

Students: You must web the following information. Work in groups of 4, and read and web the following information surrounding the real events of
The Salem Witch Trials.

The **Salem witch trials** were a series of hearings before local magistrates followed by county court trials to prosecute people accused of witchcraft in Essex, Suffolk, and Middlesex Counties of colonial Massachusetts, between February 1692 and May 1693. Over 150 people were arrested and imprisoned, with even more accused who were not formally pursued by the authorities. The two courts convicted twenty-nine people of the capital felony of witchcraft. Nineteen of the accused, fourteen women and five men, were hanged. One man who refused to enter a plea was crushed to death under heavy stones in an attempt to force him to do so. At least five more of the accused died in prison.

Despite being generally known as the "Salem" witch trials, the preliminary hearings in 1692 were conducted in a variety of towns across the province: Salem Village, Ipswich, Andover, as well as Salem Town, Massachusetts. The best-known trials were conducted by the Court of Oyer and Terminer in 1692 in Salem Town. All twenty-six who went to trial before this court were convicted. The four sessions of the Superior Court of Judicature in 1693, held in Salem Town, but also in Ipswich, Boston, and Charlestown, produced only three convictions in the thirty-one witchcraft trials it conducted.

Political context



Governor William Phips (1651-1697)

The original Massachusetts charter of 1629 was canceled in 1684^[1], when King James II installed Sir Edmund Andros as the Governor of the Dominion of New England. Andros was ousted in 1689 when King James II was dethroned in "The Glorious Revolution," and William and Mary ascended to the throne in England. Simon Bradstreet and Thomas Danforth were elected Governor and Lieutenant Governor. At this same time, tensions erupted between the English colonists settling in "the Eastward" (the present-day coast of Maine) and the French-supported Wabanaki Indians of the region, in what would come to be known as King William's War, following only 13 years on the heels of the devastating King Philip's War with the Wampanogs and other indigenous tribes in southern and western New England. In October 1690, William Phips led an unsuccessful attack on Quebec, and many English settlements along the coast continued to be attacked by Indians, including a particularly brutal assault on York on January 25, 1692. A new charter for the Province of Massachusetts had not been given final approval in England until October 16, 1691^[2] News of the appointment of William Phips as the new governor reached Boston in late January^[3] and a

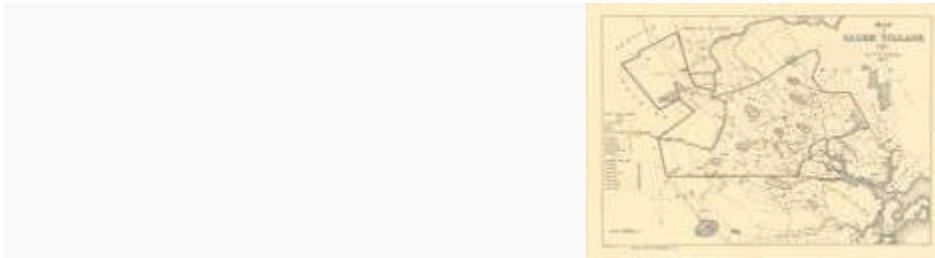
copy of the new charter arrived in Boston on February 8, 1692^[4]. Phips was formally voted governor on Election Day, May 4, 1692. Phips arrived in Boston ten days later, on May 14^[5]. On May 16, Phips was sworn in as Governor and William Stoughton as Deputy Governor^[6]. One of the first orders of business for the new Governor and Council on May 27, 1692, was the formal nomination of county justices of the peace, sheriffs, and the commission of a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer to handle the large numbers of people who were "thronging" the jails.^[7]

Boyer and Nissenbaum have postulated that without a valid charter, there was no legitimate form of government to try capital cases until Phips arrived with the new charter ^[8], but this has been disputed by David Konig, who points out that between charters, according to the Records of the Court of Assistants, a group of 14 pirates were tried and condemned on January 27, 1690 for acts of piracy and murder in August and October 1689.^[9]

For more, see:

- Emerson W. Baker & John C. Reid, *The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-1695*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto. 1998.
- David Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts: Essex County, 1629-1692*, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1979.
- Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692*, Knopf: New York, 2002.

Local context



Map of Salem Village, 1692

In 1689, Salem Village was finally allowed by the church in Salem Town to form their own separate covenanted church congregation and ordain their own minister, after many petitions to do so. Salem Village was torn by internal disputes between neighbors who disagreed about the choice of Samuel Parris as their first ordained minister, and about the choice to grant him the deed to the parsonage as part of his compensation.

In Andover, the church was in the process of dividing into two congregations, one in the north of the town led by their long-time minister, Francis Dane, and another in the south by Thomas Barnard, the teacher in the Andover church.

For more, see:

- Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1974.
- Enders A. Robinson, *Salem Witchcraft and Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables*, Heritage Books, Bowie, MD, 1992.

Economic context

Increasing family size fueled disputes over land between neighbors and within families, especially on the frontier where the economy was based on farming. Changes in the weather or blights could easily wipe out a year's crop. A farm that could support an average-sized family could not support the many families of the next generation, prompting farmers to push farther into the wilderness to find land, encroaching upon the indigenous people. As the Puritans had vowed to create a theocracy in this new land, religious fervor added tension to the mix. Loss of crops, livestock, and children, as well as earthquakes and bad weather, were typically attributed to the wrath of God.

For more, see:

- John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and Culture of Early New England*, Oxford, New York, 1982.

Religious context



Rev. Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

Despite reverence for the Bible and antipathy towards "Popery," the Puritans had established a type of theocracy akin to that of medieval Roman Catholicism, in which the church ruled in all civil matters, including that of administering capital punishment for violations of a spiritual nature. A relative few Protestants (such as Roger Williams) prior to this period had contended that this was contrary to the pure teachings of the New Testament, in which the church was separate from the State (Mt. 22:21; 1Cor. 5:12, 13 1 Pet. 2:13, 14), and unrepentant sinful behavior that merited serious spiritual discipline was administered by supernatural means (Acts 5:1-10; 1 Cor. 5:1-4; 1 Tim. 1:20).

The Puritans believed in the existence of an invisible world inhabited by God and the angels, including the Devil (who was seen as a fallen angel) and his fellow demons. To Puritans, this invisible world was as real as the visible one around them.

In his book *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (1689), Cotton Mather describes strange behavior exhibited by the four children of a Boston mason, John Goodwin, and attributed it to witchcraft practiced upon them by an Irish washerwoman, Mary Glover. Mather, a minister of Boston's North Church (not to be confused with the Episcopalian Old North Church of Paul Revere fame), was a prolific publisher of pamphlets and a firm believer in witchcraft.

For more, see:

- Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England*, Cambridge: New York, 1992.
- Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1939.
- Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th Century Massachusetts*, University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1984.

Social context

The patriarchal beliefs that Puritans held in the community added further stresses. Women, they believed, should be totally subservient to men. By nature, a woman was more likely to enlist in the Devil's service than was a man, and women were considered lustful by nature. In addition, the small-town atmosphere made secrets difficult to keep and people's opinions about their neighbors were generally accepted as fact. In an age where the philosophy "children should be seen and not heard" was taken at face value, children were at the bottom of the social ladder. Toys and games were seen as idle and playing was discouraged. Girls had additional restrictions heaped upon them. Boys were able to go hunting, fishing, exploring in the forest, and often became apprentices to carpenters and smiths, while girls were trained from a tender age to spin yarn, cook, sew, weave, and be servants to their husbands, mothers, and children.

For more, see:

- Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Woman: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1997
- Carol F. Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, Norton: New York, 1987.

The events

Because of the number of cases involved, timelines are very helpful to clarifying the unfolding of the specifics of this event. Most start with the afflictions of the girls in the Parris household in January/February 1692 and end in May 1693 with the last trials, but some start earlier to place the trials in a wider context of other witch-hunts, and some end later to include information about restitution.

Main article: Timeline of the Salem Witch Trials

The initial outbreak



The parsonage in Salem Village, as photographed in the late 19th century



Present-day archaeological site of the Salem Village parsonage

In Salem Village in 1692, Betty Parris, age 9, and her cousin Abigail Williams, age 11, the daughter and niece (respectively) of Reverend Samuel Parris, began to have fits described as "beyond the power of Epileptic Fits or natural disease to effect" by John Hale, minister in nearby Beverly^[10]. The girls screamed, threw things about the room, uttered strange sounds, crawled under furniture, and contorted themselves into peculiar positions, according to the eyewitness account of Rev. Deodat Lawson, a former minister in the town. The girls complained of being pinched and pricked with pins. A doctor, historically assumed to be William Griggs, could find no physical evidence of any ailment. Other young women in the village began to exhibit similar behaviors. When Lawson preached in the Salem Village meetinghouse, he was interrupted several times by outbursts of the afflicted.^[11]

The first three people accused and arrested for allegedly afflicting Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, 12-year-old Ann Putnam, Jr., and Elizabeth Hubbard were Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba.^[12] Sarah Good was poor and known to beg for food or shelter from neighbors. Sarah Osburne had married her indentured servant and rarely attended church meetings. Tituba, as a slave of a different ethnicity than the Puritans, was an obvious target for accusations. All of these women fit the description of the "usual suspects" for witchcraft accusations, and no one stood up for them. These women were brought before the local magistrates on the complaint of witchcraft and interrogated for several days, starting on March 1, 1692, then sent to jail (Boyer 3).

Other accusations followed in March: Martha Corey, Dorothy Good (mistakenly called Dorcas Good in her arrest warrant) and Rebecca Nurse in Salem Village, and Rachel Clinton in nearby Ipswich. Martha Corey had voiced skepticism about the credibility of the girls' accusations, drawing attention to herself. The charges against her and Rebecca Nurse greatly concerned the community because Martha Corey was a full covenanted member of the Church in Salem Village, as was Rebecca Nurse in the Church in Salem Town. If such upstanding people could be witches, then anybody could be a witch, and church membership was no protection from accusation. Dorothy Good, the daughter of Sarah Good, was only 4 years old, and when questioned by the magistrates her answers were construed as a confession, implicating her mother. In Ipswich, Rachel Clinton was arrested for witchcraft at the end of March^[13] on charges unrelated to the afflictions of the girls in Salem Village.

Accusations and examinations before local magistrates



Magistrate Samuel Sewall (1652-1730)

In April, the stakes rose. When Sarah Cloyce (Nurse's sister) and Elizabeth (Bassett) Proctor were arrested, they were brought before John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin, not only in their capacity as local magistrates, but as members of the Governor's Council, at a meeting in Salem Town. Present for the examination were Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth, and Assistants Samuel Sewall, Samuel Appleton, James Russell, and Isaac Addington. Objections by John Proctor during the proceedings resulted in his arrest that day as well.

Within a week, Giles Corey (Martha's husband, and a covenanted church member in Salem Town), Abigail Hobbs, Bridget Bishop, Mary Warren (a servant in the Proctor household and sometime accuser herself), and Deliverance Hobbs (stepmother of Abigail Hobbs) were arrested and examined. Abigail Hobbs, Mary Warren, and Deliverance Hobbs all confessed and began naming additional people as accomplices. More arrests followed: Sarah Wilds, William Hobbs (husband of Deliverance and father of Abigail), Nehemiah Abbott Jr., Mary Eastey (sister of Cloyce and Nurse), Edward Bishop, Jr. and his wife Sarah Bishop, and Mary English, and finally on April 30, the Reverend George Burroughs, Lydia Dustin, Susannah Martin, Dorcas Hoar, Sarah Morey, and Philip English (Mary's husband). Nehemiah Abbott Jr. was released because the accusers agreed he was not the person whose specter had afflicted them. Mary Easty was released for a few days after her initial arrest because the accusers failed to confirm that it was she who had afflicted them, and then she was rearrested when the accusers reconsidered.



Deposition of Abigail Williams v. George Jacobs, Sr.

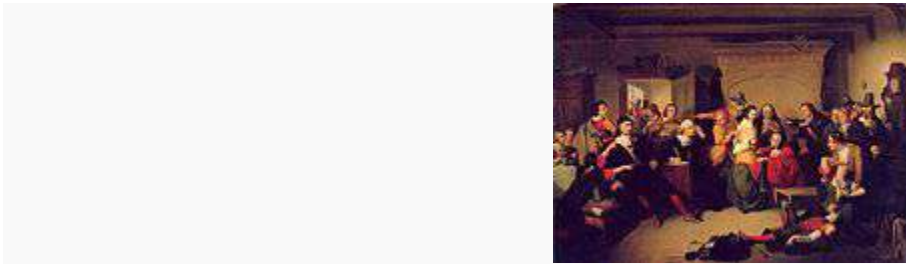
In May, accusations continued to pour in, but some of those named began to evade apprehension. Multiple warrants were issued before John Willard and Elizabeth Colson were apprehended, but George Jacobs Jr. and Daniel Andrews were not caught. Until this point, all the proceedings were still only investigative, but on May 27, 1692, William Phips ordered the establishment of a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer for Suffolk, Essex, and

Middlesex counties to prosecute the cases of those in jail. Warrants were issued for even more people. Sarah Osborne, one of the first three accused, died in jail on May 10, 1692.

Warrants were issued for 36 more people, with examinations continuing to take place in Salem Village: Sarah Dustin (daughter of Lydia Dustin), Ann Sears, Bethiah Carter Sr. and her daughter Bethiah Carter Jr., George Jacobs, Sr. and his granddaughter Margaret Jacobs, John Willard, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Abigail Soames, George Jacobs, Jr. (son of George Jacobs, Sr. and father of Margaret Jacobs), Daniel Andrew, Rebecca Jacobs (wife of George Jacobs, Jr. and sister of Daniel Andrew), Sarah Buckley and her daughter Mary Witheridge, Elizabeth Colson, Elizabeth Hart, Thomas Farrar, Sr., Roger Toothaker, Sarah Proctor (daughter of John and Elizabeth Proctor), Sarah Bassett (sister-in-law of Elizabeth Proctor), Susannah Roots, Mary DeRich (another sister-in-law of Elizabeth Proctor), Sarah Pease, Elizabeth Cary, Martha Carrier, Elizabeth Fosdick, Wilmot Redd, Sarah Rice, Elizabeth How, Capt. John Alden (son of John Alden and Priscilla Mullins of Plymouth Colony), William Procter (son of John and Elizabeth Procter), John Flood, Mary Toothaker (wife of Roger Toothaker and sister of Martha Carrier) and her daughter Margaret Toothaker, and Arthur Abbott. When the Court of Oyer and Terminer convened at the end of May, this brought the total number of people in custody for the court to handle to 62.^[14]

Cotton Mather wrote to one of the judges, John Richards, on May 31, 1692, voicing his support of the prosecutions, but cautioning him of the dangers of relying on spectral evidence and advising the court on how to proceed.^[15]

Overview



Examination of a Witch by T. H. Matteson, inspired by the Salem trials

After someone concluded that a loss, illness or death had been caused by witchcraft, the accuser would enter a complaint against the alleged witch with the local magistrates.^[16]

If the complaint was deemed credible, the magistrates would have the person arrested^[17] and brought in for a public examination, essentially an interrogation, where the magistrates pressed the accused to confess.^[18]

If the magistrates at this local level were satisfied that the complaint was well-founded, the prisoner was handed over to be dealt with by a superior court. In 1692, the magistrates opted to wait for the arrival of the new charter and governor, who would establish a Court of Oyer and Terminer to handle these cases.

The next step, at the superior court level, was to summon witnesses before a grand jury.^[19]

A person could be indicted on charges of afflicting with witchcraft,^[20] or for making an unlawful covenant with the Devil.^[21] Once indicted, the defendant went to trial, sometimes on the same day, as in the case of the first person indicted and tried on June 2, Bridget Bishop, who was executed on June 10, 1692.

There were four execution dates, with one person executed on June 10, 1692,^[22] five executed on July 19, 1692,^[23] another five executed on August 19, 1692 (Susannah Martin, John Willard, George Burroughs, George Jacobs, Sr., and John Proctor), and eight on September 22, 1692 (Mary Eastey, Martha Corey, Ann Pudeator, Samuel Wardwell, Mary Parker, Alice Parker, Wilmot Redd, and Margaret Scott). Several others, including Elizabeth (Bassett) Proctor and Abigail Faulkner, were convicted but given temporary reprieves because they were pregnant (Chronology). Though convicted, they would not be hanged until they had given birth (Chronology). Five other women were convicted in 1692, but sentence was never carried out: Ann Foster (who later died in prison), her daughter Mary Lacy Sr., Abigail Hobbs, Dorcas Hoar, and Mary Bradbury.



Giles Cory was pressed to death during the Salem witch trials in the 1690s.

Giles Corey, an 80-year-old farmer from the southeast end of Salem (called Salem Farms), refused to enter a plea when he came to trial in September. The judges mistakenly believed that the law provided for the application of a form of torture called *peine forte et dure*, in which the victim was slowly crushed by slowly piling stones on a board laid upon the victim's body. (British law had, in reality, abolished this practice twenty years earlier.)^[1] After two days of *peine fort et dure*, Corey died, his chest crushed, without entering a plea^[24]. Though his refusal to plead is often explained as a way of preventing his possessions from being confiscated by the state, this is not true; the possessions of convicted witches were often confiscated, and the possessions of persons accused but not convicted were confiscated before a trial, as in the case of Corey's neighbor John Proctor and the wealthy Englishmen of Salem Town. Some historians hypothesize that Giles Corey's personal character, a stubborn and lawsuit-prone old man who knew he was going to be convicted regardless, led to his recalcitrance^[25].

Not even in death were the accused witches granted peace or respect. As convicted witches, Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey had been excommunicated from their churches and none was given proper burial. As soon as the bodies of the accused were cut down from the trees, they were thrown into a shallow grave and the crowd would disperse. Oral history claims that the families of the dead reclaimed their bodies after dark and buried them in unmarked graves on family property. The record books of the time do not mention the deaths of any of those executed.