

Practicing witchcraft in massachusetts



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The Salem Witch Trials took place in Salem Massachusetts in the early 1690s. In these trials over 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft. According to the Smithsonian, 20 out of those 200 were executed and two dogs were executed as well.

Salem was by no means the first site of witch trials. Thousands of women were burnt at the stake in the middle ages and numerous accusations occurred in the 17th century. At the time of the trials, Salem was split in two, Salem Town, and Salem Village. Salem Town was big on trade and commerce, while Salem Village was big on farming. Salem Village was full of Puritans who were not pleased with Salem Town and they wanted to separate. Salem Village was the only colonial town with more than two people accused and convicted of witchcraft. During the time of the witch trials, members of the community were already on edge due to severe weather and illness spreading. The weather was negatively affecting the harvest and smallpox was traveling through Salem Village like crazy. On top of everything, nearby Indian villages began attacking Salem. All of these factors led to the mass hysteria that caused many to be executed, however one cannot say with confidence that one of these factors was the sole cause of The Salem Witch Trials.

The first women accused of witchcraft in Salem were accused in February of 1692. Two young girls, 9-year-old Elizabeth Parris the daughter of Salem's minister, and her cousin 11-year-old Abigail Williams began acting in strange manners. As doctors could not explain their behavior it was deemed supernatural activity. The hysteria soon set in and the young girls were questioned about the witches who were causing these fits. These girls soon

gave up three names, Sarah Good, Tituba, and Sarah Osburn. On March 1st, 1692 the three were arrested:

It must be borne in mind, that it was then an established doctrine in theology, philosophy, and law, that the Devil could not operate upon mortals, or mortal affairs, except through the intermediate instrumentality of human beings in confederacy with him, that is, witches or wizards. The question, of course, in all minds and on all tongues, was: “ Who are the agents of the Devil in afflicting these girls?”. There must be some among us thus acting, and who are they? For some time the girls held back from mentioning names; or, if they did, it was prevented from being divulged to the public. In the meantime, the excitement spread and deepened. At length, the people had become so thoroughly prepared for the work, that it was concluded to begin operations in earnest. The continued pressure upon the ? afflicted children, the earnest and importunate inquiry, on all sides. Who is it that bewitches you? opened their lips in response, and they began to select and bring forward their victims. One after another, they cried out Good, Osburn, Tituba. On the 29th of February, 1692, warrants were duly issued against those persons. It is observable, that the complainants who procured the warrants in these cases were Joseph Hutchinson, Edward Putnam, Thomas Putnam, and Thomas Preston. This fact shows how nearly unanimous, at this time, was the conviction that the sufferings of the girls were the result of witchcraft. – Salem Witchcraft: Volume II by Charles W. Upham

These arrests were the spark that lit the flame of the witch trials. They all denied use of witchcraft until one came forward, the minister’s slave, and

confessed. Only one of these women were executed, but they all suffered tremendously.

Sarah Good was one of the first people to be gravely affected by these trials. Sarah Good was born in 1653 to a well-off man, however, her father's estate got tied up leaving her with nothing. Good married an indentured servant who died in 1686 with loads of debt. Sarah then went on to marry a man and they ended up homeless with two young children because they had to pay off her first husband's debt. She didn't have a good reputation, because of this many considered her a town nuisance. This status made her an easy target for accusations. When Elizabeth and Abigail's diagnoses were supernatural forces Good quickly got pointed out. Good remained in jail until June 28th when she was officially condemned for multiple charges of witchcraft. She was charged for using witchcraft against three people, Sarah Bibber, Elizabeth Hubbard, and Ann Putnam, Jr. While Good was in jail, her 4-year-old daughter was arrested for witchcraft. A deposition from Anne Putnam explains why:

The deposition of Ann Putnam who testifieth and saith that on the 3th March 1691/92 I saw the apparition of Dorothy Good, Sarah Goodr's daughter, who did immediately almost choke me and tortured me most grievously; and so she hath several times since tortured me by biting and pinching and almost choking me tempting me also to write in her book and also on the day of her examination being the 24th of March 1691/92 the apparition of Dorothy Good tortured me during the time of her examination and several times since.

Dorothy Good got out of jail after eight months, but the court was not done with her mom yet. Sarah was put on trial in June of 1692. Good never confessed to the crimes she was accused of, but she did state that Sarah Osburn tormented the young girls. On July 19th Good and four others, Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, and Sarah Wildes, were brought to Proctorr's Ledge and hanged.

Sarah Osburn was born in 1643 in Watertown Massachusetts. She later married a well-known man by the name of Robert Prince and she moved to Salem Village with him in 1662. Prince died in 1674 leaving Osburn a widow with three kids and a 150-acre farm. Sarah hired an indentured immigrant, Alexander Osburn, to help work the farms. Alexander paid off his indenture and the two married making Sarah, Sarah Osburn. The farm had been left with Sarah with the plan of her sons taking over when they came of age, but now Sarah was married and wanted to keep ownership for her and her husband. The battle for the land continued until Sarah was accused of witchcraft in 1692. Sarah was accused by many people, though she never confessed nor did she try to blame the other women that were arrested with her in March. Her case was never solved, as she died shackled in her jail cell in May of 1692.

Tituba was born in an Barbados. Her mother was hanged after resisting sexual advances from her white owner. Tituba was run off the plantation and she ended up living with Mama Yaya, who taught her traditional healing methods. Tituba returned to slavery when she fell in love with and married a slave named John Indian, they were both sold to Samuel Parris. Parris brought her to Boston in 1680. He took her to Salem when he was appointed <https://assignbuster.com/practicing-witchcraft-in-massachusetts/>

a minister in 1689. Tituba mainly took care of Parris's daughter and niece, Elizabeth Parris and Abigail Williams. When Elizabeth, Abigail, and some of their friends began acting weird finger were quickly pointed at Tituba, as she spent most of her time with the girls. Tituba was accused of voodoo for witch cake to reveal the Parris girls fatal fortunes in egg yolks. When Tituba appeared in court in March of 1692 she confessed that The devil came to me and bid me serve him.

Martha Corey dared to speak up against these accusations against Good, Osburn, and Tituba. Soon after the girls learned Corey was questioning them, she was accused of practicing witchcraft. Ann Putnam claims that she saw Martha in an apparition, on March 12th Ann was asked what Martha was wearing in the apparition, to which she replied: I was so blinded I could not see. When Edward Putnam and Ezekiel Cheever went to confront Martha, she asked if Ann could even tell them what she was wearing. The men took her knowing this as a sign of witchcraft. She was arrested on March, 19th 1692. Days later another person, Abigail Hobbs, named Martha as a witch. However, Hobbs also named Marthar's husband Giles as a wizard. The trial took place in September 1692, many people testified against both of them. On September 10th Martha was convicted of witchcraft. Just nine days later Giles was executed in a way that had never been seen before.

Giles Corey was stripped naked, a board placed upon his chest, and then, while his neighbors watched, heavy stones and rocks were piled on top of the board. It was a punishment never before seen or ever again inflicted in the colony of Massachusetts. Corey pleaded to have more weight added so that his death might come quickly. He was eventually crushed to death at

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the age of eighty. Judge Jonathan Corwin ordered Corey buried in an unmarked grave on Gallows Hill.

On the 22nd Martha was hanged along with five other women, and two men on Gallows Hill. It wasn't until 1954 that Martha was officially absolved of her crimes.

Many factors played into the witch trials, including the weather and recent attacks. However, everyone can agree that the trials ended abruptly, although many believe that it was due to selfish reasons.

On October 12, 1692, Governor Phips issued an order that protected the current prisoners from harm and suspended any more arrests of people accused of witchcraft. Robert Calef, a merchant outraged by the progress of the trials, stated that Governor Phips only issued these orders on the belief that his own wife had been accused of working for Satan.

There were trials to hear the last of the cases, but nobody else was condemned. The last trial was held in January of 1693. The years following the witch trials were harsh as well, people were stuck in jail and unable to pay. Others lost their land when they got convicted and were left homeless and broke. Throughout the year of witch trials six main girls had been doing the accusing, however only one girl publicly apologized. That girl was Ann Putnam Jr. Ann accused over sixty people of witchcraft. In 1706 Ann claimed stated:

“ I desire to be humbled before God for that sad and humbling providence that befell my father's family in the year about ninety-two; that I, then being in my childhood, should, by such a providence of God, be made an instrument for the accusing of several people for grievous crimes, whereby

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their lives was taken away from them, whom, now I have just grounds and good reason to believe they were innocent persons; and that it was a great delusion of Satan that deceived me in that sad time.”

She also stated that: that the devil had taken her, and she had no choice but to do what she was told.

None of the other girls apologized, they all went on to get married and live as though they had not played a key role in the deaths of many men and women.