The Salem Witch Trials, 1692

The seeds of the hysteria that afflicted Salem Village, Massachusetts were sown in January 1692 when a group of young girls began to display bizarre behavior. The tight-knit community was at a loss to explain the convulsive seizures, blasphemous screaming, and trance-like states that afflicted the youngsters. The physicians called in to examine the girls could find no natural cause of the disturbing behavior. If the source of the affliction was not attributable to a physical malady, the community reasoned that it must be the work of Satan. Witches had invaded Salem.

In February the village began praying and fasting in order to rid itself of the devil's influence. The girls were pressured to reveal who in the community controlled their behavior. Three women were identified and examined. One, Tituba (a slave), confessed to seeing the devil who appeared to her "sometimes like a hog and sometimes like a great dog." Even more troubling, Tituba confessed that a conspiracy of witches permeated Salem Village.

In March the afflicted girls accused Martha Corey. The three women previously denounced as colluding with the devil were marginal to the community. Martha Corey was different; she was an upstanding member of the Puritan congregation - her revelation as a witch demonstrated that Satan's influence reached to the very core of the community. Events snowballed as the accusatory atmosphere intensified and reached a fever pitch. During the period from March into the fall many were charged, examined, tried and condemned to death. The hangings started in June with the death of Bridget Bishop and continued through September. As winter approached, the hysteria played itself out as criticism of the procedures grew. In October, the colonial governor dissolved the local Court of inquiry. The convictions and condemnations for witchery stopped. Nineteen victims of the witch-hunt had been hanged, one crushed to death under the weight of stones and at least four died in prison awaiting trial.

The Trial of Martha Corey

Friday March 11, 1692 was a day of fasting and prayer in Salem. During the day the community's minister, the Rev. Samuel Parris, asked the girls to reveal another witch. They did, and the accusation shocked those who heard it for it implicated Martha Corey (Goodwife Corey) a new but upstanding member of the congregation. Immediately a delegation was sent to the Corey farm

It is estimated that Salem Village contained approximately 350 residents at the time of the trials.

After her examination, Martha Corey was tried and convicted of witchcraft. She was hanged on September 22, 1692.
to interview the accused in the hope of clearing up this discrepancy. Martha Corey's sarcastic response to the accusation disheartened the delegation who immediately called for her arrest. Her trial was the scene of much agitation. In the courtroom Martha's accusers writhed in agony as they were forced by an unseen power to mimic the witch's every movement. When Martha shifted her feet the girls did also, when Martha bit her lip the girls were compelled to bit their own lips, crying out in pain. They saw the specter of a black man bending over the accused and heard the drum beat calling the witches to convene on the meetinghouse lawn. Deodat Lawson, a visiting minister, describes the scene:

"On, Monday, the 21st. of March, the magistrates of Salem appointed to come to examination of Goodwife Corey. And about twelve of the clock they went into the meeting house, which was thronged with spectators. Mr. Noyes began with a very pertinent and pathetic prayer; and Goodwife Corey being called to answer to what was alleged against her, she desired to go to prayer, which was much wondered at, in the presence of so many hundred people. The magistrates told her they would not admit it; they came not there to hear her pray, but to examine her in what was alleged against her. The worshipful Mr. Hathorne asked her why she afflicted those children. She said she did not afflict them. He asked her, 'Who did then?' She said, 'I do not know; how should I know?'

The number of the afflicted persons were about that time ten, viz. four married women: Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Putnam, Goodwife Bibber, and an ancient woman named Goodall; three maids-. Mary Walnut, Mercy Lewes, at Thomas Putnam's, and a maid at Dr. Griggs's; there were three girls from nine to twelve years of age, each of them, or thereabouts, viz. Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams, and Ann Putnam.

These were most of them at Goodwife Corey's examination, and did vehemently accuse her in the assembly of afflicting them, by biting, pinching, strangling, etc.; and that they did in their fit see her likeness coming to them, and bringing a book to them. She said she had no book. They affirmed she had a yellow bird that used to suck betwixt her fingers; and being asked about it, if she had any familiar spirit that attended her, she said she had no familiarity with any such thing, she was a gospel woman, which title she called herself by. And the afflicted persons told her ah, she was a gospel witch. Ann Putnam did there affirm that one day when Lieutenant Fuller was at prayer at her father's house she saw the shape of Goodwife Corey and she thought Goodwife N, praying at the same time to the Devil. She was not sure it was Goodwife N., she thought it was, but very sure she saw the shape, of Goodwife Corey. The said Corey said they were poor, distracted children, and no head to be given to what they said. Mr. Hathorne and Mr. Noyes replied it was the
judgment of all present they were bewitched, and only she, the accused person, said they were distracted.

It was observed several times that if she did but bite her underlip in time of examination, the persons afflicted were bitten on their arms and wrists and produced the marks before the magistrates, ministers, and others. And being watched for that, if she did but pinch her fingers, or grasp one hand hard in another, they were pinched, and produced the marks before the magistrates and spectators. After that, it was observed that if she did but lean her breast against the seat in the meeting house (being the bar at which she stood), they were afflicted. Particularly Mrs. Pope complained of grievous torment in her bowels as if they were, torn out. She vehemently accused said Corey as the instrument, and first threw her muff at her, but that not flying home, she got off her shoe, and hit Goodwife Corey on the head with it. After these postures were watched, if said Corey did but stir her feet, they were afflicted in their feet, and stamped fearfully.

The afflicted persons asked her why she did not go to the company of witches which were before the meeting house mustering. Did she not hear the drum beat? They accused her of having familiarity with the Devil, in the time of examination, in the shape of a black man whispering in her ear; they affirmed that her yellow bird sucked betwixt her fingers in the assembly; and, order being given to see if there were any sign, the girl that saw it said it was too late now; she had removed a pin, and put it on her head, which was found there sticking upright.

... she denied all that was charged upon her, and said they could not prove her a witch. She was that afternoon committed to Salem prison; and after she was in custody, she did not so appear to them and afflict them as before."

References:
Lawson, Deodat, A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft at Salem Village(1692) [reprinted in Commager, Henry Steele, The Heritage of America (1949)]; Starkey, Marion, The Devil in Massachusetts (1989); Trask, Richard, "The Devil Hath Been Risen" (1997).

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SALEM WITCH TRIALS

The infamous Salem witch trials began during the spring of 1692, after a group of young girls in Salem Village, Massachusetts, claimed to be possessed by the devil and accused several local women of witchcraft. As a wave of hysteria spread throughout colonial Massachusetts, a special court convened in Salem to hear the cases; the first convicted witch, Bridget Bishop, was hanged that June. Eighteen others followed Bishop to Salem's Gallows Hill, while some 150 more men, women and children were accused over the next several months. By September 1692, the hysteria had begun to abate and public opinion turned against the trials. Though the Massachusetts General Court later annulled guilty verdicts against accused witches and granted indemnities to their families, bitterness lingered in the community, and the painful legacy of the Salem witch trials would endure for centuries.

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CONTEXT & ORIGINS OF THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS
Belief in the supernatural—and 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 Town (present-day 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.

DID YOU KNOW?
In an effort to explain by scientific means the strange afflictions suffered by those “bewitched” Salem residents in 1692, a study published in Science magazine in 1976 cited the fungus ergot (found in rye, wheat and other cereals), which toxicologists say can cause symptoms such as delusions, vomiting and muscle spasms.

In January 1692, 9-year-old Elizabeth (Betty) Parris and 11-year-old Abigail Williams (the daughter and niece of Samuel Parris, minister of Salem Village) began having fits, including violent contortions and uncontrollable outbursts of screaming. After a local doctor, William Griggs, diagnosed bewitchment, other young girls in the community began to exhibit similar symptoms, including Ann Putnam Jr., Mercy Lewis, Elizabeth Hubbard, Mary Walcott and Mary Warren. In late February, arrest warrants were issued for the Parris’ Caribbean slave, Tituba, along with two other women—the homeless beggar
Sarah Good and the poor, elderly Sarah Osborn—whom the girls accused of bewitching them.

SALEM WITCH TRIALS: THE HYSTERIA SPREADS
The three accused witches were brought before the magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne and questioned, even as their accusers appeared in the courtroom in a grand display of spasms, contortions, screaming and writhing. Though Good and Osborn denied their guilt, Tituba confessed. Likely seeking to save herself from certain conviction by acting as an informer, she claimed there were other witches acting alongside her in service of the devil against the Puritans. As hysteria spread through the community and beyond into the rest of Massachusetts, a number of others were accused, including Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse—both regarded as upstanding members of church and community—and the four-year-old daughter of Sarah Good.

Like Tituba, several accused “witches” confessed and named still others, and the trials soon began to overwhelm the local justice system. In May 1692, the newly appointed governor of Massachusetts, William Phips, ordered the establishment of a special Court of Oyer (to hear) and Terminer (to decide) on witchcraft cases for Suffolk, Essex and Middlesex counties. Presided over by judges including Hathorne, Samuel Sewall and William Stoughton, the court handed down its first conviction, against Bridget Bishop, on June 2; she was hanged eight days later on what would become known as Gallows Hill in Salem Town. Five more people were hanged that July; five in August and eight more in September. In addition, seven other accused witches died in jail, while the elderly Giles Corey (Martha’s husband) was pressed to death by stones after he refused to enter a plea at his arraignment.
SALEM WITCH TRIALS: CONCLUSION AND LEGACY
Though the respected minister Cotton Mather had warned of the dubious value of spectral evidence (or testimony about dreams and visions), 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." Amid waning public support for the trials, Governor Phips dissolved the Court of Oyer and Terminer in October and mandated that its successor disregard spectral evidence. Trials continued with dwindling intensity until early 1693, and by that May Phips had pardoned and released all those in prison on witchcraft charges.

In January 1697, the Massachusetts General Court declared a day of fasting for the tragedy of the Salem witch trials; the court later deemed the trials unlawful, and the leading justice Samuel Sewall publicly apologized for his role in the process. The damage to the community lingered, however, even after Massachusetts Colony passed legislation restoring the good names of the condemned and providing financial restitution to their heirs in 1711. Indeed, the vivid and painful legacy of the Salem witch trials endured well into the 20th century, when Arthur Miller dramatized the events of 1692 in his play "The Crucible" (1953), using them as an allegory for the anti-Communist "witch hunts" led by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s.
The Witchcraft Trials in Salem: A Commentary
by Douglas Linder

O Christian Martyr Who for Truth could
die
When all about thee Owned the hideous lie!
The world, redeemed from superstition's
sway,
Is breathing freer for thy sake today.
--Words written by John Greenleaf Whittier and
inscribed on a monument marking the grave of
Rebecca Nurse, one of the condemned "witches"
of Salem.

From June through September of 1692, nineteen men and women, all having
been convicted of witchcraft, were carted to Gallows Hill, a barren slope near
Salem Village, for hanging. Another man of over eighty years was pressed to
death under heavy stones for refusing to submit to a trial on witchcraft charges.
Hundreds of others faced accusations of witchcraft. Dozens languished in jail for
months without trials. Then, almost as soon as it had begun, the hysteria that
swept through Puritan Massachusetts ended.

Why did this travesty of justice occur? Why did it occur in Salem? Nothing
about this tragedy was inevitable. Only an unfortunate combination of an
ongoing frontier war, economic conditions, congregational strife, teenage
boredom, and personal jealousies can account for the spiraling accusations,
trials, and executions that occurred in the spring and summer of 1692.

In 1688, John Putnam, one of the most influential elders of Salem Village,
invited Samuel Parris, formerly a marginally successful planter and merchant in
Barbados, to preach in the Village church. A year later, after negotiations over
salary, inflation adjustments, and free firewood, Parris accepted the job as
Village minister. He moved to Salem Village with his wife Elizabeth, his six-
year-old daughter Betty, niece Abagail Williams, and his Indian slave Tituba,
acquired by Parris in Barbados.

The Salem that became the new home of Parris was in the midst of change: a
mercurial elite was beginning to develop, prominent people were becoming less willing to assume positions as town leaders, two clans (the Putnams and the Porters) were competing for control of the village and its pulpit, and a debate was raging over how independent Salem Village, tied more to the interior agricultural regions, should be from Salem, a center of sea trade.

Sometime during February of the exceptionally cold winter of 1692, young Betty Parris became strangely ill. She dashed about, dove under furniture, contorted in pain, and complained of fever. The cause of her symptoms may have been some combination of stress, asthma, guilt, boredom, child abuse, epilepsy, and delusional psychosis. The symptoms also could have been caused, as Linda Caprael argued in a 1976 article in Science magazine, by a disease called "convulsive ergotism" brought on by injecting rye--eaten as a cereal and as a common ingredient of bread--infected with ergot. (Ergot is caused by a fungus which invades developing kernels of rye grain, especially under warm and damp conditions such as existed at the time of the previous rye harvest in Salem. Convulsive ergotism causes violent fits, a crawling sensation on the skin, vomiting, choking, and--most interestingly--hallucinations. The hallucinogenic drug LSD is a derivative of ergot.) Many of the symptoms or convulsive ergotism seem to match those attributed to Betty Parris, but there is no way of knowing with any certainty if she in fact suffered from the disease--and the theory would not explain the afflictions suffered by others in Salem later in the year.

At the time, however, there was another theory to explain the girls' symptoms. Cotton Mather had recently published a popular book, "Memorable Providences," describing the suspected witchcraft of an Irish washerwoman in Boston, and Betty's behavior in some ways mirrored that of the afflicted person described in Mather's widely read and discussed book. It was easy to believe in 1692 in Salem, with an Indian war raging less than seventy miles away (and many refugees from the war in the area) that the devil was close at hand. Sudden and violent death occupied minds.

Talk of witchcraft increased when other playmates of Betty, including eleven-year-old Ann Putnam, seventeen-year-old Mercy Lewis, and Mary Walcott, began to exhibit similar unusual behavior. When his own nostrums failed to effect a cure, William Griggs, a doctor called to examine the girls, suggested that the girls' problems might have a supernatural origin. The widespread belief that witches targeted children made the doctor's diagnosis seem increasingly likely.

A neighbor, Mary Sibley, proposed a form of counter magic. She told Tituba to bake a rye cake with the urine of the afflicted victim and feed the cake to a dog. (Dogs were believed to be used by witches as agents to carry out their devilish commands.) By this time, suspicion had already begun to focus on Tituba, who had been known to tell the girls tales of omens, voodoo, and witchcraft from her native folklore. Her participation in the urine cake episode made her an even more obvious scapegoat for the inexplicable.
Meanwhile, the number of girls afflicted continued to grow, rising to seven with the addition of Ann Putnam, Elizabeth Hubbard, Susannah Sheldon, and Mary Warren. According to historian Peter Hoffer, the girls "turned themselves from a circle of friends into a gang of juvenile delinquents." (Many people of the period complained that young people lacked the piety and sense of purpose of the founders' generation.) The girls contorted into grotesque poses, fell down into frozen postures, and complained of biting and pinching sensations. In a village where everyone believed that the devil was real, close at hand, and acted in the real world, the suspected affliction of the girls became an obsession.

Sometime after February 25, when Tituba baked the witch cake, and February 29, when arrest warrants were issued against Tituba and two other women, Betty Parris and Abigail Williams named their afflictor and the witchhunt began. The consistency of the two girls' accusations suggests strongly that the girls worked out their stories together. Soon Ann Putnam and Mercy Lewis were also reporting seeing "witches flying through the winter mist." The prominent Putnam family supported the girls' accusations, putting considerable impetus behind the prosecutions.

The first three to be accused of witchcraft were Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborn. Tituba was an obvious choice (LINK TO TITUBA'S EXAMINATION). Good was a beggar and social misfit who lived wherever someone would house her (LINK TO GOOD'S EXAMINATION) (LINK TO GOOD'S TRIAL), and Osborn was old, quarrelsome, and had not attended church for over a year. The Putnams brought their complaint against the three women to county magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne, who scheduled examinations for the suspected witches for March 1, 1692 in Ingersoll's tavern. When hundreds showed up, the examinations were moved to the meeting house. At the examinations, the girls described attacks by the specters of the three women, and fell into their by then perfected pattern of contortions when in the presence of one of the suspects. Other villagers came forward to offer stories of cheese and butter mysteriously gone bad or animals born with deformities after visits by one of the suspects. The magistrates, in the common practice of the time, asked the same questions of each suspect over and over: Were they witches? Had they seen Satan? How, if they are were not witches, did they explain the contortions seemingly caused by their presence? The style and form of the questions indicates that the magistrates thought the women guilty.

The matter might have ended with admonishments were it not for Tituba. After first adamantly denying any guilt, afraid perhaps of being made a scapegoat, Tituba claimed that she was approached by a tall man from Boston—obviously Satan—who sometimes appeared as a dog or a hog and who asked her to sign in his book and to do his work. Yes, Tituba declared, she was a witch, and moreover she and four other witches, including Good and Osborn, had flown through the air on their poles. She had tried to run to Reverend Parris for counsel, she said, but the devil had blocked her path. Tituba's confession succeeded in transforming her from a possible scapegoat to a central figure in
the expanding prosecutions. Her confession also served to silence most skeptics, and Parris and other local ministers began witch hunting with zeal.

Soon, according to their own reports, the spectral forms of other women began attacking the afflicted girls. Martha Corey, Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Cloyce, and Mary Easty (Link to Easty's Examination) were accused of witchcraft. During a March 20 church service, Ann Putnam suddenly shouted, "Look where Goodwife Cloyce sits on the beam suckling her yellow bird between her fingers!" Soon Ann's mother, Ann Putnam, Sr., would join the accusers. Dorcas Good, four-year-old daughter of Sarah Good, became the first child to be accused of witchcraft when three of the girls complained that they were bitten by the specter of Dorcas. (The four-year-old was arrested, kept in jail for eight months, watched her mother get carried off to the gallows, and would "cry her heart out, and go insane.") The girls accusations and their ever more polished performances, including the new act of being struck dumb, played to large and believing audiences.

Stuck in jail with the damming testimony of the afflicted girls widely accepted, suspects began to see confession as a way to avoid the gallows. Deliverance Hobbs became the second witch to confess, admitting to pinching three of the girls at the Devil's command and flying on a pole to attend a witches' Sabbath in an open field. Jails approached capacity and the colony "teetered on the brink of chaos" when Governor Phips returned from England. Fast action, he decided, was required.

Phips created a new court, the "court of oyer and terminer," to hear the witchcraft cases. Five judges, including three close friends of Cotton Mather, were appointed to the court. Chief Justice, and most influential member of the court, was a gung-ho witch hunter named William Stoughton. Mather urged Stoughton and the other judges to credit confessions and admit "spectral evidence" (testimony by afflicted persons that they had been visited by a suspect's specter). Ministers were looked to for guidance by the judges, who were generally without legal training, on matters pertaining to witchcraft. Mather's advice was heeded. the judges also decided to allow the so-called "touching test" (defendants were asked to touch afflicted persons to see if their touch, as was generally assumed of the touch of witches, would stop their contortions) and examination of the bodies of accused for evidence of "witches' marks" (moles or the like upon which a witch's familiar might suck) (Scene Depicting Examination for Marks). Evidence that would be excluded from modern courtrooms-- hearsay, gossip, stories, unsupported assertions, surmises-- was also generally admitted. Many protections that modern defendants take for granted were lacking in Salem: accused witches had no legal counsel, could not have witnesses testify under oath on their behalf, and had no formal avenues of appeal. Defendants could, however, speak for themselves, produce evidence, and cross-examine their accusers. The degree to which defendants in Salem were able to take advantage of their modest protections varied considerably, depending on their own acuteness and their influence in the community.
The first accused witch to be brought to trial was Bridget Bishop. Almost sixty years old, owner of a tavern where patrons could drink cider ale and play shuffleboard (even on the Sabbath), critical of her neighbors, and reluctant to pay her her bills, Bishop was a likely candidate for an accusation of witchcraft (LINK TO EXAMINATION OF BISHOP). The fact that Thomas Newton, special prosecutor, selected Bishop for his first prosecution suggests that he believed the stronger case could be made against her than any of the other suspect witches. At Bishop's trial on June 2, 1692, a field hand testified that he saw Bishop's image stealing eggs and then saw her transform herself into a cat. Deliverance Hobbs, by then probably insane, and Mary Warren, both confessed witches, testified that Bishop was one of them. A villager named Samuel Grey told the court that Bishop visited his bed at night and tormented him. A jury of matrons assigned to examine Bishop's body reported that they found an "excruciation of flesh." Several of the afflicted girls testified that Bishop's specter afflicted them. Numerous other villagers described why they thought Bishop was responsible for various bits of bad luck that had befallen them. There was even testimony that while being transported under guard past the Salem meeting house, she looked at the building and caused a part of it to fall to the ground.

Bishop's jury returned a verdict of guilty. One of the judges, Nathaniel Saltonstall, aghast at the conduct of the trial, resigned from the court. Chief Justice Stoughton signed Bishop's death warrant, and on June 10, 1692, Bishop was carted to Gallows Hill and hanged (LINK TO IMAGE OF BISHOP'S HANGING).

As the summer of 1692 warmed, the pace of trials picked up. Not all defendants were as disreputable as Bridget Bishop. Rebecca Nurse was a pious, respected woman whose specter, according to Ann Putnam, Jr. and Abigail Williams, attacked them in mid March of 1692 (LINK TO EXAMINATION OF NURSE). Ann Putnam, Sr. added her complaint that Nurse demanded that she sign the Devil's book, then pinched her. Nurse was one of three Towne sisters, all identified as witches, who were members of a Topsfield family that had a long-standing quarrel with the Putnam family. Apart from the evidence of Putnam family members, the major piece of evidence against Nurse appeared to be testimony indicating that soon after Nurse lectured Benjamin Houlton for allowing his pig to root in her garden, Houlton died. The Nurse jury returned a verdict of not guilty, much to the displeasure of Chief Justice Stoughton, who told the jury to go back and consider again a statement of Nurse's that might be considered an admission of guilt (but more likely an indication of confusion about the question, as Nurse was old and nearly deaf). The jury reconvened, this time coming back with a verdict of guilty (LINK TO NURSE TRIAL). On July 19, 1692, Nurse rode with four other convicted witches to Gallows Hill.

Persons who scoffed at accusations of witchcraft risked becoming targets of accusations themselves. One man who was openly critical of the trials paid for his skepticism with his life. John Proctor, a central figure in Arthur Miller's fictionalized account of the Salem witchhunt, The Crucible, was an opinionated tavern owner who openly denounced the witchhunt. Testifying against Proctor
were Ann Putnam, Abigail Williams, Indian John (a slave of Samuel Parris who worked in a competing tavern), and eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Booth, who testified that ghosts had come to her and accused Proctor of serial murder. Proctor fought back, accusing confessed witches of lying, complaining of torture, and demanding that his trial be moved to Boston. The efforts proved futile. Proctor was hanged. His wife Elizabeth, who was also convicted of witchcraft, was spared execution because of her pregnancy (reprieved "for the belly").

No execution caused more unease in Salem than that of the village's ex-minister, George Burroughs. Burroughs, who was living in Maine in 1692, was identified by several of his accusers as the ringleader of the witches. Ann Putnam claimed that Burroughs bewitched soldiers during a failed military campaign against Wabanakis in 1688-89, the first of a string of military disasters that could be blamed on an Indian-Devil alliance. In her interesting book, *In the Devil's Snare*, historian Mary Beth Norton argues that the large number of accusations against Burroughs, and his linkage to the frontier war, is the key to understanding the Salem trials. Norton contends that the enthusiasm of the Salem court in prosecuting the witchcraft cases owed in no small measure to the judges' desire to shift the "blame for their own inadequate defense of the frontier." Many of the judges, Norton points out, played lead roles in a war effort that had been markedly unsuccessful.

Among the thirty accusers of Burroughs was nineteen-year-old Mercy Lewis, a refugee of the frontier wars. Lewis, the most imaginative and forceful of the young accusers, offered unusually vivid testimony against Burroughs. Lewis told the court that Burroughs flew her to the top of a mountain and, pointing toward the surrounding land, promised her all the kingdoms if only she would sign in his book (a story very similar to that found in Matthew 4:8). Lewis said, "I would not writ if he had threwed me down on one hundred pitchforks." At an execution, a defendant in the Puritan colonies was expected to confess, and thus to save his soul. When Burroughs on Gallows Hill continued to insist on his innocence and then recited the Lord's Prayer perfectly (something witches were thought incapable of doing), the crowd reportedly was "greatly moved." The agitation of the crowd caused Cotton Mather to intervene and remind the crowd that Burroughs had had his day in court and lost.

One victim of the Salem witchhunt was not hanged, but rather pressed under heavy stones until his death. Such was the fate of octogenarian Giles Corey, who, after spending five months in chains in a Salem jail with his also accused wife, had nothing but contempt for the proceedings. Seeing the futility of a trial and hoping that by avoiding a conviction his farm, that would otherwise go the state, might go to his two sons-in-law, Corey refused to stand for trial. The penalty for such a refusal was *peine et fort*, or pressing. Three days after Corey's death, on September 22, 1692, eight more convicted witches, including Giles' wife Martha, were hanged. They were the last victims of the witchhunt.

By early autumn of 1692, Salem's lust for blood was ebbing. Doubts were developing as to how so many respectable people could be guilty. Reverend John
Hale said, "It cannot be imagined that in a place of so much knowledge, so many in so small compass of land should abominably leap into the Devil's lap at once." The educated elite of the colony began efforts to end the witch-hunting hysteria that had enveloped Salem. Increase Mather, the father of Cotton, published what has been called "America's first tract on evidence," a work entitled Cases of Conscience, which argued that it "were better that ten suspected witches should escape than one innocent person should be condemned." Increase Mather urged the court to exclude spectral evidence. Samuel Willard, a highly regarded Boston minister, circulated Some Miscellany Observations, which suggested that the Devil might create the specter of an innocent person. Mather's and Willard's works were given to Governor Phips. The writings most likely influenced the decision of Phips to order the court to exclude spectral evidence and touching tests and to require proof of guilt by clear and convincing evidence. With spectral evidence not admitted, twenty-eight of the last thirty-three witchcraft trials ended in acquittals. The three convicted witches were later pardoned. In May of 1693, Phips released from prison all remaining accused or convicted witches.

By the time the witchhunt ended, nineteen convicted witches were executed (LINK TO LIST OF DEAD), at least four accused witches had died in prison, and one man, Giles Corey, had been pressed to death. About one to two hundred other persons were arrested and imprisoned on witchcraft charges. Two dogs were executed as suspected accomplices of witches.

Scholars have noted potentially telling differences between the accused and the accusers in Salem. Most of the accused lived to the south of, and were generally better off financially, than most of the accusers. In a number of cases, accusing families stood to gain property from the convictions of accused witches. Also, the accused and the accusers generally took opposite sides in a congregational schism that had split the Salem community before the outbreak of hysteria. While many of the accused witches supported former minister George Burroughs, the families that included the accusers had—for the most part—played leading roles in forcing Burroughs to leave Salem. The conclusion that many scholars draw from these patterns is that property disputes and congregational feuds played a major role in determining who lived, and who died, in 1692.

A period of atonement began in the colony following the release of the surviving accused witches. Samuel Sewall, one of the judges, issued a public confession of guilt and an apology. Several jurors came forward to say that they were "sadly deluded and mistaken" in their judgments. Reverend Samuel Parris conceded errors of judgment, but mostly shifted blame to others. Parris was replaced as minister of Salem village by Thomas Green, who devoted his career to putting his torn congregation back together. Governor Phips blamed the entire affair on William Stoughton. Stoughton, clearly more to blame than anyone for the tragic episode, refused to apologize or explain himself. He criticized Phips for interfering just when he was about to "clear the land" of witches. Stoughton became the next governor of Massachusetts.
The witches disappeared, but witchhunting in America did not. Each generation must learn the lessons of history or risk repeating its mistakes. Salem should warn us to think hard about how to best safeguard and improve our system of justice.

SALEM TRIALS HOMEPAGE

http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL_ACCT.HTM