

The salem witch trial and its role in history



I specifically remember sitting in my high school English class covering the topic of the Salem Witch Trials. I was fascinated by what we were learning and reading about this historical event. I remember thinking how crazy is what the girls who were close to my age and older were making such crazy accusations.

Now as a nursing major, the medical side of the Witch Trials really intrigue me. The Salem Witch Trials were a landmark event in the history of the United States that left a lasting impression and impact on this nation. To this day these trials are still being researched and studied by historians all across the country.

Scholars and historians have attempted to pinpoint the specific cause of these witch trials, but still much speculation exists as to the for sure root of the cause. There is speculation that the economic downturn of this time played a large role in the accusations. The Puritans were known for their narrow mindedness which is believed to have contributed to this event. Historians also believe that the city of Salem's socioeconomic issues in itself played a key role. Salem was said to be a poor underprivileged counterpart to its neighboring town called Salem Town which was populated mostly by wealthy merchants. Indian attacks were also pertinent to this area and time, and there was a distrust among the whites and indians. The very different dynamic of Salem and Salem Town often lead to conflict between the two communities(Salem Witch Trials).

In 1688, Reverend Samuel Parris became the official minister of Salem. A few years later in the winter of 1692 his daughter Betty became strangely ill. She

would run through the house screaming and making noises, she would convulse on the floor, and complained of fevers. The talk of witchcraft became more popular when Bettyr's friend Ann Putnam, Mercy Lewis, and a young woman named Mary Walcott, began to exhibit many of the same unusual behaviors(The Salem Witch Trials- Bewitchment or Ergotism).

During the time of the early 1690r's more than two hundred women were found to be guilty guilty of the witchcraft. Women claimed they were unable to control body movements and verbal noises. Women would scream out and had uncontrollable twitches and movements. The women also claimed to be having hallucinations and experiencing supernatural symptoms (The Witchcraft of Encephalitis in Salem). Doctors during this time didnt really have a diagnosis or an explanation for these behaviors. They would simply diagnose these girls with bewitchment. These symptoms and these girls were viewed as a curious medical mystery (The Salem Trials Bewitchment or Ergotism).

Eventually, warrants were issued out for the arrest of the Parrisr's slave who was a woman of caribbean descent, named Tituba, along with two other women. The others were a poor homeless woman named Sarah Good and a woman who was elderly named Sarah Osborn. These women were who the girls accused of bewitching them. More and more women began coming forward and admitting to witchcraft. Like Tituba, several women that had been accused of witchcraft confessed and also gave names of others that were potentially guilty. The trials began to overwhelm what the local system of justice could handle.(I am a Gosple Woman). In May 1692, William Phips, became the new governor of

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Massachusetts. He designed a special court to hear and to decide on witchcraft cases for the counties that surrounded Salem and its area. (Salem Witch Mania). More than two hundred women were accused and nineteen of those women were confirmed guilty and sentenced to hanging. Later in 1692, after many trials and hearings it was determined by judges that this was in fact witchcraft and they felt these women had come under attack of the devil and were doing the devil's work. Several of the accused faced time in jail. The nineteen women who were found officially guilty were then lead to Gallowr's Hill to be hung and persecuted for this witchcraft(Salem Witch Mania).

As 1692 ended and the year 1693 began, the hysteria of the Salem Witch Trials began to its lose steam. William Phips who was serving as governor of the colony, after hearing that his own wife was accused of witchcraft, called for an immediate end to the trials. However, at this point twenty people and two dogs had been executed for the crime of witchcraft in Salem. Nineteen were hung and one person was smashed to death under a pile of rocks for refusing to testify(Salem Revisited).

To this day, scholars and historians still really dont know the truth behind what happened in Salem. Once witchcraft is ruled out, other important factors come to light as to what might have caused the women to act out like this. As stated earlier, Salem had suffered greatly in recent years from Indian attacks. There was a distrust towards the indians from white men. They did not think all indians were trustworthy and viewed them as savages. They accused the indians of infecting the women or processing them with something. As the townr's population increased in numbers, land and <https://assignbuster.com/the-salem-witch-trial-and-its-role-in-history/>

resources became harder and harder to acquire. An epidemic of smallpox had also broken out at the beginning of the decade. Massachusetts was also experiencing some of the most harsh winters in its history(Salem Witch Mania). It is widely agreed on that the motives of the young girls themselves can be questioned. This was an era of society where women had basically no power, particularly young women(Last Word, Burn the Witch). It is hard to understand why these women and young women would make accusations of this sort. (Salem Revisited). The Salem Witch Trials played an important part in the history of America, but what is even more important is what can be learned from records of these trials. Thankfully, there has not been a repeat of a similar situation. It seems if it was almost as if women felt the need to go to these lengths of faking bewitchment to have their voice heard. The witch trials were an example of what can happen when people are in a position of fear, facing economic instability, sickness, and times of war.

During this time women and men had very different roles in society. Women were basically homebound and in charge of maintaining the home and bearing children. It is thought that because of this women were pleading for a different type of society. Women had no political or socio economic power in Salem, Massachusetts or really anywhere during this time(Here are no Newtens). Puritans were known for their very strict conservative ways. Some historians landmark these event as the first glimpses of the womenr's suffrage movement.

As we examine history of the decades from the 1600r's to the 1900r's there were many instances where women wanted to be heard and wanted their own personal rights. The Salem Witch Trials, the formation of the Womenr's

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Rights Convention, and the formation of the American Equal Rights Association are all examples of women speaking out and trying to change society's norms. While these witch trials did not directly change how society viewed as women it made a statement that was felt across the world. We see in history that these trials did not change the circumstances for women and that they were still mostly bound to the home and not as highly regarded as men.

While it would be many years down the road before women really began to obtain the same opportunities as men, I admire these women for standing up for themselves and making their presence known. I am sad that lives had to be lost for that reason.