WITCHCRAFT LAWS AND TRIALS: SALEM AND BEYOND

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CHARACTERISTICS OF WITCHES
FROM ENTERTAINING SATAN BY JOHN PUTNAM DEMOS

• Female
• Age 40-60
• Married
• Had few or no children
• Had been accused of committing crimes or had run-ins with governmental authorities
• Informally practiced medicine
• Low social position
• Abrasive personality

In primitive society, when native tribes beat the ground with clubs and yelled, it was called witchcraft; today, in civilized society, it is called golf.

--Anonymous
EXODUS 22:18
Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

LEVITICUS 20:27
A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them.
DEUTERONOMY 18:10-11
There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

SAINT BONIFACE (DIED 754)
Denied the existence of witches, saying that to believe in them was unChristian.
SUMMIS DESIDERANTES AFFECTIBUS
Issued by Pope Innocent VIII on December 5, 1484.
Der Hexenhammer written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, was first published in Germany in 1487. Witch trials began throughout Europe following the publication of this book and lasted until the early 1700s.

An estimated 40,000 to 100,000 people—75 percent to 80 percent of them female—were executed during that period for witchcraft.

WHY THE EMPHASIS ON WOMEN?

The authors claimed women were more susceptible to demonic temptations through the manifold weaknesses of their gender. It was believed that women were weaker in faith and more carnal than men.
ENGLAND, 1542

The Witchcraft Act of 1542 (33 Hen. VIII c. 8) is the first to define Witchcraft as a felony in England.
The Act provided that “the offender and offenders contrarie to this acte. Being therof unlawfullie convicte befor suche as shal have power and auctorie to here and determyn felonyes, shalle have and suffre such paynes of deathe losse and forfaytures of their lands tentes goodes and catalles as in cases of felonie by the course of the common laws of this realme, and also shalle lose p’vilege of clergie and sayntuarie.”

ENGLAND, 1562

The Witchcraft Act of 1562, officially “An Act Against Conjurations, Inchantments And Witchcraftes” (5 Eliz. I c. 16), is adopted.
The Act provided that “that na maner of person nor persons, of quhatsumever estate, degre or condtioun thay be of, tak upon hand in ony tymes heirafter, to use ony mener of witchcraftis, sorsonie or necromancie, nor gif thaymselvys furth to have ony craft or knawlege thairof.”
ENGLAND, 1604

The Witchcraft Act of 1604, officially “An Act against Conjuraction, Witchcraft and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits” (2 Ja. I c. 12), expanded the Act of 1562 to bring the penalty of death without benefit of clergy to anyone who invoked evil spirits or communed with familiar spirits.

The Bury St Edmunds Witch Trials were a series of trials conducted between the years 1599 and 1694 in the town of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, England.

Eighteen witches—16 of them women—were hanged at Bury St. Edmunds on the August 27, 1645.

Noted English jurist Sir Matthew Hale presided over the trial of two elderly widows on March 10, 1662. They were found guilty on 13 charges of using witchcraft and were hanged.

Hale allowed the admission of spectral evidence during the trials. The report of the case—A Tryal of Witches—was later referenced to allow the admission of spectral evidence during the Salem Witch Trials.
SPECTRAL EVIDENCE

Spectral evidence refers to testimony that the accused person's spirit or spectral shape appeared to the witness in a dream at the time the accused person's physical body was at another location.

--http://definitions.uslegal.com/
CAUSES FOR THE OUTBREAK OF WITCHCRAFT HYSTERIA IN AMERICA

• A strong belief that Satan was acting in the world—diseases, natural catastrophes and misfortune said to be the work of the devil.
• A belief that Satan recruits witches and wizards to work for him.
• Prior witchcraft cases in America and in Europe.
• A belief that a person afflicted by witchcraft exhibits certain symptoms.
• A time of troubles, making it seem likely that Satan was active.

• Magistrates and judges receptive to accusations of witchcraft.
• Confessing "witches" adding credibility to earlier charges.
• Old feuds between the accusers and the accused spurring charges of witchcraft.

ADDITIONAL CAUSES SPECIFIC TO THE SALEM TRIALS

• Stimulation of imaginations by Tituba.
• Convulsive ergotism, a disease caused by eating infecting rye that can produce hallucinations, causing strange behavior (An interesting theory, but unlikely).
• Teenage boredom.

--Douglas O. Linder
Famous American Trials: Salem Witchcraft Trials, 1692
The New Englanders are a People of God settled in those, which were once the Devil's Territories; and it may easily be supposed that the Devil was Exceedingly disturbed.

--Cotton Mather

The Wonders of the Invisible World

VIRGINIA, 1626

Midwife Joan Wright of Jamestown, Virginia was the first person in the American colonies known to have been arraigned for being a witch. The record is unclear as to whether she was found guilty of practicing witchcraft.

Fifteen individuals—13 of them women—were ultimately tried for witchcraft in Virginia. Most were found not guilty; one was executed.

MARYLAND, 1635

The Maryland Assembly adopted the English Witchcraft Act of 1604.
MASSACHUSETTS, 1638

A complaint was filed against midwife Jane Hawkins of Boston, Massachusetts accusing her of witchcraft.

MASSACHUSETTS, 1641

The General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony adopted the following statute: “If any man or woman be a WITCH, that is, hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit, they shall be put to death. Exod. 22. 18. Levit. 20. 27. Deut. 18. 10. 11.”

CONNECTICUT, 1642

The Colony of Connecticut enacted the following capital law: “If any man or woman be a witch—that is, hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit—they shall be put to death.” Exodus xxii, 18; Leviticus xx, 27; Deuteronomy xviii, 10, 11.”
CONNECTICUT, 1647

Alse Young of Windsor is the first person known to have been executed for witchcraft in the American colonies. She was hung in Hartford on May 26th. The specific charges against her are not known, nor are the details of her trial.

The following year Mary Johnson of Wethersfield was probably executed in Hartford after a forced confession.

RHODE ISLAND, 1647

The Assembly of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations adopted the following statute: “Witchcraft is forbidden by this present Assembly to be used in this colony; and the penalty imposed by the authority that we are subjected to is felony of death.”
MASSACHUSETTS, 1648
Margaret Jones of Charleston, Massachusetts, a healer and herbalist, was the first woman executed by hanging for practicing witchcraft in Boston. Her husband was also arrested but was later released.

CONNECTICUT, 1651
John and Joan Carrington of Wethersfield, husband and wife, were indicted for witchcraft on February 20th, and found guilty on March 6th. They were most likely executed by hanging. They were the first couple executed for witchcraft in the American colonies.

Between 1647 and 1697 approximately 42 individuals were accused of witchcraft in Connecticut, several of them multiple times.

At least ten were executed.
A witchcraft trial in Connecticut began with a formal complaint. Magistrates would then collect evidence—depositions from witnesses and an examination of the accused. If the accused was female, a jury of women would examine her for witches’ marks or Witches teats. Prior to 1662 only one witness was required to support a witchcraft conviction.

The information would be presented to a Grand Jury for investigation. If indicted, cases went to a jury trial with the Governor acting as magistrate.

Among those in Connecticut accused of being a witch was Mary Staples. After a large number of witnesses testified on her behalf, the Court found no grounds for suspecting her of being a witch. Roger Ludlow, the man who had accused her, was found guilty of defamation and ordered to pay ten pounds reparations and five pounds court costs.

Mary Staples’ great-great-great-great-great-great grandson was Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill.
The last alleged witch to be executed in Connecticut was Mary Barnes. She was hanged in Bristol in 1663.

ATLANTIC OCEAN, 1654
Katherine Grady, an elderly woman bound for Jamestown, Virginia on an English ship, was hung by the ship's captain during a storm after having been identified as being a witch.

A second elderly woman, Mary Lee, was hung the same year on a ship bound for St. Mary's City, Maryland. She was accused by the crew of using witchcraft to cause a storm that threatened to sink the vessel.

NEW HAVEN, 1656
The General Court of the New Haven Colony adopted the following statute: "If any person be a witch, he or she shall be put to death according to Exodus XXII, 18; Leviticus XX, 27; Deuteronomy XVIII, 10. 11."
MASSACHUSETTS, 1656

Eunice "Goody" Cole of Hampton, which was then part of Massachusetts but which is now in New Hampshire, was convicted of witchcraft. She was sentenced to be whipped and was sent to a Boston prison on a life sentence. Around 1660 she was released from prison to care for her ailing husband, however she was soon returned to jail. Released again following the death of her husband, she was again charged with witchcraft and returned to prison. She was released again sometime between 1668 and 1671. Cole died in 1680.

In 1938, the residents of Hampton, New Hampshire, voted to restore Eunice Cole to "full citizenship."
NEW YORK, 1658
Elizabeth Garlick of East Hampton was brought before local authorities on suspicion of witchcraft. Sent to Connecticut for trial as the local magistrates were not “skilled in the Science of Demonology,” she was acquitted on May 5th.

In 1660 Mary Wright of Oyster Bay, was arrested on suspicion of witchcraft. Sent to Massachusetts for trial—Oyster Bay was then culturally attached to New England—she was acquitted of being a witch but convicted of being a Quaker and banished from the colony.

NEW YORK, 1665
Ralph and Mary Hall of Brookhaven, husband and wife, were tried upon suspicion of witchcraft. The parties were acquitted.

Five years later, in 1670, Katharine Harrison of Westchester, who had been banished from Connecticut after being found guilty of being a witch, was arrested by New York authorities upon suspicion of witchcraft. She was released by the New York Court of Assizes “with liberty to remain in the towne of Westchester where she now resides, or anywhere else in the Government during her pleasure.”

PLYMOUTH, 1671
The General Court of the Plymouth Colony adopts the following statute: “If any Christian (so called) be a witch, this is, hath, or consulteth with a familiar spirit; he or they shall be put to death.”
NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1679
The General Assembly of the Province of New Hampshire adopts the following statute: “If any Christian, soe called, be a witch, y’t is, hath or consulted w’t h a familiar spirit, he or they shall be put to death.”

PENNSYLVANIA, 1683
Margaret Mattson was tried for witchcraft in Pennsylvania, the only recorded trial for witchcraft in the Province. She was found guilty “of having the Common Forme of a Witch, but not Guilty In manner and Forme as Shee stands Endicted” and sentenced to six months good behavior.
A neighbor, Gertro Hendrickson, was charged with being a witch but apparently never tried.
MARYLAND, 1685

Rebecca Fowler was hanged on October 9th in Calvert County, Maryland after a jury found her guilty of "evil and diabolical arts called witchcrafts, enchantments, charms and sorceries."

According to legend a second woman suspected of being a witch, Moll Dyer, froze to death in 1697 after witch hunters forced out of her Leonardtown, Maryland home on a winter night.
MASSACHUSETTS, 1688

“Goody” Glover is probably the last person hanged for witchcraft in Boston.

MASSACHUSETTS, 1692

The most famous witchcraft trials in American history began in Salem in February 1692. Almost 200 individuals were accused of being witches, of whom 19 were hung, one was pressed to death and others died in prison.
SALEM, WINTER 1692

Betty Parris, her cousin Abigail Williams, and a neighbor girl, Ann Putnam, began to have fits described as being "beyond the power of Epileptic Fits or natural disease to effect." Betty is the daughter of the Rev. Samuel Parris, Salem Village's first ordained minister. Soon many of their friends report similar episodes.

In February a local doctor, William Griggs, reported that the illnesses had a supernatural cause.

The girls soon accuse three local women—Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne—of using witchcraft to cause their maladies.

Tituba was a slave who belonged to the Rev. Samuel Parris.

Sarah Good was a homeless woman who survived by begging. She was pregnant at the time of her arrest and had a four-year-old daughter.

Sarah Osborne was a 50-year-old widow. Homebound due to a lingering illness, she had not attended church for a number of years. She had pending legal issues involving the politically powerful Putnam family.

SALEM, MARCH 1692

On March 1st Tituba, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne were examined for witches teats by officials in the Salem Village Meetinghouse. Good and Osborne denied the charges of witchcraft, while Tituba confessed to o being a witch. She implicated the other two women. All three were jailed. Osborne died in prison in mid-May.

By the end of the month four more women were accused of witchcraft, including Sarah Good's four-year-old daughter Dorcas.
SALEM, APRIL 1692

Additional accusations are made. Among those accused of practicing witchcraft is John Proctor, the first man in Salem to be accused and arrested. His wife Elizabeth had been accused and arrested the previous month. Also accused was former Salem minister George Burroughs.

SALEM, MAY 1692

On May 4th George Burroughs is arrested in Maine, returned to Salem and placed in jail.

Additional accusations and arrests occur throughout the month.

On May 27, 1692 Sir William Phipps, the new governor of the colony, issued a commission for a Court of Oyer and Terminer and appointed John Hathorne, Nathaniel Saltonstall, Bartholomew Gedney, Peter Sergeant, Samuel Sewall, Wait Still Winthrop, and Lieutenant Governor William Stoughton as judges.

SALEM, JUNE 1692

On June 2, 1692, Bridget Bishop was tried and convicted of witchcraft and sentenced to death by hanging.
Also in June, the Rev. Cotton Mather writes a letter urging that the Salem trials be speedy. The letter includes conflicting comments regarding the use of spectral evidence.

SALEM, JULY 1692

Five women—Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes, Sarah Good and Elizabeth Howe—were tried in late June and convicted of being witches.

They were executed on July 19, 1692.

Before her execution, the Rev. Nicholas Noyes—who acted as official minister of the trials—asked Sarah Good to confess. Her last words were reportedly “You are a liar! I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life God will give you blood to drink.”
Ironically—perhaps appropriately—Noyes died in 1717 of a hemorrhage and literally did choke on his own blood.

SALEM, AUGUST 1692
On August 5, 1692, George Jacobs Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John Willard and John and Elizabeth Proctor were pronounced guilty and sentenced to hang. All but Elizabeth Proctor, who was then pregnant, were hanged on Gallows Hill on August 19th.

SALEM, SEPTEMBER 1692
On September 9th, Martha Corey, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Dorcas Hoar and Mary Bradbury were tried, found guilty and sentenced to hang.
On September 17th, Margaret Scott, Willmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, Mary Parker, Abigail Faulkner, Rebecca Earnes, Mary Lacy, Ann Foster and Abigail Hobbs were tried and sentenced to hang.
Martha Cory, Margaret Scott, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Willmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, and Mary Parker were hanged on September 22nd. Hoar escaped execution by confessing.
Also in September, Giles Corey was indicted and pressed to death. 

*Peine forte et dure* (hard and forceful punishment) was a method used in the Common Law system, in which a defendant who stood mute would be subjected to having heavier and heavier stones placed upon his or her chest until a plea was entered, or until he or she died.

Giles Corey pleaded not guilty to his indictment but would not put himself upon trial by jury (they having cleared none upon trial) and knowing there would be the same witnesses against him, rather chose to undergo what death they would put him to. In pressing, his tongue being prest out of his mouth, the sheriff with his cane forced it in again, when he was dying. He was the first in New-England, that was ever prest to death.

--Robert Calef

*More Wonders of the Invisible World*
SALEM, OCTOBER 1692

On October 3rd, the Reverend Increase Mather, President of Harvard College and father to Cotton Mather, denounces the use of spectral evidence.

On October 8th, Governor Phipps orders that spectral evidence no longer be admitted in witchcraft trials.

On October 29, Phipps prohibits further arrests, releases many accused witches, and dissolves the Court of Oyer and Terminer.

In Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits the Rev. Increase Mather wrote that "It were better that ten suspected witches should escape, than that one innocent person should be condemned."

SALEM, 1693

On January 3rd, Judge Stoughton ordered that suspected witches who were exempted because of pregnancy be executed. Governor Phipps denied enforcement of the order.

Forty-nine of the 52 surviving people brought into court on witchcraft charges were released in January because their arrests were based on spectral evidence. Those who remained in prison were all pardoned by the Governor by May.
SALEM, POST 1693

On January 14, 1697, the General Court ordered a day of fasting and soul-searching for the tragedy of Salem, "raised among us by Satan and his Instruments." On that day, Samuel Sewall asked Rev. Samuel Willard to read aloud an apology for his role in the Salem tragedy to the congregation of Boston's South Church. The trial jurors also asked forgiveness.

On August 25, 1706, Ann Putnam, one of the original accusers, publicly asked for forgiveness.

In May 1709, 22 people who had been convicted of witchcraft, or whose relatives had been convicted of witchcraft, presented the government with a petition in which they demanded both a reversal of attainder and compensation for financial losses.

In 1711 the General Court passed a bill restoring the rights and good names of those accused. Governor Joseph Dudley also authorized monetary compensation to the 22 people in the 1709 petition. The amount of 578 pounds 12 shillings was authorized to be divided among the survivors and relatives of those accused.

In 1957—more than 250 years after the trials—Massachusetts formally apologized for the events of 1692.

Of those who sat in judgment at Salem, only John Hathorne refused to repent for his actions.

In Stephen Vincent Benet's story "The Devil and Daniel Webster," Satanappoints Hathorne as judge in the trial of Jabez Stone. He is described as "a tall man, soberly clad in Puritan garb, with the burning gaze of the fanatic."
CONNECTICUT, 1697
Winifred Benham of Wallingford, Connecticut was acquitted on charges of witchcraft. It was the last recorded witchcraft trial in Connecticut.

VIRGINIA, 1706
Grace Sherwood of Princess Anne County, Virginia was tried and convicted of witchcraft.
Sherwood was twice examined by a jury of women for witch’s marks, both juries reaching a positive verdict. On July 10th she underwent trial by water, being thrown into Chesapeake Bay at a place now known as Witchduck Point. Sherwood swam, an indication that she was guilty of being a witch. The records are unclear as to whether she served jail time.

MARYLAND, 1712

A jury acquitted Virtue Violl of Talbot County, Maryland, of using witchcraft to harm the health of a neighbor. It was Maryland’s last known witchcraft trial.
PENNSYLVANIA, 1718
The Pennsylvania General Assembly adopted “An Act for the Advancement of Justice” which brought the English Witchcraft Act of 1604 “in execution in this province.”

DELAWARE, 1719
Delaware adopted the English Witchcraft Act of 1604
NEW JERSEY, 1730
The October 22nd issue of the Pennsylvania Gazette, edited by Benjamin Franklin, reported on a witch trial at Mount Holly, New Jersey. A man and woman were reportedly charged with “making their neighbor’s sheep dance in an uncommon manner, and with causing hogs to speak, and sing Psalms.”

At the time the article was accepted by many as being accurate.

Franklin apparently had a good laugh at the hoax.

OHIO, c. 1800
According to legend, Nancy Evans of Bethel was tried for witchcraft after several female members of the Hildebrand reported that they were under the influence of a witch.
Sir Bedevere: What makes you think she's a witch?
Peasant: Well, she turned me into a newt!
Sir Bedevere: A newt?
Peasant: [meekly after a long pause] ... I got better.
Crowd: [shouts] Burn her anyway!

--Monty Python and the Holy Grail

PENNSYLVANIA, 1802
In 1802 an angry crowd brought a woman before Justice of the Peace B.F. Brewster of Harmar Township, near Pittsburgh, and demanded that she be tried as a witch and executed.
TOTALS

300 – 400 individuals accused.
40 – 50 executed.
Roughly half of these occurred at Salem.

QUESTIONS?