

Salem witch trials research paper

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During the early winter of 1692 two young girls became inexplicably ill and started having fits of convulsion, screaming, and hallucinations. Unable to find any medical reason for their condition the village doctor declared that there must be supernatural forces of witchcraft at work. This began an outbreak of hysteria that would result in the arrest of over one hundred-fifty people and execution of twenty women and men. The madness continued for over four months.

The notorious witch trials of Salem, Massachusetts occurred from June through September. It is a brief, but turbulent period in history and the causes of the trials have long been a source of discussion among historians. Many try to explain or rationalize the bizarre happenings of the witch hunts and the causes that contributed to them. To understand the trials and how they came to be, we must first examine the ideals and views of the people surrounding the events.

Salem Village had a very colorful history before the famous witch trials. It was not exactly known as a bastion of tranquillity in New England. The main reason was its 600 plus residents were divided into two main parts: those who wanted to separate from Salem Town, and those who did not. The residents who wanted to separate from Salem Town were farming families located in the western part of Salem Village. Those who wanted to remain a part of Salem Town were typically located on the eastern side of Salem Village--closest to Salem Town. The residents who wished to remain a part of Salem Town were economically tied to its thriving, rich harbors.

Many of the Salem Village farming families believed that Salem Town's thriving economy made it too individualistic. This individualism was in <https://assignbuster.com/salem-witch-trials-research-paper/>

opposition to the communal nature that Puritanism mandated. Thus, they were out of touch with the rest of Salem Village. One particularly large farming family who felt that Salem Town was out of touch with the rest of Salem Village was the Putnams.

Belief in the supernatural, specifically in the devil's practice of giving certain humans (witches) the power to harm others in return for their loyalty--had emerged in Europe as early as the 14th century, and was widespread in colonial New England. In addition, the harsh realities of life in the rural Puritan community of Salem Village (present-day Danvers, Massachusetts) at the time included the after-effects of a British war with France in the American colonies in 1689, a recent smallpox epidemic, fears of attacks from neighboring Native American tribes and a longstanding rivalry with the more affluent community of Salem. Amid these simmering tensions, the Salem witch trials would be fueled by residents' suspicions of and resentment toward their neighbors, as well as their fear of outsiders.

The events which led to the Witch Trials actually occurred in what is now the town of Danvers, then a parish of Salem Town, known as Salem Village. Launching the hysteria was the bizarre, seemingly inexplicable behavior of two young girls; the daughter, Betty, and the niece, Abigail Williams, of the Salem Village minister, Reverend Samuel Parris

In February, 1692, three accused women were examined by Magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne. Corwin's home, known as the Witch House, still stands at the corner of North and Essex Streets in Salem, providing guided tours and tales of the first witchcraft trials. John Hathorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, is buried in the Charter Street

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Old Burying Point. By the time the hysteria had spent itself, 24 people had died. Nineteen were hanged on Gallows Hill in Salem Town, but some died in prison. Giles Corey at first pleaded not guilty to charges of witchcraft, but subsequently refused to stand trial. This refusal meant he could not be convicted legally. However, his examiners chose to subject him to interrogation by the placing of stone weights on his body. He survived this brutal torture for two days before dying.

Though the respected minister Cotton Mather had warned of the dubious value of spectral evidence, his concerns went largely unheeded during the Salem witch trials. Increase Mather, president of Harvard College and Cotton's father later joined his son in urging that the standards of evidence for witchcraft must be equal to those for any other crime, concluding that " It would better that ten suspected witches may escape than one innocent person be condemned." Trials continued with dwindling intensity until early 1693, and by that May Phips had pardoned and released those in prison on witchcraft charges. The aftermath of the Salem witch trials was severe.

Many people were stuck in jail, unable to pay for their stay during the trials. Other people who were convicted had their land confiscated leaving families broke and homeless. Many people after the Salem witch trials could not get along with each other like the accusers and the families of the accused. Many people tried to repent their accusation and make public apologies to the families of the accused and to Salem. Many people did forgive, but many families still felt it was not enough. Since the Salem Witch trials has ended, there has been no more deaths because of witchcraft or an accusation of

one. The Salem Witch Trials has left such an effect on Salem Village that it was renamed Danvers and is called that to this day.