Grand jury that she saw s'd Good upon her, & also a sauser being by invisible hands taken of from a Talbe & carried our of doors s'd. Sheldon affirmed she saw said Sarah Good carry it away & put it where it was found abroad.

Susanah Shelden: oned this har testimony to be the trugh efore the juriars of Inquest on the oath which she had daken this. 28. of June 1692.

(Johanna Childin v. Sarah Good)

the deposition of Johanna Chilun testifieth and saieth that upon 2d: of June: 1692: that the aparition of Sarah good and her least Child did appear to her : and the Child did tell its mother that she did murrder it : to which Sarah good replied that she did it because that she Could not atend it and the Child tould its mother that she was A witch: and then Sarah good said she did give it to the divell

(Henry Herrick and Jonathan Batchelor v. Sarah Good)

The deposition of Henery Herrick aged About 21 years, this deponent testifieth & saith that in Last march was two yeare; Sarah Good came to his fathers house & desired to lodge there; & his father forbid it; & she went away Grumbling & my father bid us follow her & see that shee went away clear, lest she should lie in the barn: & by smoking of her pipe should fire the barn; & s'd deponent with Jonathan Batchelor seing her make a stop near the barne, bid her be gone; or he would set her father of; to which she replied that then it should cost his father Zachariah Herick one; or tow of the best Cowes which he had; --

And Johathan Batchelor aged 14 year testifieth the same above-written; and doth farther testifie that about a weeke after two of his grandfathers: Master Catle were removed from their places: & other younger Catle put in their rooms & since that several of their Catle have bene set Loose in a strange maner --

(Sarah Bibberr v. Sarah Good)

The Deposition of Sarah viber aged about 36 years who testifieth and saith that sence I have been afflicted I have often seen the Apperistion of Sarah Good but she did not hurt me tell the 2 day of May 1692 tho I saw hir Apperishtion most greivously tortor mercy lewes & Jno. Indian att Salem. on the 11th April 1692: but on the 2: may 1692 the Apperistion of Sarah good did most greivously torment me by presing my breath almost out of my body and also she did immediatly affect my child by pinceing of it that I could hardly hold it and my husband seing of it took hold of the Child but it cried out and twisted so dreadfully by reson of the torture that the Apperishtion of Sarah good did affect it with all tha it gott out of its fathers armes to: also seval[ly] times sence the Apperishtion of Sarah Good has most greivously tormented me by beating and pinching me and almost Choaking me to death and pricking me with pinnes after a most dreadfull maner

Sarah viber ownid this har tistimony to be the truth one the oath she had taken: be fore us the Juriars for Inquest: this: 28dy of June 1692

Sworne. in Court Juen 29th 1692.

And further Adds. that shee very beleives uppon her Oath that Sarah Good had bewitched her --

(Sarah Bibber v. Sarah Good)

The deposition of Sarah Biber aged 36 years testifieth and sayeth that the saterday bight before goode Dustin of Reding was examined I saw the apparition of Sarah goode standing by my bedside, and shee pulled aside the curtian and turned down the sheet and Looked upon my child 4 years old and presently upon it the child was stracke into a great fit that my hausband and I could hardly hold it

Sara biber one of her oath did owe this har testimony before the Juriars for Inqwest: this. 28: of June 1692

(Mary Walcott v. Sarah Good)

The Deposition of Mary wolcott aged about 17 years who testifieth and saith that sence I have been afflicted I have often seen the Aperishment of sarah good amongst the wictes hwo has also afflicted me and urged me writ in hir bood

The Mark of Mary Walcot

mary welcott ownid this har testimony to be the truth one har oath: before the Jurrars for Inqwest this 28. of June 1692

also mary walcott testifieth that I have seen sarah good afflicting mercy lewes and Elizabeth Hubberd and Abigail williams and I verily beleve she bewichted me

(Reverse) Mary Walcott ag't Sarah Good

(Samuel Sibley v. Sarah Good)

Samuell Sibley aged about :34: years Testefieth and saith that I being at the house of doctter grides that night after: that Sary good was examened and Elizabeth Hubbard Said that ther sands Sary good #[stands] apon the tabel by you with all hear naked brast and bar footed bar lagded and said o nast Slout if .I. had sum thing.I. would kill hear the.I.Struck with my Staf where She Said Sary good Study and Elizabeth hubard cried out you have heet har right acors the back you have a most killd hear if any body was there they may see it

(Death Warrant for Sarah Good, Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, and Sarah Wilds)

To Goerge: Corwine Gent'n High Sheriff of the county of Essex Greeting Whereas Sarah Good Wife of William Good of Salem Village Rebecka Nurse wife of Francis Nurse of Salem Villiage Susanna Martin of Amesbury Widow Elizabeth How wife of James How of Ipswich Sarah Wild wife of John Wild of Topsfield all of the County of Essex in thier Maj'ts Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England Att A Court of Oyer & Terminer held by Adjournment for Our Severaign Lord & Lady Kind Wiliam & Queen Mary for the said County of Essex at salem in the s'd County onf the 29th day of June [torn] were Severaly arrigned on Several Indictments for the horrible Crime of Witchcraft by them practised & Committed On Severall persons and pleading not guilty did for thier Tryall put themselves on God & Thier Countrey whereupon they were Each of them found & brought in Guilty by the Jury that passed On them according to their respective Indictments and Sentence of death did then pass upon them as the Law directs Execution whereof yet remains to be done:

Those are Therefore in thier Maj'ties name William & Mary now King & Queen over England &ca: to will & Command you that upon Tuesday next being the 19th day for [torn] Instant July between the houres of Eight & [torn] in [torn] forenoon the same day you Safely conduct the s'd Sarah Good Rebecka Nurse Susann Martin Elizabeth Howe & Sarah Wild From thier Maj'ties goal in Salem afores'd to the place of Execution & there Cause them & Every of them to be hanged by the Neck untill they be dead and of the doings herein make return to the Clerke of the said Court & this precept and hereof you are not to fail at your perill and this Shall be your sufficient Warrant given under my hand & seale at Boston th 12't day of July in the fourth year of Reign of our Sovereigne Lord & Layd Wm & Mary King and Queen &ca:

*Wm Stoughton
Salem July 19th 1692

I caused the within mentioned persons to be Executed according to the Tenour of the with[in] warrant

*George Corwin Sherif

WRITTEN DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

Newspaper	Map	Advertisement
Letter	Telegram	Congressional Record
Patent	Press Release	Census Report
Memorandum	Report	Other

UNIQUE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

Interesting Letterhead	Notations
Handwritten	"RECEIVED" stamp
Typed	Other
Seals	

DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:

AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:

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FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?

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List three things the author said that you think are important:

Why do you think this document was written?

What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written.

Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

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SALEM WITCH TRIALS: A COMMENTARY

By Douglas Linder

(University of Missouri-Kansas City, School of Law)

From June through September of 1692, nineteen men and women, all having been convicted of witchcraft, were carted to Gallows Hill, a barren slope near Salem Village, for hanging. Another man of over eighty years was pressed to death under heavy stones for refusing to submit to a trial on witchcraft charges. Hundreds of others faced accusations of witchcraft. Dozens languished in jail for months without trials. Then, almost as soon as it had begun, the hysteria that swept through Puritan Massachusetts ended.

Why did this travesty of justice occur? Why did it occur in Salem? Nothing about this tragedy was inevitable. Only an unfortunate combination of an ongoing frontier war, economic conditions, congregational strife, teenage boredom, and personal jealousies can account for the spiraling accusations, trials, and executions that occurred in the spring and summer of 1692.

In 1688, John Putnam, one of the most influential elders of Salem Village, invited [Samuel Parris](#), formerly a marginally successful planter and merchant in Barbados, to preach in the Village church. A year later, after negotiations over salary, inflation adjustments, and free firewood, Parris accepted the job as Village minister. He moved to Salem Village with his wife Elizabeth, his six-year-old daughter Betty, niece Abigail Williams, and his Indian slave [Tituba](#), acquired by Parris in Barbados.

The [Salem](#) that became the new home of Parris was in the midst of change: a mercantile elite was beginning to develop, prominent people were becoming less willing to assume positions as town leaders, two clans (the Putnams and the Porters) were competing for control of the village and its pulpit, and a debate was raging over how independent Salem Village, tied more to the interior agricultural regions, should be from Salem, a center of sea trade.

Sometime during February of the exceptionally cold winter of 1692, young Betty Parris became strangely ill. She dashed about, dove under furniture, contorted in pain, and complained of fever. The cause of her symptoms may have been some combination of stress, asthma, guilt, boredom, child abuse, epilepsy, and delusional psychosis. The symptoms also could have been caused, as Linda Caporael argued in a 1976 article in *Science* magazine, by a disease called "convulsive ergotism" brought on by ingesting rye--eaten as a cereal and as a common ingredient of bread--infected with ergot. (Ergot is caused by a fungus which invades developing kernels of rye grain, especially under warm and damp conditions such as existed at the time of the previous rye harvest in Salem. Convulsive ergotism causes violent fits, a crawling sensation on the skin, vomiting, choking, and--most interestingly--hallucinations. The hallucinogenic drug LSD is a derivative of ergot.) Many of the symptoms of convulsive ergotism seem to match those attributed to Betty Parris, but there is no way of knowing with any certainty if she in fact suffered from the disease--and the theory would not explain the afflictions suffered by others in Salem later in the year.

At the time, however, there was another theory to explain the girls' symptoms. [Cotton Mather](#) had recently published a popular book, "[Memorable Providences](#)," describing the suspected witchcraft of an Irish washerwoman in Boston, and Betty's behavior in some ways mirrored that of the afflicted person described in Mather's widely read and discussed book. It was easy to believe in 1692 in Salem, with an Indian war raging less than seventy miles away (and many refugees from the war in the area) that the devil was close at hand. Sudden and violent death occupied minds.

Talk of witchcraft increased when other playmates of Betty, including eleven-year-old [Ann Putnam](#), seventeen-year-old [Mercy Lewis](#), and Mary Walcott, began to exhibit similar unusual behavior. When his own nostrums failed to effect a cure, William Griggs, a doctor called to examine the girls, suggested that the girls' problems might have a

supernatural origin. The widespread belief that witches targeted children made the doctor's diagnosis seem increasing likely.

A neighbor, Mary Sibley, proposed a form of counter magic. She told Tituba to bake a rye cake with the urine of the afflicted victim and feed the cake to a dog. (Dogs were believed to be used by witches as agents to carry out their devilish commands.) By this time, suspicion had already begun to focus on Tituba, who had been known to tell the girls tales of omens, voodoo, and witchcraft from her native folklore. Her participation in the urine cake episode made her an even more obvious scapegoat for the inexplicable.

Meanwhile, the number of girls afflicted continued to grow, rising to seven with the addition of Ann Putnam, Elizabeth Hubbard, Susannah Sheldon, and Mary Warren. According to historian Peter Hoffer, the girls "turned themselves from a circle of friends into a gang of juvenile delinquents." (Many people of the period complained that young people lacked the piety and sense of purpose of the founders' generation.) The girls contorted into grotesque poses, fell down into frozen postures, and complained of biting and pinching sensations. In a village where everyone believed that the devil was real, close at hand, and acted in the real world, the suspected affliction of the girls became an obsession.

Sometime after February 25, when Tituba baked the witch cake, and February 29, when arrest warrants were issued against Tituba and two other women, Betty Parris and Abigail Williams named their afflictors and the witchhunt began. The consistency of the two girls' accusations suggests strongly that the girls worked out their stories together. Soon Ann Putnam and Mercy Lewis were also reporting seeing "witches flying through the winter mist." The prominent Putnam family supported the girls' accusations, putting considerable impetus behind the prosecutions.

The first three to be accused of witchcraft were Tituba, [Sarah Good](#), and Sarah Osborn. Tituba was an obvious choice ([LINK TO TITUBA'S EXAMINATION](#)). Good was a beggar and social misfit who lived wherever someone would house her ([LINK TO GOOD'S EXAMINATION](#)) ([LINK TO GOOD'S TRIAL](#)), and Osborn was old, quarrelsome, and had not attended church for over a year. The Putnams brought their complaint against the three women to county magistrates Jonathan Corwin and [John Hathorne](#), who scheduled examinations for the suspected witches for March 1, 1692 in Ingersoll's tavern. When hundreds showed up, the examinations were moved to the meeting house. At the examinations, the girls described attacks by the specters of the three women, and fell into their by then perfected pattern of contortions when in the presence of one of the suspects. Other villagers came forward to offer stories of cheese and butter mysteriously gone bad or animals born with deformities after visits by one of the suspects. The magistrates, in the common practice of the time, asked the same questions of each suspect over and over: Were they witches? Had they seen Satan? How, if they are were not witches, did they explain the contortions seemingly caused by their presence? The style and form of the questions indicates that the magistrates thought the women guilty.

The matter might have ended with admonishments were it not for Tituba. After first adamantly denying any guilt, afraid perhaps of being made a scapegoat, Tituba claimed that she was approached by a tall man from Boston-- obviously Satan--who sometimes appeared as a dog or a hog and who asked her to sign in his book and to do his work. Yes, Tituba declared, she was a witch, and moreover she and four other witches, including Good and Osborn, had flown through the air on their poles. She had tried to run to Reverend Parris for counsel, she said, but the devil had blocked her path. Tituba's confession succeeded in transforming her from a possible scapegoat to a central figure in the expanding prosecutions. Her confession also served to silence most skeptics, and Parris and other local ministers began witch hunting with zeal.

Soon, according to their own reports, the spectral forms of other women began attacking the afflicted girls. Martha Corey, [Rebecca Nurse](#), Sarah Cloyce, and [Mary Easty](#) ([LINK TO EASTY'S EXAMINATION](#)) ([LINK TO EASTY'S PETITION FOR MERCY](#)) were accused of witchcraft. During a March 20 church service, Ann Putnam suddenly shouted, "Look where Goodwife Cloyce sits on the beam suckling her yellow bird between her fingers!"

Soon Ann's mother, Ann Putnam, Sr., would join the accusers. Dorcas Good, four-year-old daughter of Sarah Good, became the first child to be accused of witchcraft when three of the girls complained that they were bitten by the specter of Dorcas. (The four-year-old was arrested, kept in jail for eight months, watched her mother get carried off to the gallows, and would "cry her heart out, and go insane.") The girls' accusations and their ever more polished performances, including the new act of being struck dumb, played to large and believing audiences.

Stuck in jail with the damning testimony of the afflicted girls widely accepted, suspects began to see confession as a way to avoid the gallows. [Deliverance Hobbs](#) became the second witch to confess, admitting to pinching three of the girls at the Devil's command and flying on a pole to attend a witches' Sabbath in an open field. Jails approached capacity and the colony "teetered on the brink of chaos" when [Governor Phips](#) returned from England. Fast action, he decided, was required.

Phips created a new court, the "court of oyer and terminer," to hear the witchcraft cases. Five judges, including three close friends of Cotton Mather, were appointed to the court. Chief Justice, and most influential member of the court, was a gung-ho witch hunter named [William Stoughton](#). Mather urged Stoughton and the other judges to credit confessions and admit "spectral evidence" (testimony by afflicted persons that they had been visited by a suspect's specter). Ministers were looked to for guidance by the judges, who were generally without legal training, on matters pertaining to witchcraft. Mather's advice was heeded. The judges also decided to allow the so-called "touching test" (defendants were asked to touch afflicted persons to see if their touch, as was generally assumed of the touch of witches, would stop their contortions) and examination of the bodies of accused for evidence of "witches' marks" (moles or the like upon which a witch's familiar might suck) ([SCENE DEPICTING EXAMINATION FOR MARKS](#)). Evidence that would be excluded from modern courtrooms-- hearsay, gossip, stories, unsupported assertions, surmises-- was also generally admitted. Many protections that modern defendants take for granted were lacking in Salem: accused witches had no legal counsel, could not have witnesses testify under oath on their behalf, and had no formal avenues of appeal. Defendants could, however, speak for themselves, produce evidence, and cross-examine their accusers. The degree to which defendants in Salem were able to take advantage of their modest protections varied considerably, depending on their own acuteness and their influence in the community.

The first accused witch to be brought to trial was [Bridget Bishop](#). Almost sixty years old, owner of a tavern where patrons could drink cider ale and play shuffleboard (even on the Sabbath), critical of her neighbors, and reluctant to pay her bills, Bishop was a likely candidate for an accusation of witchcraft ([LINK TO EXAMINATION OF BISHOP](#)). The fact that Thomas Newton, special prosecutor, selected Bishop for his first prosecution suggests that he believed the stronger case could be made against her than any of the other suspect witches. At Bishop's trial on June 2, 1692, a field hand testified that he saw Bishop's image stealing eggs and then saw her transform herself into a cat. Deliverance Hobbs, by then probably insane, and Mary Warren, both confessed witches, testified that Bishop was one of them. A villager named Samuel Grey told the court that Bishop visited his bed at night and tormented him. A jury of matrons assigned to examine Bishop's body reported that they found an "excrescence of flesh." Several of the afflicted girls testified that Bishop's specter afflicted them. Numerous other villagers described why they thought Bishop was responsible for various bits of bad luck that had befallen them. There was even testimony that while being transported under guard past the Salem meeting house, she looked at the building and caused a part of it to fall to the ground. Bishop's jury returned a verdict of guilty. One of the judges, Nathaniel Saltonstall, aghast at the conduct of the trial, resigned from the court. Chief Justice Stoughton signed Bishop's death warrant, and on June 10, 1692, Bishop was carted to Gallows Hill and hanged ([LINK TO IMAGE OF BISHOP'S HANGING](#)).

As the summer of 1692 warmed, the pace of trials picked up. Not all defendants were as disreputable as Bridget Bishop. Rebecca Nurse was a pious, respected woman whose specter, according to Ann Putnam, Jr. and Abigail Williams, attacked them in mid March of 1692 ([LINK TO EXAMINATION OF NURSE](#)). Ann Putnam, Sr. added her complaint that Nurse demanded that she sign the Devil's book, then pinched her. Nurse was one of three Towne

sisters, all identified as witches, who were members of a Topsfield family that had a long-standing quarrel with the Putnam family. Apart from the evidence of Putnam family members, the major piece of evidence against Nurse appeared to be testimony indicating that soon after Nurse lectured Benjamin Houlton for allowing his pig to root in her garden, Houlton died. The Nurse jury returned a verdict of not guilty, much to the displeasure of Chief Justice Stoughton, who told the jury to go back and consider again a statement of Nurse's that might be considered an admission of guilt (but more likely an indication of confusion about the question, as Nurse was old and nearly deaf). The jury reconvened, this time coming back with a verdict of guilty ([LINK TO NURSE TRIAL](#)). On July 19, 1692, Nurse rode with four other convicted witches to Gallows Hill.

Persons who scoffed at accusations of witchcraft risked becoming targets of accusations themselves. One man who was openly critical of the trials paid for his skepticism with his life. [John Proctor](#), a central figure in Arthur Miller's fictionalized account of the Salem witchhunt, *The Crucible*, was an opinionated tavern owner who openly denounced the witchhunt. Testifying against Proctor were Ann Putnam, Abigail Williams, Indian John (a slave of Samuel Parris who worked in a competing tavern), and eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Booth, who testified that ghosts had come to her and accused Proctor of serial murder. Proctor fought back, accusing confessed witches of lying, complaining of torture, and demanding that his trial be moved to Boston. The efforts proved futile. Proctor was hanged. His wife Elizabeth, who was also convicted of witchcraft, was spared execution because of her pregnancy (retrieved "for the belly").

No execution caused more unease in Salem than that of the village's ex-minister, [George Burroughs](#). Burroughs, who was living in Maine in 1692, was identified by several of his accusers as the ringleader of the witches. Ann Putnam claimed that Burroughs bewitched soldiers during a failed military campaign against Wabanakis in 1688-89, the first of a string of military disasters that could be blamed on an Indian-Devil alliance. In her interesting book, *In the Devil's Snare*, historian Mary Beth Norton argues that the large number of accusations against Burroughs, and his linkage to the frontier war, is the key to understanding the Salem trials. Norton contends that the enthusiasm of the Salem court in prosecuting the witchcraft cases owed in no small measure to the judges' desire to shift the "blame for their own inadequate defense of the frontier." Many of the judges, Norton points out, played lead roles in a war effort that had been markedly unsuccessful.

Among the thirty accusers of Burroughs was nineteen-year-old Mercy Lewis, a refugee of the frontier wars. Lewis, the most imaginative and forceful of the young accusers, offered unusually vivid testimony against Burroughs. Lewis told the court that Burroughs flew her to the top of a mountain and, pointing toward the surrounding land, promised her all the kingdoms if only she would sign in his book (a story very similar to that found in Matthew 4:8). Lewis said, "I would not writ if he had throwed me down on one hundred pitchforks." At an execution, a defendant in the Puritan colonies was expected to confess, and thus to save his soul. When Burroughs on Gallows Hill continued to insist on his innocence and then recited the Lord's Prayer perfectly (something witches were thought incapable of doing), the crowd reportedly was "greatly moved." The agitation of the crowd caused Cotton Mather to intervene and remind the crowd that Burroughs had had his day in court and lost.

One victim of the Salem witchhunt was not hanged, but rather pressed under heavy stones until his death. Such was the fate of octogenarian [Giles Corey](#) who, after spending five months in chains in a Salem jail with his also accused wife, had nothing but contempt for the proceedings. Seeing the futility of a trial and hoping that by avoiding a conviction his farm, that would otherwise go the state, might go to his two sons-in-law, Corey refused to stand for trial. The penalty for such a refusal was *peine et fort*, or pressing. Three days after Corey's death, on September 22, 1692, eight more convicted witches, including Giles' wife Martha, were hanged. They were the last victims of the witchhunt.

By early autumn of 1692, Salem's lust for blood was ebbing. Doubts were developing as to how so many respectable people could be guilty. Reverend John Hale said, "It cannot be imagined that in a place of so much knowledge, so many in so small compass of land should abominably leap into the Devil's lap at once." The educated

elite of the colony began efforts to end the witch-hunting hysteria that had enveloped Salem. [Increase Mather](#), the father of Cotton, published what has been called "America's first tract on evidence," a work entitled *Cases of Conscience*, which argued that it "were better that ten suspected witches should escape than one innocent person should be condemned." Increase Mather urged the court to exclude spectral evidence. Samuel Willard, a highly regarded Boston minister, circulated *Some Miscellany Observations*, which suggested that the Devil might create the specter of an innocent person. Mather's and Willard's works were given to Governor Phips. The writings most likely influenced the decision of Phips to order the court to exclude spectral evidence and touching tests and to require proof of guilt by clear and convincing evidence. With spectral evidence not admitted, twenty-eight of the last thirty-three witchcraft trials ended in acquittals. The three convicted witches were later pardoned. In May of 1693, Phips released from prison all remaining accused or convicted witches.

By the time the witchhunt ended, nineteen convicted witches were executed ([LINK TO LIST OF DEAD](#)), at least four accused witches had died in prison, and one man, Giles Corey, had been pressed to death. About one to two hundred other persons were arrested and imprisoned on witchcraft charges. Two dogs were executed as suspected accomplices of witches.

Scholars have noted potentially telling differences between the accused and the accusers in Salem. Most of the accused lived to the south of, and were generally better off financially, than most of the accusers. In a number of cases, accusing families stood to gain property from the convictions of accused witches. Also, the accused and the accusers generally took opposite sides in a congregational schism that had split the Salem community before the outbreak of hysteria. While many of the accused witches supported former minister George Burroughs, the families that included the accusers had--for the most part--played leading roles in forcing Burroughs to leave Salem. The conclusion that many scholars draw from these patterns is that property disputes and congregational feuds played a major role in determining who lived, and who died, in 1692.

A period of atonement began in the colony following the release of the surviving accused witches. [Samuel Sewall](#), one of the judges, issued a public confession of guilt and an apology. Several jurors came forward to say that they were "sadly deluded and mistaken" in their judgments. Reverend Samuel Parris conceded errors of judgment, but mostly shifted blame to others. Parris was replaced as minister of Salem village by Thomas Green, who devoted his career to putting his torn congregation back together. Governor Phips blamed the entire affair on William Stoughton. Stoughton, clearly more to blame than anyone for the tragic episode, refused to apologize or explain himself. He criticized Phips for interfering just when he was about to "clear the land" of witches. Stoughton became the next governor of Massachusetts.

The witches disappeared, but witchhunting in America did not. Each generation must learn the lessons of history or risk repeating its mistakes. Salem should warn us to think hard about how to best safeguard and improve our system of justice.

UNDERSTANDING THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS

The Salem Witch Trials represent a dark time in American history. There are many lessons we can take from the Trials and apply to our modern day life: How do we avoid modern day “witch hunts”? It is important to note that this is a highly complex and complicated issue in American history. There is no easy answer, and it can be difficult for us to understand the mindset of people living so long ago.

Review the interactive exhibit on the Salem Witch Trials at:

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schooladventures/salemwitchtrials/>

Choose one of the following assignments to complete:

OPTION ONE: Diary Entries

Put yourself in the shoes of one of the main participants of the trials (either someone on trial, the judge, a witness, or one of the ministers). Create a series of short diary entries in which you explain the events happening in the town. Your entries should demonstrate your understanding of the perspective of the person writing the entries. They can be written in modern English, but should demonstrate the facts of the situation.

OPTION TWO: Understanding Theories

Find and discuss two to three different theories for what happened in Salem, Massachusetts. In 250 to 300 words, summarize the theories and explain which theory you think best explains the events.

OPTION THREE: Summarizing the Information

In 250 to 300 words, write a factual summary of the events before, during, and after the trials. Be sure to mention dates and places whenever appropriate, to include the key participants in the events, and to explain the relationship of the people and events to each other. In your essay, try to stay away from any opinions; instead your goal is to make your summary as factual as possible.