

THESIS

DANGEROUS EXPECTATIONS: UNCOVERING WHAT TRIGGERED THE HUNT FOR  
WITCHES IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2022

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## ABSTRACT

### DANGEROUS EXPECTATIONS: UNCOVERING WHAT TRIGGERED THE HUNT FOR WITCHES IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND

In voyaging to the New World, European colonists found a world that was unlike anything they believed they would experience, and they struggled to implement their familiar political, social, and religious structures in their new colonies. The gap between colonists' expectations and the New World they actually found sparked the occurrence of witch hunts in colonial New England during the seventeenth century. This thesis works to reinterpret and bridge the gap between two well-developed historiographies of witchcraft. Although historians tend to study witchcraft in the Old World and in New England separately and depict them differently, they are closely related. Witchcraft in the Old World changed and evolved into what we recognize as witchcraft in New England. They provide a continuous narrative.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a first-generation college graduate, my path to completing this project begins and ends with my family. This would not have been possible without the never-ending love and support I received from you all. To my mom and dad, Allisa and Scott, thank you for providing me with the resources and stability I, as a stubborn and type-A personality person, needed to succeed in all things. Just like you always say, I have done “exactly what I’m supposed to.” To my older siblings, Katie and Tj, thank you for believing in me more than almost anyone. You two even give mom and dad a run for their money. Shocking you guys with weird history facts and winning when we play Chronology are some of my favorite activities. You are the greatest friends I could ask for.

I would also like to recognize my graduate cohort. The process of writing a thesis is long and difficult, but they made me feel less alone. The genuine interest you all have shown in my research has kept me going. A special thank you to Cassie, Jacie, and Hailey. Cassie, you have been a cheerleader for my success since the day I met you. I value your friendship and encouragement. Jacie, thank you for helping me recognize my accomplishments. You have taught me how to celebrate the small victories rather than waiting for the big ones. You have been a constant source of positivity for me. Hailey, thank you for always being one of the first people to wish me luck in whatever task I am completing and for being one of the first people to congratulate me when I succeed. You never fail to ask me how I am doing. I will miss our 8:00 A.M. chats where I laugh so hard I can barely breathe. I appreciate you all.

Thank you to the Colorado State University History Department and those I have had the pleasure of interacting with and learning from. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Ann Little. When I walked into your Eighteenth-Century America history course as a nineteen-year-old undergraduate transfer student on my first day at CSU, I had no idea I would end up with one, let alone two, degrees in history. Your passion for history sparked my own and is the reason I went on to enroll in six of your classes at the undergraduate and graduate level. I truly would not have done this without you.

Finally, I would like to thank my graduate committee for their constant support, enthusiasm, and encouragement. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Jared Orsi, for his guidance, support, critiques, and praises. I am grateful for your willingness to advise me on this thesis and for making me a better researcher and writer. To Dr. Diane Margolf and Dr. Erin Jordan, thank you for your advice and assistance with sourcing, for answering what probably seemed like a never-ending bombardment of emails, and your insight and help with placing the Old and New Worlds into conversation with each other. In a project of this size, it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the big picture, thank you for pushing me to take a step back to find it. To Dr. Zach Hutchins, thank you for your thoughtful comments and critiques during my defense. Your revision suggestions made a positive impact on this final version. I feel lucky to have gotten the opportunity to work with you all.

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## Introduction

First, the ground is so fertill, that questionless it is capable of producing any Grain, Fruits, or Seeds you will sow or plant, growing in the Regions afre named: But it may be, not euey kinde to that perfection of delicacy; or some tender plants may miscarie, because the Summer is not so hot, and the winter is more colde in those parts wee haue yet tried neere the Sea side, then we finde in the same height in *Europe* or *Asia*.<sup>1</sup>

This observation comes from John Smith, published in *A description of New England*, in 1616. Smith is credited with coining the term “New England,” which he describes as “that part of *America* in the Ocean Sea opposite to *Nova Albyon* in the South Sea; discovered by the most memorable Sir *Francis Drake* in his voyage about the worlde. In regarde whereto this is stiled *New England*, being in the same latitude.”<sup>2</sup> In part, descriptions like the one above would have been responsible for drawing colonists across the Atlantic Ocean to settle in New England.

English exploration and colonization of North America did not begin with the New England colonies, but rather with a settlement established and named after the King of England in 1607 and located in what became Virginia. It took thirteen years for the English to establish their first New England colony, named Plymouth Colony, and

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<sup>1</sup> John Smith, *A Description of New England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska: Zea E-Books in American Studies, 1616), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *A Description of New England*, 18.

Pilgrims fleeing from religious persecution in England spent sixty-six days on the Mayflower to be the first English inhabitants of Plymouth Colony in 1620.

In voyaging to the New World, European colonists found a world that was unlike anything they believed they would experience. Drawing from the Bible and religious understandings of how the world worked, people of the Old World sometimes explained unfortunate events as the result of outside forces. Because religion was one way people in the Middle Ages through the Early-Modern period explained the world, the cosmic battle between good and evil provided a reasonable explanation for failures. When the outcome of events was poor, it was easy to assume that it was the Devil and his accomplices, rather than God, at work. By the time New England colonists conducted their own witch hunts in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Old World started to look away from these outside forces to more visible and scientific explanations for unfortunate events.

Upon arriving in what would become the New England colonies, the English struggled to implement their familiar political, social, and religious structures in an unfamiliar world. Among these immediate challenges were difficulties in implementing and maintaining the traditional Puritan Model brought from the Old World, the distance between colonial leaders and primary authority at home in England, and the stressor of learning to navigate around and interact with local native groups. Additional difficulties were subsistence and social order in their new, unfamiliar natural world while realizing they had been misled by early descriptions of the landscape.

The colonists' initial observations of the New World found vast forests dominating the landscape, but as William Cronon noted in *Changes in the Land*, "as early as 1653,

the historian Edward Johnson could count it as one of God's providences that a 'remote, rocky, barren, bushy, wild-woody wilderness' had been transformed in a generation into 'a second England for fertility.'"<sup>3</sup> When faced with this unfamiliar natural world, no matter how much they believed they were able to conquer it, colonists began to realign their understandings of politics, society, religion, and nature and the way they functioned in relation to one another in an effort to search for the cause of their anxieties. One answer they found was witches.

Numerous theories attempt to explain how the witch hunts of seventeenth-century New England, and even other witch hunts elsewhere, began and why they gripped their respective locales so tightly. Historian Emerson Baker said it best in *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience*, "While each book puts forward its own theories, most historians agree that there was no single cause of the witchcraft that started in Salem and spread across the region... Salem offered 'a perfect storm.'"<sup>4</sup> Colonists in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts used the legal structures set up by their respective colonial governments in their search for witches as an explanation for legal, social, religious, and natural world challenges. These two colonies had different methods for overseeing witch trials which allows for an interesting comparison. Records of the victims in these witch hunts exist mainly, if not exclusively, in trial documents.

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<sup>3</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Emerson W. Baker, *Storm of Witchcraft: the Salem Trials and the American Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 6.

The anxieties already present in the minds of the New England colonists worsened as they interacted with a natural world that disrupted their expectations.<sup>5</sup> This gap between what colonists expected to find in the New World and what they actually found in New England forced a shift away from the political, social, and religious structures and ideas about the natural world that they brought with them when they left the Old World. This sparked the witch trials.

This thesis is comprised of three chapters. The first chapter, entitled, “What They Knew: England and Continental Europe’s Impact on the Colonist Mindset” argues that Europeans had what they thought was expansive knowledge of the way their political, social, and religious structures worked in relation to the natural world within their communities. This knowledge helped further inform and create their belief system as England, Scotland, and Continental Europe faced witch trials in the Late Middle Ages through the Early-Modern era. New England colonists took these ideas about their political, social, and religious structures, as well as nature, directly from Old England and Continental Europe when they traveled to the New World in the seventeenth century. One of the primary goals of this chapter is to present the necessary background information for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter two, entitled, “An Unfamiliar and Unexpected World,” argues that the beliefs New England colonists brought with them to North America regarding how their political, social, and religious structures worked within their familiar European homelands were incompatible with the world they encountered in North America and the

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014), 39-40.

systems they were able to implement. This meant that many of the expectations New England colonists had when they arrived in North America quickly dissolved as they were challenged by the New World. For example, colonists struggled to maintain and keep their livestock due to the lack of fencing and clear landownership, meaning that their livestock would wander onto the land of neighbors, and in some cases, Native Americans. This struggle inflamed tensions between neighbors.

One belief, however, that managed to survive the voyage across the Atlantic and the difficult adjustment to North America was the existence of external forces with the ability to influence people's minds and actions. The survival of this belief inspired several communities in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to seek supernatural explanations for New World challenges that they could explain with the worldview they brought with them across the Atlantic. Communities had clearly defined expectations for their structure and the way individuals functioned within that structure, meaning social pressure served a crucial role in maintaining control. This proved disastrous for individuals in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts when they stepped outside of these community expectations. Chapters one and two of this thesis primarily use secondary scholarship of witchcraft in the Old and New World in an effort to conceptualize the key characteristics of witch hunts that colonists would have been familiar and travelled to the New World with.

The final chapter, entitled, "Not Very Neighborly: The New England Witch Trials as the Culmination of Exacerbated Anxieties," describes the witch hunts that ensued as a result of the incompatibility of the ideas brought from Old England and Continental Europe and the world colonists found upon arriving in New England. This chapter

focuses on Connecticut and Massachusetts, though outbreaks of witchcraft accusations occurred in New Hampshire as well. These witch hunts-represented a desperate attempt by the colonists to make sense of the difficult New World and the failure of the Old-World in preparing for its challenges. Witch hunts only emerged in New England after colonists realized the impossibility of taming the New World to reflect what they experienced in England and Continental Europe. Chapter three of this thesis relies heavily on primary sources to discuss the events that unfolded in colonial Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts during the witch trials.



Figure 1: *Compendium maleficarum*: Devil and witches trampling a cross. From *Compendium maleficarum* by Francesco Maria Guazzo, 1608.

## Definitions

Before we proceed, it is important to note that the supposed practice of witchcraft in seventeenth-century Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts is not reflected in the interpretations of popular culture today. As Norman Gevitz explained in “The Devil Hath Laughed at the Physicians,” witchcraft in the seventeenth century was

defined as “an act by which individuals used secret or occult means, emanating from the devil, to inflict suffering upon people or their property.”<sup>6</sup> As we will see, this does not translate to the cartoon image of an old hag with green skin stirring a potion in a cauldron that is common today. To fully understand and acknowledge the early-modern period’s concept of witchcraft, we must account for the variations of witchcraft that people during this time believed existed.

The two uses of witchcraft essential to the early-modern era defined by Civil or Roman law were labeled as white and black. Witches who practiced white witchcraft were sometimes viewed as beneficent friends who healed diseases or reversed harmful spells. Black witches on the other hand were malefic. These individuals sought to harm others and damage their neighbor’s property. Black witchcraft drew its power from evil spirits, making it the most feared. The punishment for black witchcraft was execution. Although not necessarily as feared as black witchcraft because it did not have origins in harmful actions, New England colonists, like their relatives in England and Europe, still condemned white witchcraft for being unnatural as suspicions surrounding witchcraft increased. This suspicion came out of the belief that even individuals practicing white witchcraft could, and would, turn on their friends and neighbors during arguments. There were some forms of witchcraft that were neither white or black, such as the

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<sup>6</sup> Norman Gevitz, “The Devil Hath Laughed at the Physicians’: Witchcraft and Medical Practice in Seventeenth-Century New England,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 55, no. 1 (2000), 10.

worship of wells, trees, and stones, but these were also viewed as devilish and were shunned.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to there being different uses of witchcraft, black and white, there were also different types, with harmful witchcraft, known as *maleficium*, being the most simple and fearsome. Individuals in the early-modern era defined *maleficium* as the use of magic, or other supernatural ability, to create physical harm upon another person. This harmful form of witchcraft could be seen through harm done to animals and crops, destruction of property, illness, or death.<sup>8</sup> The belief in *maleficium*, or harmful witchcraft, was held by nearly all European groups and may have even predated Christianity. Additional types of witchcraft, proposed by Christina Larner's "Witchcraft Past and Present," are compact and sabbath. Compact witchcraft crosses the line between black and white witchcraft in that it does not matter whether it is used for healing or harming. The only requirement needed for witchcraft to be classified as compact is the presence of a pact with Satan to gain their power. Sabbath witchcraft could be viewed as an extension of compact witchcraft in that it also requires a pact with Satan, but sabbath witchcraft requires the gathering of witches at meetings to pay homage to the Devil. In short, sabbath witchcraft occurs when witches make a pact as a group. This widespread

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<sup>7</sup> George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1956) 23-33. Brian P. Levack and Christina Larner, "Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe," in *Articles on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: A Twelve Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles, vol.3* (New York: Garland, 1992), 81-82.

<sup>8</sup> Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 5; Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 39; Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 6.

certainty of harmful supernatural forces allowed witchcraft prosecutions to begin because without this inherent suspicion, witch hunts would have been inconceivable.<sup>9</sup>

The subject of witch trials has fascinated historians and common people for centuries. The gap between colonists' expectations and the New World they actually found sparked the occurrence of witch hunts in colonial New England during the seventeenth century. In the case of New England, the world they found and the systems they struggled to implement increased colonists' anxieties which led to the trying and executing of individuals marked innocent by today's standards. This thesis works to reinterpret and bridge the gap between two well-developed historiographies of witchcraft. Although historians tend to study witchcraft in the Old World and in New England separately and differently, they are closely related. Witchcraft in the Old World changed and evolved into what we recognize as witchcraft in New England. They provide a continuous narrative. Before the witch trials of colonial New England can be explored, it is necessary to uncover the political, social, and religious structures of Europe and the ways in which they encountered and tried to extinguish supernatural forces because the colonists brought these ideas with them to the New World.

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<sup>9</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 24; Levack and Lerner, "Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe," 81; Brian P. Levack and Christina Lerner, "Witchcraft Past and Present," in *Articles on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: A Twelve Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles, vol.3* (New York: Garland, 1992), 358.

## Chapter 1- What They Knew: England and Continental Europe's Influence on the Colonist Mindset

England and Continental Europe executed thousands of individuals for witchcraft during the early-modern period spanning from about 1450 to 1750, though the treatment of witchcraft in England and on the Continent proved different.<sup>10</sup> On the European Continent the fear of witchcraft filtered down through society from the top with clear definitions being spread by the Church. England on the other hand experienced fear of witchcraft from popular culture of the time rather than through the Church. Anglo-Saxons through to the Elizabethan Age held a common belief that witches had the ability to drive people mad either by casting a spell or inflicting a demon upon them.<sup>11</sup> This belief in the existence of outside forces was apparent in political processes, publications, social interactions, religious practices, and ideas about the natural world, all of which the emigrants would carry with them to New England.

### **Legal Acts, Political Processes, and Prominent Publications**

The political processes of the Old World as a whole were not overly concerned with witchcraft, though this changed during heightened times of paranoia, as seen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Witchcraft Statute of Henry VIII, called "The Bill against conjurations of witchcrafts and sorcery and enchantments," became the earliest English statute concerning witchcraft when it passed in 1542. This statute's legal emphasis was upon *maleficium*. Under this law, acts of witchcraft through

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<sup>10</sup> Brian P. Levack, *The Witch hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1987) 1.

<sup>11</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 124.

invocation, conjugation, or sorcery used to harm others became punishable by death.<sup>12</sup>

Once King Edward VI repealed this act in 1547, any legal action taken against witchcraft fell under ecclesiastical control until Elizabethan law partially revived the Witchcraft Statute of Henry VIII in 1563.<sup>13</sup>

The most noticeable modification to this early statute came in the form of a shift in English understanding of witchcraft toward ideas held by Continental Europe. For example, the updated act added consultation with evil spirits— with or without *maleficium*— to the definition of the felony of witchcraft. It also differentiated between *maleficium* resulting in death and *maleficium* resulting in harm to human bodies or property, the latter receiving a lesser punishment. This shift towards sharing the Continental understanding of witchcraft in England moved further with an additional statute passed under King James VI/I in 1604, titled “An Act against conjuration witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits,” which included Continental definitions as well as increased penalties for *maleficium*. Under this statute, consulting with evil spirits was expanded to include those who would “consult, covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewarde any evil and wicked spirit for any intent or purpose.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984) 12.

<sup>13</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 205.

<sup>14</sup> Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts*, 12.

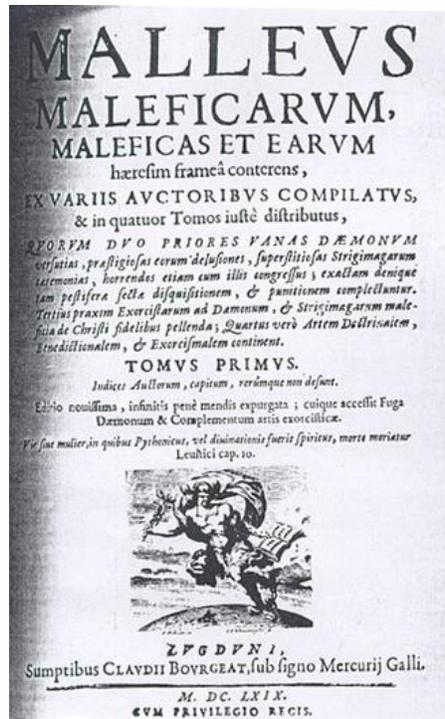


Figure 2: Title page from the 1669 Lyons edition

The first migration wave to North America in the early seventeenth century took place as the witch hunts in Europe reached new heights, though witchcraft had been a concern for centuries before this point.<sup>15</sup> Witch hunts in Europe became commonplace in the mid-fifteenth century, possibly spurred by the publication of the first comprehensive book on witchcraft, the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, written and completed by two German inquisitors, came after Pope Innocent VIII issued a public decree, known as a papal bull, titled *Summis desiderantes affectibus* in 1484.<sup>16</sup> This book's title translates to "The Hammer of Witches" and gives instructions for how to find and interrogate witches, however, it served as a synthesis

<sup>15</sup> John Demos, *The Enemy Within: 2,000 Years of Witch hunting in the Western World* (New York: Viking, 2008) 81.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) 177-180.

rather than a completely new idea.<sup>17</sup> This book, used by Protestants and Catholics across Europe, sold more copies than any other book except the Bible from the time of its publication until 1678. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum* there were three conditions required for the occurrence of witchcraft: “the evil intentions of the witch, the assistance of the devil, and the permission of God.” Under the *Malleus*’ influence, the act of inquisition became key to discovering acts of heresy as well as magical practices. Most of the *Malleus*’ success can be attributed to the fact that it focused less on the accused and more on the accusers and prosecutors through its discussion of inquisitorial procedures.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the *Malleus Maleficarum*’s popularity across Europe, the first English translation was not published until 1584, the same year as another work on witchcraft, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scot. *Discoverie* became the first major work on witchcraft published during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and was significant in terms of its declarations and findings.<sup>19</sup> In this work Scot declared that witchcraft could not and did not exist, a declaration unusual at a time where nearly everyone believed in witchcraft and the supernatural to some degree. When combined, the *Malleus Maleficarum* and *Discoverie of Witchcraft* helped ideas from Continental Europe spread to England, and by extension, the New England colonies.<sup>20</sup> These two documents remain leading primary sources in witchcraft scholarship.

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<sup>17</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 233.

<sup>18</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 233.

<sup>19</sup> Weismann, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th Century Massachusetts*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> The *Malleus Maleficarum* is available to read online for free at, <http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/table-of-contents/> or is published in Kors and Peters’ *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: a documentary history*, 180-229. The *Discoverie of Witchcraft* is available to read online for free through Project Gutenberg or in Kors and Peters’ *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: a documentary history*, 394-401.

One additional text regarding witch hunts came from an unexpected source, King James VI/I. King James VI/I engaged with witch hunts in both Scotland and England when he became King despite the fact that previous rulers and the General Assembly did not see witchcraft as a major issue, though it was still illegal. While living in Scotland, King James desired to add to the intellectual conversation surrounding witchcraft in Europe and wrote *Daemonologie* in 1597.<sup>21</sup>

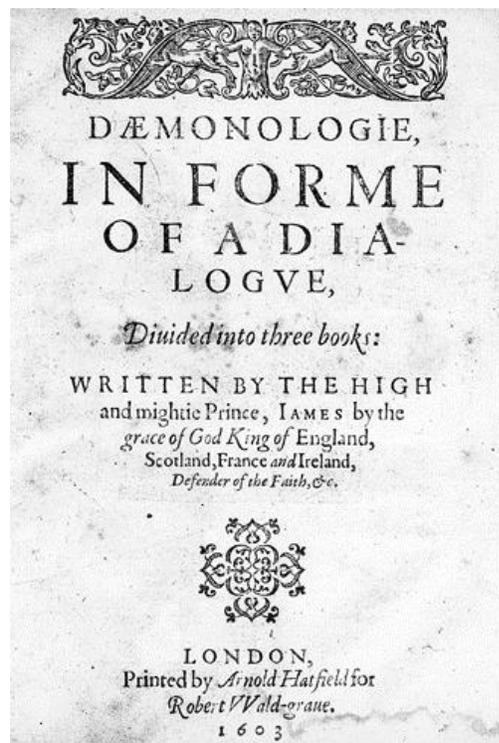


Figure 3: Title page from 1603 reprinting

After he became King of England in 1603, James VI/I abandoned his near obsession with witchcraft because he recognized the English as being more civilized than the Scots, though witch hunts still occurred. These texts contributed to the world the English colonists left behind when they moved to the New World. The distribution of

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<sup>21</sup> King James's *Daemonologie* is available to read online for free through Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25929/25929-pdf.pdf>

these publications on witchcraft, made possible by the printing press, made witch scares possible even in regions that were not typically prone to witch hunting.<sup>22</sup> For a fuller list of major works discussing witchcraft, see Appendix A.

### **Society and Gender**

The profiling of witches in the seventeenth century followed the traditional English model, which then travelled with the English colonists across the Atlantic when they settled New England. Under this model, accused witches were typically female, of middle-age, had low social and economic status, possessed negative reputations, and were likely of a healing profession among other traits, though these were not necessarily exclusive characteristics. The female gendering of witchcraft accusations in Europe and in colonial New England has led to a female focused historiography, but men were also important historical actors in the narrative.<sup>23</sup>

Women in Europe were particularly vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. In fact, roughly two-thirds of those accused of witchcraft from 1300 to 1500 were women.<sup>24</sup> In *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, Barbara Rosen states “More women than men were called witches because witchcraft deals predominantly with the concerns of women and their world was a much more closed and mysterious society to men in the fifteenth century than it is now.” A prominent example of this is the process of

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<sup>22</sup> Levack and Lerner, “Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe,” 84.

<sup>23</sup> For scholarship on witchcraft and gender, see: Erika Gasser, *Vexed with Devils: Manhood and Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Richard Godbeer, “‘Your Wife Will Be Your Biggest Accuser’: Reinforcing Codes of Manhood at New England Witch Trials,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 15, no. 3 (2017): 474-504; Clive Holmes, “Women: Witnesses and Witches,” *Past and Present* 140, no. 1 (1993): 45-78; Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987); E. J. Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” *History Workshop Journal* 60, no. 1 (January 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Brian P. Levack, Alan Anderson, and Raymond Gordon, “Witchcraft and the Status of Women--the Case of England,” in *Witchcraft, Women, and Society* (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), 28.

pregnancy and childbirth in which little was known about the physical changes a woman's body underwent.<sup>25</sup> Communities were inherently suspicious of women who birthed malformed infants, something that continued through to the witch hunts in seventeenth-century New England.

Like much else, the image of witches in England and Continental Europe varied. As mentioned, English witches were generally poor women with negative reputations within their communities. English witches worked alone rather than in a group and only met the Devil in his guise of a vagrant or animal, which contributes to the idea of "familiar spirits" in the form of animals. At this time, the concept of familiars was uncommon and was not typically found on the European Continent or in the Bible. Witches used animals, like toads, as ingredients for substances to cause death or disease, though in these instances the animals served as tools and not necessarily as animal familiars. Officials used the existence of a witch's familiar as damning evidence of guilt. An additional difference between witches on the European Continent and England was that witches on the Continent held no control over anything. They were a slave to the Devil and were expected to submit completely. English witches, in contrast, entered into something resembling a bargain with the Devil.<sup>26</sup>

## **Religion**

Religion held a place in the witch trials of Old England and Continental Europe and would continue to hold this place during the witch trials of colonial New England. A key aspect of this prominence was the belief in providence. Providence was the belief

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<sup>25</sup> Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* (Amhurst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991) 8.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, 29-31, 51.

that God ultimately influenced the movement of peoples as a predetermined end. This idea took many different forms, including safe travel, good weather, successful harvests, and the defeat of enemies.<sup>27</sup> The concept of the supernatural and demonology in general was inconceivable without reference in religious texts and values.<sup>28</sup>

Christians at this time believed God was the first and main cause for events but that the stars had the ability to incline man's will. By implying that the stars had some form of influence, even though they could not specifically compel individuals to act a certain way or perform certain tasks, medieval Christians avoided the belief-based conflict of science and moral responsibility informed by religious teachings.<sup>29</sup> Although it is not considered a subset of witchcraft, the English government viewed prophecy as being closely allied with witchcraft, meaning they considered it of equal concern because they believed that those who practiced witchcraft could take on a prophetic role with only a moment's notice. These acts were concerning because the English government feared witches would attempt to cause harm to the king while prophets might foresee the time of the king's death.<sup>30</sup>

However, not everyone in this time period believed that the Devil, or witches, controlled things like illness or weather patterns. Scot's *The Discoveries of Witchcraft* is one example. Scot was a Member of Parliament and a non-believer. He contended that many believed "that neighbor haile nor snowe, thunder nor lightening, raine nor

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<sup>27</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 26-30.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 437.

<sup>29</sup> B. S. Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979) 17.

<sup>30</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 226.

tempestuous winds come from the heavens at the commandment of God: but are raised by the cunning and power of witches and conjures; insomuch as a clap of thunder, or a gale of wind is no sooner heard, but either they run to ring bells, or crime out to burne witches.”<sup>31</sup> As the argument against the Devil’s role in creating storms rose in prevalence, common thought shifted to believe that God sent these storms to punish communities for their sins.<sup>32</sup>

Religion in England underwent several changes beginning in the early sixteenth century. The country began the century as devout followers of Roman Catholicism with close connections to the international Roman Catholic Church but ended the century as a follower of their own independent Protestant Church. The English Reformation was largely driven by political factors, namely that King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife, Katherine of Aragon. Edward VI, Henry VIII’s son with his third wife, became king upon his father’s death, and his reign saw the beginnings of church reforms, including the publication of an English Prayer Book. Mary Tudor, Henry VIII’s oldest child and daughter with Katherine of Aragon, became Queen of England after her half-brother’s death in 1553 and sought to return England to the Pope’s jurisdiction and reintroduced old heresy laws. Mary’s reign was short lived and her half-sister Elizabeth, Henry VIII’s only surviving child with Anne Boleyn, assumed the throne in 1558 and returned the country to the Protestant faith. Elizabeth I’s long reign stabilized the country and secured its future as a Protestant country.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 158.

<sup>32</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 161.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Doran and Christopher Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People: The Church and Religion in England, 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1-4.

The beginning of the Stuart dynasty in 1603 did not destabilize the country and James VI/I, a Calvinist, continued and consolidated ecclesiastical policies that were already in motion. The religious climate in England remained relatively balanced and peaceful as King James maintained tolerance towards both Catholics and Protestants. James VI/I's son Charles, who ascended the throne in 1625, proved less tolerant than his father, supported an anti-Calvinist or Laudian approach, and sought religious reform without much compromise. King Charles's desire to promote his reform began when he appointed William Laud as archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, helping to consolidate the Laudian control over the Church of England. The English Civil War emerged in the early 1640s in part due to this strict religious control and resulted in the execution of King Charles as a traitor. Presbyterianism emerged from this unrest as a competing Church for the English people.<sup>34</sup>

Religious freedom was high in the following years. A minority of English men and women began attending congregations of Independents, Baptists, and Quakers following the Act for the Relief of Peaceable People in 1650, which removed the obligation of attending local parish churches on Sundays. However, a majority of English still continued to attend their local parish churches and practicing Catholics could often attend mass without harassment if they were discrete. The return of the English monarchy under Charles II in 1660 ended this religious freedom as he reinstated compulsory state Church. The 1670s and 1680s saw the imprisonment of nonconformists, like Presbyterians, Baptists, and Quakers, but the government could not fully eradicate them. The Act of Toleration in 1689, passed by James II, returned

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<sup>34</sup> Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, 4-5.

religious rights to alternative religious groups and by the eighteenth century there was no longer a national church in England despite the Church of England's prominence.<sup>35</sup>

In the early-modern period, Puritanism, a form of Calvinism that became dominant in the New England colonies, is difficult to define, though it has a pair of clear characteristics including, intense spirituality and a rejection of many Church of England liturgical and ceremonial practices. Puritanism also possessed a belief in double predestination resulting in patterns of self-examination and introspection in the form of written thoughts in diaries, memoirs, and spiritual account books. One of the most prominent dividing factors between Puritans and other English Protestants was the Puritan upholding of the Bible as the sole source of moral truth. English Protestants accepted doctrines and practices within the Church of England that were not mentioned in the Bible while Puritans rejected these non-scriptural doctrines. Puritanism reached across social, political, and economic spectrums, meaning that it did not reflect the interests of a sole group or development.<sup>36</sup>

The religious evolutions England experienced from 1500 to 1700 informed the upbringings and adult lives of the colonists in New England and the ways in which they interacted with politics, society, and the natural world. Puritanism in particular impacted the ways in which neighbors interacted with each other. Moral and immoral behaviors and lifestyles concerned Puritan communities and Puritan officials sometimes used their positions to punish those who stepped out of line. Conflicts between Puritans and their

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<sup>35</sup> Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, 97-99.

ungodly neighbors occurred at home in England as well as in the New England colonies.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Natural World**

To understand New Englanders' relationship with the natural world and climate more broadly, we must examine the climatic conditions of Old England and Continental Europe in the centuries leading up to the age of exploration through the years of England's early colonies. In England specifically there were famines in 1272, 1277, 1283, 1292, and 1311, but this reflected what happened in mainland Europe from the late thirteenth into the early fourteenth century.<sup>38</sup> The agricultural disruptions created community and region wide upsets and malnutrition. In the same decade the Salem Witch Trials plagued New England, western Europe experienced one of its coldest decades on record.<sup>39</sup> A series of cold winters and summers from the late 1680s through to 1692 led to back-to-back poor harvest seasons. Unpredictable weather patterns continued into the eighteenth century with alternating dry winters and mild winters with wet and dry summers.<sup>40</sup> These climatic shifts had disastrous effects, especially in England, in the form of food shortages despite seventeenth-century agricultural innovations.<sup>41</sup>

The use of astrology was one way people in the early-modern era attempted to make sense of famines, colder-than-normal weather patterns and other conditions of nature. In fact, the earliest religions and forms of magic functioned in part out of this

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<sup>37</sup> Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Jean M. Grove, *The Little Ice Age* (London: Routledge, 1990) 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Grove, *The Little Ice Age*, 417.

<sup>40</sup> Brian M. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History 1300-1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) 132.

<sup>41</sup> Fagan, *The Little Ice Age*, 138.

desire to maintain, control, and understand the world and the way it operated.<sup>42</sup>

Because people during this time believed that the planets, stars, and objects on Earth were all closely connected, the planets and terrestrial elements became associated with parts of humoral theory, under which water was associated with phlegm, earth with melancholy, air with blood, and fire with cholera. This merged the science of astronomy with astrology, medicine, and agriculture. This is because people in the early-modern era divided astrology into two subsets: natural and judicial. Natural astrology was the branch that influenced agriculture and medicine while judicial astrology involved predictions and advice giving. From these two branches come many other sectors of astrology.<sup>43</sup>

It was not just the common people who possessed these ideas about astrology and the natural world. Across European courts in the late medieval and early-modern eras monarchs and nobles alike sought guidance, healing, and predictions from astrologer-physicians. At English court, Kings Henry VI, Edward IV, Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Queens Mary I, and Elizabeth I all had favored astrologers, showing that the possession of astrological beliefs was conventional across the era and across dynasties, though its uses were not necessarily overwhelming present.<sup>44</sup>

### **European Witch Hunts**

The European witch hunts did not follow a pattern of geographical or chronological distribution as shown in Brian Levack's *The Witch hunt in Early-modern Europe*. In terms of chronology Levack states, "A gradual increase in the number of

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<sup>42</sup> Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500-1800*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500-1800*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500-1800*, 18-19.

prosecutions during the fifteenth century was followed by a slight reduction in the early sixteenth century, a dramatic increase in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and finally a gradual decline in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>45</sup> By the time the New England witch hunts occurred, the Old World's efforts had been reduced, suggesting a delay in information transmission from England to its colonies.

In *European Witch Trials*, Richard Kieckhefer outlines four stages of witch hunting for the period of 1300-1500. In the first stage, from 1300 to 1330, witch trials were slightly more detectable than before 1300, but were still low in number and occurred in France, England, and Germany. Most prevalent in these trials were the political motives behind charges, a characteristic that appears again in Scottish witch trials at the end of the fifteenth century, the most notable being when King James III executed several witches in 1479 to add to the charge that his brother, the Earl of Mar, was conspiring to kill the king through the assistance of witches. However, this instance appears as a one-off in the historical record and did not inspire additional witch hunting.<sup>46</sup>

The second period of witch hunting, from 1330 to 1375, was not particularly active and once again nearly all trials on record occurred in France, Germany, England, and Italy. The period from 1375 to 1435 accounts for Kieckhefer's third period of witch hunting. This period saw an increase in the number of witchcraft cases, particularly those dealing with diabolism. The hotspots of these cases were France, Germany,

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<sup>45</sup> Levack, *The Witch hunt in Early-Modern Europe*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Levack and Larner, "Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe," 53.

Switzerland, and Italy. The final period of witch hunting occurred from 1435 to 1500. It is these cases that set the precedent for outbreaks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The years between 1435 and 1500 saw an additional increase in prosecution rates and the hotspots were once again located in France, Germany, and Switzerland.<sup>47</sup>

More widespread panic ensued as Europe saw witch hunts across Europe in the 1560s, most notably in Brandenburg, Württemberg, Baden, Bavaria, Mecklenburg, France, England, Switzerland, Transylvania, and Scotland.<sup>48</sup> European witch hunts reached their peak between 1580 and 1650.<sup>49</sup> These widespread instances of witch hunting continued into the seventeenth century with one of these notable hunts taking place in Bamberg and Wurzburg, two small territories a few miles apart that were in what is now Germany. These two witch hunts provide an example of how widespread the panic over witches could become as about 450 people were accused of witchcraft in Bamberg between 1626 and 1630. An additional European witch hunt during the seventeenth century took place in Loudun, located in France. This example shows that no one was safe from witchcraft accusations and prosecutions. Even Urbain Grandier, a Catholic Priest, fell victim to accusations of placing a convent of nuns under demonic possession in 1634. As punishment, Grandier was burned alive on August 18, 1634.<sup>50</sup> This period of time was devastating for European society as they underwent economic stagnation, periods of bad weather accompanied by crop failures, as well as the threat of plague.<sup>51</sup> These instances of witch panic were completely anxiety and fear driven.

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<sup>47</sup> Levack and Lerner, "Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe," 83-84.

<sup>48</sup> Levack and Lerner, "Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe," 84-85.

<sup>49</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 3; Robert Rapley, *Witch Hunts: From Salem to Guantanamo Bay* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007) 8.

<sup>50</sup> Rapley, *Witch Hunts: From Salem to Guantanamo Bay*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> Rapley, *Witch Hunts: From Salem to Guantanamo Bay*, 8-9.

Following these instances, witch hunts in the eighteenth century were not common and rarely led to execution. The last legal execution of a witch occurred in Switzerland in 1782, and the final execution, taking place in Poland five years after the death penalty for witchcraft was abolished, was in 1793.<sup>52</sup>

Although Old England maintained some form of ideological independence from Continental Europe, the continent would have still influenced the English, and by extension, the English colonists in New England. Witchcraft trials of the Old World inspired those of New England in the second half of the seventeenth century. For example, the process of swimming a witch, a tactic used in New England as well as Europe, as part of a trial (*judicium aquae frigidae*) has origins to an old Germanic rite. Under the swimming test, officials led supposed witches to a body of water where they were then bound and thrown in to see if they floated on the water rather than sinking. Floating signaled guilt to authorities. Originally a pagan ritual, swimming a witch was later introduced into Christian practice and used water for baptism to test if the pure water would reject the accused, marking them as guilty. The same concept is present in England, as mentioned in the Laws of Æthelstan (ca. AD 930) and of Æthelred (ca. 1000), the Laws of William the Conqueror (ca. 1100), the Assize of Clarendon (1166), the Assize of Northampton (1176), and the borough charters of 1194 and 1207, though in these instances officials used the swimming test for crimes like adultery, theft, and homicide in addition to witchcraft. The Gauls also had a similar test they performed on

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<sup>52</sup> Levack and Lerner, "Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe," 86.

newborn children in which they would observe if a child could float on the Rhine to prove legitimacy.<sup>53</sup>



Figure 4: "The witch swims!" Illustration from Montague Summers' *The Discovery of Witches: A Study of Master Matthew Hopkins, Commonly Call'd Witch Flinder Generall*, Published by Cayme Press, London, 1928.

Methods for executing witches varied geographically. For example, many of the individuals tried and executed for witchcraft in the early-modern period in Continental Europe were burned at the stake. This contrasts with both Old England and New England witch trials in which those found guilty of witchcraft were hanged, which was also the punishment for other felons. Hanging during this time did not follow our contemporary understandings or design of breaking the guilty party's neck. Rather,

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<sup>53</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 232-233.

hanging at this time was an act of slow strangulation. The practice of burning versus hanging was argued based on the heretical versus felonious nature of the crime in secular courts. Secular courts gained jurisdiction over the crime of witchcraft on the grounds that it involved *maleficium*, though the punishment of burning at the stake reflects a more heretical nature. The burning of heretics comes from scripture but is also part of a mythological purification ritual associated with fire.<sup>54</sup>

Just like the forms of execution for witches varied geographically, so did the practices of the execution. For example, individuals executed for witchcraft in the territories of Spain and Italy were burned alive, however this was not the case across Europe. While witches in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Scotland were certainly burned at the stake, they were typically strangled before death by fire ensued. Drowning was also employed in some instances, as was beheading. The reason behind burning a witch even after an execution was to ensure the witch could not return from the dead using magic. England, on the other hand, tended to dole out noncapital sentences in trials. Punishments like imprisonment and banishment were common in England but were also present in places where death sentences became common. However, banishments were not necessarily a sign that secular courts were acting leniently in the battle against witchcraft.<sup>55</sup>

When compared to some secular courts in Europe, where confessions of guilt equaled conviction and execution, the court at Salem during the 1692 witch trials did prove to be exceptionally lenient through their refusal to execute individuals who

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<sup>54</sup> Levack, *The Witch hunt in Early-Modern Europe*, 1, 82-83.

<sup>55</sup> Levack, *The Witch hunt in Early-Modern Europe*, 82-84.

confessed to witchcraft. Despite this leniency, it was Spain that proved to be the most lenient through their use of ecclesiastical justice in which a witchcraft confession often led to reconciliation with the Catholic Church, ensuring that only those who were unrepentant would suffer.<sup>56</sup>

## **Conclusion**

These common beliefs of astrology mixing with agriculture, medicine, and religion, as well as politics and societal rules and expectations would have been present in the upbringings of earliest colonists, making these beliefs travel from the Old World to the New World. Witchcraft paranoia in England and Continental Europe had calmed down by the early to mid-seventeenth century, making what was to come for the New England colonies at the end of the seventeenth century seem so out of place in comparison. By the time the witch trials of colonial New England took place, particularly by the time the mania took hold of Salem in Massachusetts, England had grown more concerned with the visible, rather than the invisible world.<sup>57</sup> This was not the only delay in cultural and knowledge diffusion across the Atlantic Ocean, but it was one of the most shocking and dangerous for the individuals living through it. Historian Michael Bailey attributes the end of witch hunting in Europe to two types of skepticism: "First, authorities became concerned about the means by which trials were conducted and the validity of the convictions obtained...Later, acting on a more fully developed skepticism that had been present since the late sixteenth century but was only widely accepted in the later seventeenth, authorities began to modify or repeal the legislation against

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<sup>56</sup> Levack, *The Witch hunt in Early-Modern Europe*, 82-84.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997) 4-5.

witchcraft.”<sup>58</sup> Because witch hunts had largely ceased by the time these legislative repeals occurred, it is clear they served as newfound denials in the existence of witchcraft as a crime rather than an effort to end witch hunting altogether. Although Bailey’s observations look to explain the changing situation in Europe, the growing skepticism surrounding the validity of witchcraft convictions and trials can certainly be seen in the New England witch trials of the seventeenth century as well.

With these findings in mind, it is important to discuss the problem with studying and examining the witch trials of the Medieval and Early-modern periods. Historians of witchcraft believed until the mid-1970s that there were two waves of widespread witch trials in Europe. The first of these waves, believed to have taken place in the fourteenth century, concerned areas in France and Italy while the second wave spread across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Germany, France, Switzerland, and Scotland. Norman Cohn’s *Europe’s Inner Demons*, published in 1975, is responsible for the overturning of contemporary understandings of witch trials. This work found that the fourteenth-century witch trials, in which more than 600 individuals were executed, existed in the historical record due to a series of forgeries from the fifteenth, sixteenth, and nineteenth centuries which inflated the number of actual trials. This finding also appears in Richard Kieckhefer’s *European Witch Trials*, published the year after Cohn’s work.<sup>59</sup> This discovery certainly impacts the connection between European witch trials and the later trials occurring in New England by reducing the number of trials to draw upon for evidence. However, these forgeries do not fully diminish the historical value of

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<sup>58</sup> Michael David Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 173.

<sup>59</sup> Levack and Lerner, “Crimen Exceptum? The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe,” 82-84.

the European witch trials that occurred in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries because they can still be used to indicate the popular understandings of the crime of witchcraft at the time.

## Chapter 2- An Unfamiliar and Unexpected World

The political, religious, and social cultures of colonial New England were indicative of its relationship to Old England, but these beliefs and connections did not always translate directly across the Atlantic. As a result, New England colonists sought scapegoats for disease outbreaks, health mishaps, and natural phenomena by accusing their acquaintances and neighbors of being under the influence of the Devil. To them, witches provided a reasonable explanation. However, colonists were not equally susceptible to accusations of witchcraft. Those involved in healing professions risked being accused as well. Those tried and convicted of witchcraft for causing disease or bodily harm, whether they were healers or normal civilians, were wrongfully accused, punished, and sometimes executed during times of heightened anxieties.

The frequency of witchcraft accusations rose and fell with political and social anxieties driven by the colonists' insecurity concerning their new landscape and its uncontrollable aspects. Historian Richard Godbeer maintained three reasons this insecurity spawned witchcraft accusations: "the inability to explain or control illness and other forms of misfortune, a deeply embedded belief in supernatural forces that could be used to inflict harm, and the densely personal nature of human interactions."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Godbeer, "How Could They Believe That?': Explaining to Students Why Accusations of Witchcraft Made Good Sense in Seventeenth-Century New England," *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 4 (January 2003), 28-31.

These three factors are easily applicable to the witch hunts in New England, and Old England in some cases.

Upon their arrival in New England, colonists encountered an entirely different natural world than the one they knew in England. At the same time, they experienced naturally cooler temperatures associated with what we now recognize as the Maunder Minimum. The Maunder Minimum was a period defined by reduced solar activity resulting in the lower-than-average temperatures associated with the Little Ice Age. Because there was no scientific way of tracking or mapping weather or climate patterns, one immediate misunderstanding for the English colonists was the belief that weather and climate were constant across lines of latitude. For example, the English believed the climate of Virginia should be comparable to that of southern Spain. After an initial period of high death rates, settlement failures, and disappointment in their failure to produce the commodities associated with hot climates, the English colonists were forced to accept that the eastern mainland of North America was colder in winter, spring and fall than anticipated, though it proved just as hot in the summer.<sup>61</sup> Colonists in the early colonial era were forced to shift their understandings of what the New World was and should have been.

### **Legal Acts and Political Processes**

The statutes of Massachusetts Bay in 1641 and Connecticut in 1642 were not as informative about the crime of witchcraft or its definitions as statutes from Old England. The Province of New Hampshire was under the governance of Massachusetts Bay Colony until 1680. These statutes took their derivation from the Old Testament, which

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<sup>61</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period," *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 5 (1982) 1262.

stated “if any man or woman be a witch (that is hath or consulted with a familiar spirit) They shall be put to death.” The statutes of New England would have undoubtedly used biblical language regardless due to the colonists’ reliance on Mosaic law to handle capital offenses. There were no legislative directives given to the colonists for how to dole out punishments in witchcraft trials, which proves the lack of specificity that came with early colonial legislation. In terms of the Salem Witch Trials in 1692, the arrival of an English trained public attorney was the only reason a number of indictments referred directly to the King James VI/I statute. Understanding the construction of beliefs surrounding witchcraft in seventeenth-century New England is complicated by the Anglo-American failure to merge secular and theological ideas surrounding the problem of witchcraft, like Continental Europe accomplished.<sup>62</sup>

Colonial New England adapted its laws against witchcraft from the laws of Old England and Europe, as was the case for all English, though not all European, colonies.<sup>63</sup> For example, the 1642 law against witchcraft passed in colonial Connecticut stated, “If any man or woman be a witch (that is) hath or consulted with a familiar spirit, they shall be put to death. Ex: 22.18: Lev: 20.27: Deu: 18.10,11.”<sup>64</sup> Laws against witchcraft, as evidenced by Connecticut’s law, used references from the Bible to justify such harsh punishments. Like Connecticut, Massachusetts used the same biblical rationale in their law and punishment for witchcraft, one of their twelve capital offenses published in their 1648 collection of statutes titled, *The Book of the General Lawes and*

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<sup>62</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 42; Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts*, 12-14.

<sup>63</sup> Alison Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012) 46.

<sup>64</sup> *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, from April 1636 to October 1776* (Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1850-1890), v. 1, 77; Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 129.

*Libertyes Concerning the Inhabitants of Massachusetts*. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the colonies were primed to deal with the issue of witchcraft.<sup>65</sup>

The stories of witch hunts in England certainly had an impact on the mindset of the New England colonists. In England there were over two hundred witch executions between 1645 and 1647, the same year the English colonists executed their first witch, Alice Young, in Connecticut.<sup>66</sup> These tensions continued to build throughout the 1640s, 1650s, and 1660s, leading to the Hartford Witch Panic of 1662. What made the panic so disastrous was the colony's governor, John Winthrop Jr., was away in England obtaining Connecticut's colonial charter. This meant there were no senior colony authorities present to maintain control and quash the widespread panic. Rather, it was the deputy governor, along with religious leaders, who took the opportunity to exacerbate the witch hunts in the brief moment they were the lead authorities.

After these initial years of panic within Connecticut, witchcraft paranoia spread to the colonies of Maryland, New Hampshire, New Haven (which joined with Connecticut in 1664 after political pressure from England), Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, and the Carolinas. Across the colonies, governors and magistrates began to question whether executing witches was the best way to maintain control of their communities and their fear of the Devil and his minions. The execution rates from 1647 to 1662 aligned with those in England from 1637 to 1647, but the English rates fell well below

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<sup>65</sup> Frederick C. Drake, "Witchcraft in the American Colonies, 1647-62," *American Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1968) 711.

<sup>66</sup> Drake, "Witchcraft in the American Colonies, 1647-62," 712.

that of New England in the 1660s, which further represents Old England's influence over its colonies.<sup>67</sup>

The political atmosphere colonists left behind in England, in addition to the beliefs and legal practices colonists brought with them, sparked the witch hunts in the New England colonies when the colonists faced new uncertainties.<sup>68</sup> There is a distinct pattern one can follow between trends in Old England and the same trend emerging in New England in the following decades. Colonies relied on strong leadership to contain fears and superstitions. When level-headed leaders were absent for an extended period of time, like Connecticut in 1662, panic took control with disastrous consequences as evidenced by the Hartford Witch Panic.

Conflict with and fear of the Native Americans also contributed to the increased anxiety felt by the early colonists of New England, which was something they could not have anticipated when coming from England. For example, when King Philip's War broke out in 1675, the Plymouth colonists turned their attention to fighting the Wampanoag tribe in a race war and war over land. In the four years colonists fought in King Philip's War, colonial authorities only indicted one witch, suggesting the willingness of colonists to abandon their fear of one thing, witchcraft, for another, Native Americans, only to return to witchcraft accusations when the disruption passed. After the war concluded in 1678, witch hunts picked up again and there were about a dozen witchcraft cases within the initial five years after the war in Massachusetts alone.<sup>69</sup> In

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<sup>67</sup> Drake, "Witchcraft in the American Colonies, 1647-62," 722-24.

<sup>68</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 81-82.

<sup>69</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 116; Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 45.

addition to being a physical threat, Native Americans proved to be a cultural threat as described by John Canup in, "Cotton Mather and 'Criolian Degeneracy.'" For example, Canup states "Just as the English colonists felt the need to guard against contamination from their physical surroundings, they were also conscious of the danger of cultural contamination through over-intimate contact with the native human environment. Consequently, full Americanization came to imply Indianization."<sup>70</sup> This proves how intersectional the colonists perceived New World threats to be.

The continued stressor and crisis of imperial authority came to a head in the 1680s and resulted in some undesirable events, like the revocation of the charter of Massachusetts Bay Colony and the establishment, and subsequent demise of, the Dominion of New England.<sup>71</sup> In addition to this reordering of colonial charters, events taking place in 1688 across England and Continental Europe, like the War of League of Augsburg in which England and France were on opposing sides, and King James II's removal from the English throne, were further complicating matters for the English colonies. News of King James II replacement by his daughter Mary and her husband, a Protestant prince from the Netherlands, William of Orange, reached the English colonies in 1689 at which time the colonists took it upon themselves to imprison royal governor Edmund Andros in an attempt to reestablish the original charter government of Massachusetts, which had been revoked years before. While these events unfolded in the colonies, influential colony leaders Increase Mather and Samuel Sewall pled for

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<sup>70</sup> John Canup, "Cotton Mather and 'Criolian Degeneracy,'" *Early American Literature* 24, no. 1, (1989), 23.

<sup>71</sup> John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1982) 384.

their old charter in England. The year 1689 also saw a war between the English and French over control of North America and the fur trade on the New England frontier, known as King William's War.<sup>72</sup>

The witch hunts and their subsequent trials took place in the middle of a legal procession realignment as the world began its shift away from an early-modern to a modern mindset. In modern, current court cases, superstitions and folk beliefs are prevented through the implementation of strict rules that judges, jurors, and other individuals involved must adhere to. This was not the case during the seventeenth-century witch trials, which is in part why the situation at Salem in 1692 spun out of colonial authority control.<sup>73</sup>

The legal system in colonial New England collided with religion when Puritan ministers participated in the witch trials, convictions, and executions. For example, some, though certainly not most, accused witches were subjected to trials by water. This form of trial, brought from Europe, emphasized the belief that if the accused had in fact rejected their Christian baptism by consorting with the Devil, the water would reject their body and they would float to the top. If they were innocent, their bodies would sink to the bottom. Officials did not take trials by water as complete proof of a person's guilt but often used the results as evidence in more formal court trials.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a legal history*, 147.

<sup>73</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, vii.

<sup>74</sup> Walter W Woodward, "New England's Other Witch hunt: The Hartford Witch hunt of the 1660s and Changing Patterns in Witchcraft Prosecution," *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 4 (2003), 17.

## Society and Gender

Because colonial New England in the seventeenth century was so sparsely populated, there was next to no communication between villages and settlements.<sup>75</sup> This meant that community concerns often stayed isolated to one specific town or small grouping of towns rather than spreading throughout the region. These small populations relied heavily on each individual to fulfill their assigned role or they would face disastrous consequences in the form of witch trials in the decades to come.

Like elsewhere, men and women in colonial New England had very well-defined roles to perform. Puritans viewed these roles as essential to maintaining strict order over society and maintaining the natural order of things.<sup>76</sup> New Englanders brought with them preconceived notions of gender and how that played a role in witch hunts from the Old World. Eighty to ninety percent of witchcraft accusations in Anglo-America were women.<sup>77</sup> Family experience also had influence over who was accused of witchcraft and who was doing the accusing. Accused witch Alice Young, for example, had only one child, under the average for this time period. While it is not necessarily believed that this contributed to her accusation and subsequent execution, it is possible that her smaller than average family, combined with the other profile characteristics she related to, placed her outside of the general societal standards for a respectable wife and led to her accusation of witchcraft. Family life became even more relevant when a person lacked one. Communities identified women who did not have close male relatives as

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<sup>75</sup> Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft with an Account of Salem Village and a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects* (Boston: Wiggin and Lunt, 1867) 10.

<sup>76</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 34.

<sup>77</sup> Gasser, *Vexed with Devils*, 3.

bothersome, especially if they were the inheritors of land, making them social targets.<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Godman was one of these women. As a widow during the mid-seventeenth century, Godman lived in the house of the deputy governor of New Haven Colony, Stephen Goodyear. The usual suspicions of causing illness, or death, to people and animals, having magical abilities, and not being a member of the church all applied to Godman.<sup>79</sup>

In New England society, women served a vital role in preserving what Puritans believed was the natural order of things, procreation.<sup>80</sup> But not all births fit into this perceived natural order. Some women gave birth to “monsters.”<sup>81</sup> New England Puritan leaders, like leaders in the Old World, believed women who gave birth to malformed infants exhibited direct judgements from God that they had intimate relations with Satan.<sup>82</sup> However, not everyone in New England society saw these births as being a sign of God’s disfavor. Physicians, philosophers, and select clergy members committed themselves to looking for clear biophysical explanations. The female dominated crimes of illicit sexual behavior and infanticide frequently appeared as catalysts for witchcraft accusations and executions as well. One woman that was prosecuted for these crimes in 1650 was Alice Lake.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 41; Brian P. Levack and Clarke Garrett, “Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis,” in *Witchcraft, Women, and Society* (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), pp. 17-26.

<sup>79</sup> David D. Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History, 1638-1693* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991) 61.

<sup>80</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 34.

<sup>81</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 25.

<sup>82</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 28; Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 141.

Females were not the only victims of the seventeenth-century New England witch hunts; in fact, men accused of witchcraft faced their own set of stereotypes to overcome. Many historians argue that males accused of witchcraft were feminized at the time of their cases and that they are both feminized and underrepresented in scholarship today. The trend of feminizing male witches grew out of an attempt to insert males into a feminine historiography. These men, like some women, fell outside the social norm which made them targets for accusation. Other historians argue that men accused of witchcraft were not and did not need to be feminized by their communities. Instead, it was explained that some male witches had “excesses as well as deficiencies in manly qualities.”<sup>84</sup> In the seventeenth century, manhood was vital for maintaining control over both women and other men. While women needed to be controlled from a personal, social, and healing standpoint, men needed to be controlled in other ways. For example, technological advancements were one version of male “witchcraft” that colonial authorities wanted to be in charge of.<sup>85</sup>

It was not unusual for males to be accused of witchcraft if they had close familial ties to female witches because communities in colonial New England were much smaller and closely related when compared to communities involved in the witch hunts of Old England and Europe.<sup>86</sup> Despite the fact that males represent the minority of witchcraft accusations, the most complete accounts of male prosecutions survive from the English colonies between 1630 and 1692.<sup>87</sup> Because accused male witches usually

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<sup>84</sup> Gasser, *Vexed Witch Devils*, 11.

<sup>85</sup> Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 85.

<sup>86</sup> Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 60, 62; Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 78.

<sup>87</sup> Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 79.

had close familial connections to accused female witches, there are several instances where husbands and wives were accused of witchcraft at the same time, as we will see in the next chapter.

Like individuals accused of being witches, the witch accusers faced self-imposed stereotypes of their own. The profiles of accusers fell into three main categories: middle-aged women, men between the ages of twenty and forty, and teenage girls.<sup>88</sup> Most accusations happened in a “bottom-up” manner, meaning they typically came from neighbors rather than community authorities. In fact, New England colonists commonly believed that the prosecution of a witch was the responsibility of neighbors and community members rather than a judge and jury, though this did not always end up being the case.<sup>89</sup> In the case of middle-aged female accusers, the stages of life, such as menopause, were important factors fueling personal and social anxiety, which in turn led to accusations. These women saw witches as responsible for taking away the more desirable aspects of life, like health and reproduction. Male accusers were typically in the height of their familial responsibility years. Men from the ages of twenty to forty were marrying and starting their own families, establishing themselves as a productive member of their community, and proving themselves to be competent in every aspect needed to succeed in the seventeenth century.<sup>90</sup>

Teenage girls involved in witchcraft accusations were nearly always afflicted by “fits,” characterized by emotional and physical pains and outbursts.<sup>91</sup> These girls

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<sup>88</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 121-123.

<sup>89</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 370-373.

<sup>90</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 121-122; Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 41-42.

<sup>91</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 122-123.

performed fits by “swooning and fainting away, bitter tears, sobbing and complaining, saucy discourse, barking like a dog, bleating like a calf, purring like cats, roaring and shrieking and hallooing” among many other signs of distress.<sup>92</sup> Motivations behind witchcraft accusations included a sense of community, renewed religious fervor, and attention, in the case of some teenage girls.<sup>93</sup>

Gender in Old and New England was both implicit and explicit and remained crucial to the organization of society in terms of power and authority.<sup>94</sup> The English colonies, like much of the western world, had clear guidelines for men and women and expected everyone to function as respectable members of society by maintaining close family relationships and not deviating too far from society’s expectations and standards. Men and women of all ages, but usually of middle-age, proved vulnerable to suspicion by their neighbors and other community members, especially if they violated gender norms. Although individuals accused of witchcraft, and their accusers, took on a number of forms and came from various social backgrounds, a person’s gender, combined with characteristics like age and social class, helped ensure that no one was safe from the paranoia surrounding witchcraft in seventeenth-century New England.

## **Religion**

Colonists viewed everything that happened in New England during the seventeenth century, like droughts, poor harvests, bitterly cold winters, and shifting weather patterns in general, as either an act of God’s pleasure or displeasure, which

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<sup>92</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 122; For an account of Katherine Branch’s fits that spurred a witch hunt in Connecticut in 1692, see Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem: The Other Witch Hunt of 1692* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 13-32.

<sup>93</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 125.

<sup>94</sup> Gasser, *Vexed With Devils*, 104.

reflected the Old World view.<sup>95</sup> However, phenomena such as these could also be viewed as imposed by or consequences of witchcraft. Because New England colonists believed Satan's purpose was to test man's faith in God, witches provided a simple explanation for unfortunate events, one of which was shipwrecks. For example, in 1654, Katherine Grady was aboard a ship heading for Virginia when a storm nearly sank the ship just off the coast. Katherine's fellow passengers, ascribing to the Christian belief that Satan was testing their faith, became convinced that Katherine was to blame for the near travesty. The ship's captain believed the anxieties of the travelers and hanged Katherine for witchcraft.<sup>96</sup>

While witch hunts cannot be completely ascribed to religion, it remains a key factor. The challenges of linking religion and witchcraft come from the Old World's initial efforts to convert people from the old faith, where ideas of witchcraft and magic were more prevalent, to Christianity.<sup>97</sup> The rise of Christianity led to the image of witches as priestess for the Devil that Puritans, Anglicans, Pilgrims, and Catholics in New England would have been more familiar with. The religious and spiritual reasons behind witch hunting in seventeenth-century New England grew out of beliefs that people in the modern world no longer have. These religious beliefs fueled suspicions and informed the ways people in the English colonies viewed the world and people around them. In areas across New England, and Europe, accusations of witchcraft and possession followed periods of religious turmoil.<sup>98</sup> Most witchcraft cases, writings, and religious

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<sup>95</sup> Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Emerson W. Baker, "Winter, Weather, and Witches," *Oxford University Press Blog*, March 17, 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Ian Ferguson, *The Philosophy of Witchcraft*, (United Kingdom: G. G. Harrap & Company Limited, 1925), 35-36.

<sup>98</sup> Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 82.

sermons got published because the Puritans maintained control over printing, like many other aspects of society across New England.<sup>99</sup>

The Puritan Model, brought from England, was the dominant religious model in New England, but it also directly contributed to beliefs about gender. This model relied on the upholding of the five basic tenets. The first tenet being the existence of a Judgmental God who rewarded those who were good and punished the evil. The second tenet was Predestination, or the idea that God predetermined the salvation or damnation of a person. Depravity, or the remanence of the Original Sin, was the third tenet under which humans were tainted by the sins of Adam and Eve. Hard work and self-discipline were the only ways to achieve a good status. Providence, as defined earlier in this thesis, is tenet number four. God's Grace is the final tenet. This was the view that humans are inherently unworthy of receiving salvation and that repentance and salvation could only be obtained through the Grace of God.

Designed to make females dependents, the Puritan Model made women vulnerable to accusations when they lost close family members. Within this model, individuals believed females were tied to the Devil and males were tied to God, fueling the belief that women were more likely to perform evil acts. Women were sinful by nature while a man's sins existed in the form of bad habits, such as drinking and gambling.<sup>100</sup> This religious structure led to "good" women accusing "bad" women, or

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<sup>99</sup> Gasser, *Vexed With Devils*, 102-103. An example of this is Increase Mather's "An Essay For the Recording of Illustrious Providences (Better Known as "Remarkable Providences") written and published in 1684 and published again in George Lincoln Burr's *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959).

<sup>100</sup> Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 63-64; Elizabeth Reis, "The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England," *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 1 (1995), 15.

women without proper male authority figures, of doing the Devil's work through witchcraft.<sup>101</sup> Puritan ministers taught their communities according to the belief that the Devil weakened bodies to control their souls and that women's naturally weaker bodies made them more susceptible to negative influences than men.<sup>102</sup>

Individuals living in the seventeenth century, whether it be in colonial New England, England, or Continental Europe, including ministers, magistrates, and ordinary townspeople, had a real belief and fear in and of the supernatural.<sup>103</sup> Unlike Africans and Native Americans, European and Anglo-American Christians believed in the Devil as a singular entity and the focus of all the world's evil. The idea of witches communing with the Devil did not translate outside of Christianity, though it was a common belief across cultures that disease or other misfortunes might come from witchcraft<sup>104</sup> and that fortune-telling as a form of witchcraft could be explained by the religious belief in predestination.<sup>105</sup>

The initial role of Puritan ministers in New England as supernatural anxieties began to increase was to simply preach sermons to their congregations regarding the suspected threats. One such sermon was Reverend Cotton Mather's "A Discourse on Witchcraft," delivered at Boston in 1689 in which Mather argued for the existence of witchcraft by stating,

There are especially Two Demonstrations that evince the Being of the Infernal mysterious thing. First. We have the Testimony of Scripture for it. We find Witchcrafts often mentioned, sometimes by

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<sup>101</sup> Isaac Reed, "Why Salem Made Sense: Culture, Gender, and the Puritan Persecution of Witchcraft," *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2007), 210-211.

<sup>102</sup> Reis, "The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England," 25.

<sup>103</sup> Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 53.

<sup>104</sup> Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 18.

<sup>105</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 100-101.

way of Assertion, sometimes by way of Allusion, in the Oracles of God. Besides that, We have there the History of diverse Witches in these infallible and inspired Writings... Secondly. We have the Testimony of Experience for it... We see those things done, that it is impossible any Disease or any Deceit should procure. We see some hideous Wretches in hideous Horrors confessing, That they did the Mischiefs.<sup>106</sup>

Even though community members believed it was the responsibility of neighbors to lead witch hunts, Puritan ministers also involved themselves in the legal process in a number of different ways. One way was through healing. A common belief held by people during this time was that if healers were unable to cure diseases brought about by a bewitching, ministers could. This was particularly true in the case of curing what they believed at the time to be demonic possessions. In some instances, charms bridged the gap between witchcraft and healing through the use of scripture or healing by touch.<sup>107</sup> This idea of healing through religion was a legacy from early beliefs that illness of the body meant one had been visited by the Devil.

Record keeping was an additional way religious leaders involved themselves in witch hunts. The earliest witch hunts and trials were not well documented, though some well-known New England ministers, like Increase and Cotton Mather, tried to create records of the more prominent early cases in the hopes that it would help provide context for the witch hunts occurring in the 1690s. By 1692 there was a collection of witch trial documentation in the English colonies that did not exist at the time of the

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<sup>106</sup> This sermon was later circulated as part of Mather's *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*; Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: a documentary history*, 367-370.

<sup>107</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 102.

earliest witch hunts and executions, meaning fear and experience handling witches increased.<sup>108</sup>

During the witch trials themselves, colonists thought of witchcraft confessions to be a sort of religious act. These confessions grew more complicated by strict Puritan culture and beliefs in what proper religious individuals were meant to do. In seventeenth-century New England, Puritans viewed even general sins, like greed and discontent, as denunciations of God, though many times these confessions did not truly mean someone denounced their religion or practiced witchcraft as we might think of it today. These women would not have necessarily followed contemporary imaginings of witches as old hags that live in the woods and brew potions in massive cauldrons that one might see in movies today. Instead, they would have looked like ordinary women, usually at least middle-aged for the time. There are many instances of individuals growing upset with neighbors for refusing to sell them various goods, often animal products, or the animals themselves. In rare cases, individuals confessed to having familiarity with the Devil and offered up stories of meeting with other women in the woods to have meetings or communicating through animal familiars, which were animals seen as being agents of the Devil.<sup>109</sup>

Before the Salem Witch Trials in 1692 only four people confessed their guilt of witchcraft. Because some of these confessions proved to be torture-induced, the motive behind the confession becomes clouded. The religious and legal culture of colonial New

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<sup>108</sup> Drake, "Witchcraft in the American Colonies, 1647-62," 724.

<sup>109</sup> Information on an individual's [Rebecca Greensmith] questioning can be found in Increase Mather's "An Essay For the Recording of Illustrious Providences (Better Known as "Remarkable Providences")" written and published in 1684, and published again in George Lincoln Burr's 1914 book, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706*.

England was greatly responsible for any true confessions in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>110</sup> Magistrates faced three challenges when overseeing late seventeenth-century witchcraft trials: first, to make sure they themselves understood the grounds for convicting a witch to avoid the confusion that accompanied many earlier trials; second, to make sure the jury knew and abided by these regulations; and lastly, to avoid being pressured by their community into convicting a witch. Court officials and town residents did not always have the same opinions for when a conviction should take place.<sup>111</sup> For example, during the 1662-63 Hartford Witch Panic, only four of the eleven individuals indicted were convicted. An additional example comes from Connecticut in 1692 when court officials overseeing the trials of those accused of bewitching Katherine Branch did not necessarily view her allegations or evidence as reliable because they thought the demons afflicting her influenced her information.<sup>112</sup>

Politics and religious beliefs influenced conflicts between early New England colonists and local Native American tribes. For example, colonists viewed King Philip's War as part of the larger cosmic struggle of good versus evil. As historian Mark Fiege shared in *Republic of Nature*, "God, they said, had stirred up the Indians-- "those perfect children of the Devil"-- in order to punish the colonists for their sins: too much drinking and swearing, too much tolerance of Quakers, too much pride and willingness to pursue material gain at the expense of God's ways."<sup>113</sup> According to colonists, Native Americans provided a direct challenge from Satan.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 63-65.

<sup>111</sup> Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 53, 68-69.

<sup>112</sup> Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 55-57.

<sup>113</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 45.

<sup>114</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 33-34.

Puritan beliefs built upon pre-existing ideas concerning the way gender was meant to function to create a society where no one was safe from the danger of witches and their connection to the Devil. Religious beliefs brought to the New World from the Old World influenced the ways people in colonial America interacted with each other and the perceived supernatural. Church authorities played a crucial role in New England witch hunts through their opinions and interpretations of the actions of community members. Beliefs about God and what could be considered a sin led to witchcraft confessions even if individuals were not intentionally harming anyone in their community.

### **The Natural World and Its Uses**

In addition to the information brought from the Old World, Puritan beliefs influenced the way English colonists interacted with their new land and the ways they used their new land and its natural resources for healing ailments and medicine, as well as currency. Because Puritans imposed a strict social hierarchy, the way they controlled their new surroundings tied their spiritual purpose to the taming of the landscape.<sup>115</sup> It was also during this time the Puritan ministers noticed a decrease in church attendance and they looked down upon the colonists who placed more effort into obtaining natural resources, like fish, fur, wool, lumber, grain, hay, and meat, than to the spiritual well-being of themselves, and by extension, the colony. This was because colonists needed these New World resources to pay for their voyages across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>116</sup>

Directly tied to medical practices and the natural world, Humoral Theory and the concept of the “harms” are crucial to understanding what informed the thoughts and

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<sup>115</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 27.

<sup>116</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 30, 40.

opinions of New Englanders during the witch trials of the seventeenth century. As previously mentioned, outbreaks of measles and smallpox epidemics in the late 1680s took control of regions in New England, like Massachusetts and Connecticut, resulting in witchcraft accusations and persecutions becoming more infrequent as these “harms” took over.<sup>117</sup>

An additional potential source of harm came to women who served as healers or midwives as they became vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. Married women, known as “goodwives” in this time period, were expected to have a general knowledge of folk medicine, which was not always less than the typical healer. However, the bewitchings occurring in places across New England were not something the average goodwife could treat. Continuing traditional healing practices from the Old World, one common medical treatment used to cure a variety of disorders in the New World, including bewitching, was bloodletting. Bloodletting was thought to balance the four humors—blood, phlegm, cholera, and melancholy—through the purging of excess fluid, which in this case was blood.<sup>118</sup> The more specialized a healer was when administering remedies, the more suspicious people grew about their motives and knowledge. The more unfamiliar people were with healing techniques and remedies the more the line between healing and harming became blurred.<sup>119</sup> This line increased New Englanders’ fear, particularly because the diseases thought to be induced by witchcraft could affect a person’s mind and body.<sup>120</sup> Because this fear ran so high, it is unsurprising that

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<sup>117</sup> Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 384.

<sup>118</sup> Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 18. This example comes from Godbeer’s discussion of the attempts to cure Katherine Branch in Stamford, Connecticut, which would have been typical.

<sup>119</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 119-120.

<sup>120</sup> Christian Deetjen, “Witchcraft and Medicine,” *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 2, no. 3 (May 1934), 166.

communities sought scapegoats for epidemic outbreaks. New Englanders in the seventeenth century believed that all medical afflictions were brought about by an external source, though not necessarily in the way we would think of it today. They believed illnesses were punishments from God for their sins, this meant health professionals at the time collaborated with religious officials to aid in physical and spiritual healing when required.<sup>121</sup>

Another way female healers, as well as other female members of the community, participated in witchcraft accusations was by being responsible for searching accused bodies for marks from the Devil during witchcraft trials. One of the most prominent examples of physical evidence of witchcraft came from the execution of Goodwife Knapp in Fairfield, Connecticut in 1653. After officials cut her body down from the gallows, a group of women flocked to her body “looking for the marks of a witch upon her body.” A large debate ensued after an examination of Goodwife Knapp’s breasts in which no one could agree if they marked the executed as a witch or not. The process of lactation created a strange paradox that no one knew how to explain. On the one hand, women believed that witches could intervene in lactation by making the act difficult, or by stopping it all together. On the other hand, witches were said to have creatures under their own care and were responsible for feeding them like they would an infant.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Gevitz, “The Devil Hath Laughed at the Physicians,” 10.

<sup>122</sup> Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 180-181.

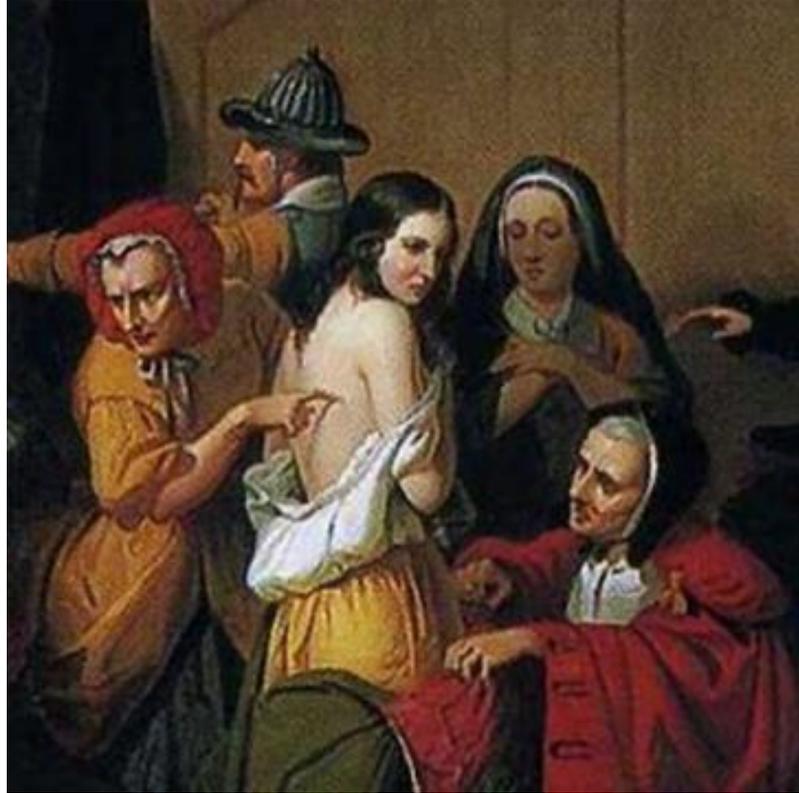


Figure 5: Close up of *Examination of a Witch*, by Thompkins Matteson, 1853.

The necessary searching of a body, whether the accused was alive or not, provided the evidence colonists believed they needed to make informed decisions about whether or not to convict a witch. The examining of bodies appeared during the Salem Witch Trials in 1692, as evidenced by Samuel Sewall's diary entry dated April 11, 1692, in which he stated, "Went to Salem, where, in the Meeting-house, the persons accused of Witchcraft were examined; was a very great Assembly; etwas awfull to see how the afflicted persons were agitated. Mr. Noyes prayid at the beginning, and Mr. Higginson concluded."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Samuel Sewall and Milton Halsey Thomas, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729.*, vol. 1 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 289.

The three warring views regarding the involvement of witches in illness, sudden madness, or “fits,” were medical diagnosis held by professionals of the time, the view of theologians, and the view of common people. During witch hunts, it was the common people who had the most influence because paranoia could not take over unless they were actively seeking answers. One key difference between the views of theologians and the common people was the theologians’ tendency to favor the notion of possession or obsession over true witchcraft though this idea gets complicated when trying to differentiate between prayers and spells. Common people on the other hand favored blaming witches, and there was always someone on the fringe of society available for suspicions to be placed upon.<sup>124</sup>

Agriculture and animal husbandry was an incredible source of anxiety for New Englanders and neighbors commonly accused each other of harming their animals or ruining crops, though this alleged harm needed to happen more than once for an accusation to be taken seriously enough to go to trial.<sup>125</sup> After some difficulty learning how to farm in the New World, agriculture became vital to New England’s economy by the late seventeenth century. After these initial periods of difficulty, colonists eventually relied on publications, like the 1712 *Husband-Man’s Guide*, for remedies and guidance. This source provides detailed instructions for animal husbandry and agriculture techniques, medical remedies for men, women, children, and animals, and arithmetic rules. Under the first part of this source, titled “*The Country-Man’s Guide To good Husbandry, with Monthly Observations for Planting and Sowing, very useful for every*

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<sup>124</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 3, 124, 145-146.

<sup>125</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 32-33.

*Man that desires to know or practise any thing that concerns his Profit or Advantage,”* we get a monthly breakdown of when is best to care for trees, roots, and other plants. For example, in the June instructions it states that “Now is the time to begin to inoculate Trees. Lay hay, weeds and such like trash at the roots of new planted trees, to keep the *earth* about them moist...At the full Moon this Month and next, gather your herbs to keep dry all the year.”<sup>126</sup> This more specialized knowledge spread through communities relatively easily.

English colonists desired order and maintained a hierarchical relationship with land. Any disruptions to this order became evidence of demonic forces at work.<sup>127</sup> According to John Winthrop, people had a civil and natural right to land.<sup>128</sup> Preparing New England’s land, which was covered by wilderness, for cultivation took years. As described in Upham’s work *Salem Witchcraft: with an account from Salem Village*, “A long lapse of years must intervene, after the woods have been felled and their dried trunks and branches brand, before the stumps can be extracted, the land levelled, the stones removed, the ploughing introduced, or the smooth green field, which give such beauty to agricultural scenes, be presented.”<sup>129</sup> As a result of the belief that colonists had a civil and natural right to land, the ecological stress on pastures and fields increased as more people began moving to and raising livestock in the English colonies. Land suitable for growing crops was filled and colonists, owning a large number of sheep, goats, horses, pigs, and cattle, outstripped the natural hay supply with overcrowding their pastures. This became even more of an issue as animals started to

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<sup>126</sup> *Husband-Man’s Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, 1712), 9.

<sup>127</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 28.

<sup>128</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 31.

<sup>129</sup> Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: with an account from Salem Village*, 29.

wander onto Indian land.<sup>130</sup> New England colonists followed the English view that livestock were property and wild animals, like deer, were available to anyone for hunting while Native Americans did not define living animals as property, neutral meetings for negotiations became impossible. New England colonists viewed practices of animal husbandry as the final stage in their efforts to Anglicize Native Americans.<sup>131</sup>

One of the most devastating and anxiety-inducing factors impacting New England colonists came from harvest blights, like the one that plagued Connecticut's wheat in the 1660s. This blight eventually spread to destroy all grain crops.<sup>132</sup> By the 1680s, many of the agriculture towns in Massachusetts that once produced crop surpluses no longer did so. This forced Massachusetts to become a net importer of cereal crops when it had once exported foodstuffs. Despite the clear weather and other natural impacts, New Englanders during this time still believed that witchcraft was the reason crops failed and soil was made barren. In the minds of New Englanders, witches could have been involved in two ways: creating storms and hail or producing vermin.<sup>133</sup> Analogies for witchcraft and storms have been used to prove the connection between the two events. For example, Reverend Cotton Mather used the phrases "inextricable storm" and "inexplicable storms from the invisible world" to describe the mass paranoia overtaking Salem.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 27-30

<sup>131</sup> Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 42.

<sup>132</sup> Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 374

<sup>133</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 171-172

<sup>134</sup> Cotton Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather, 1681-1724*, (Boston: The Society, 191112), 216.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044013643143&view=1up&seq=260&skin=2021&q1=inextricable%20storm>

Like the Salem Witch Trials in 1692, the Hartford Witch hunt, which took place in 1662 and continued into 1663, also occurred during a period of extreme weather. Connecticut's winter of 1661-1662 was very snowy and preceded "a very great drought" in the summer months. The next winter was much like the previous one, with snow cover from January to March followed by a wheat blight beginning in the summer of 1663. This blight nearly destroyed the entire harvest. As mentioned, the longest Solar Minimum on record, the Maunder Minimum, lasted from 1645 through 1715, and corresponded with the famous Little Ice Age, a time of bitterly cold winters in the Earth's northern hemisphere.<sup>135</sup> The weather patterns in colonial New England during the Little Ice Age produced anxieties for the colonists. During this time period, snow cover lasted longer into the spring months than it does now despite there being lower snow lines.<sup>136</sup> Temperature as a factor in the overall climate had the greatest biological impact. The unfamiliar climate of New England combined with the effects of the Little Ice Age certainly had physiological impacts, but also had impacts on transportation and major weather patterns, like ocean currents and hurricanes.<sup>137</sup>

New Englanders blamed accidental mishaps like fires, drowning, destruction of life or property by lightning, unintended shootings, and ships lost at sea on witchcraft. For example, one instance in which someone assumed guilt for a shipping incident occurred during the Salem witch hunt. Eleven years after a sailor's ship was "met with such a violent storm that we lost our main mast and rigging and lost fifteen horses," Mary

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<sup>135</sup> Grove, *The Little Ice Age*, 4; Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: how climate made history*, 47-48. The term "little ice age" was first used by Matthes in 1939 in a piece of scientific literature, but the term has since grown to be used by geographers, geologists, climatologists, and historians to describe the climate from roughly 1550 to 1800.

<sup>136</sup> Grove, *The Little Ice Age*, 380.

<sup>137</sup> Grove, *The Little Ice Age*, 391.

Bradbury was blamed for the incident. The case of Mary Bradbury proves how driven by anxiety and the need to explain the unexplainable accusations of witchcraft and the court proceedings and those involved had become. At the time of her accusation, Mary Bradbury was seventy years old and she and her husband, Captain Thomas Bradbury, were well-respected, leading citizens of Salisbury, Massachusetts.<sup>138</sup>

As evidenced through the beliefs of the English, the merging of astronomy and astrology concepts with medicine and agriculture was a common practice and can be seen in New England through the 1712 *Husband-Man's Guide*. In addition to traditional husbandry guidance outlined in the first part of this source, we see information regarding what types of medicines, remedies, or curative substances, called “physicks,” could or should be used at different points of the year, in part based off of astronomy and the humours. For example, according to the February entry in the first part of the guide, “If necessity urge you may let blood, but be sparing in physick till *March* and *April*,” whereas in April, “Now purge & bleed, you that need; for the use of Physick is yet very seasonable, the Pores of the body being open...best time to remove and prevent Causes of sickness. Let blood these two Months [March and April] the Moon being in *Cancer*, *Acquary*, or *Taurus*, but held to be extreame perilous for the *Moon* to be in that sign which ruleth the Member where the vein is opened.”<sup>139</sup> The rest of part one follows in much the same manner.

The second part of *The Husband-Man's Guide* of 1712, titled “*Choice Physical Receipts for the Cure of Diseases in Men, Women and Children*,” provides descriptions

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<sup>138</sup> Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 37.

<sup>139</sup> *Husband-Man's Guide*, 4-6.

of various ailments and their home remedies, most using things found in nature. Under this part we get remedies for things like consumption, plague, stomach aches, back aches, and bleeding. Because this edition of the *Husband-Man's Guide* was published just over a century after the initial establishment of the English colonies in the New World, it proves that the use of astronomy and astrology to understand and control the land were not fleeting ideals left over from English and mainland European influence. It also suggests that by the end of the seventeenth century, English colonists began to understand their surroundings more fully, making the witch hunts further evidence of extreme disruptions occurring in New England.

Animals played a particularly interesting role in periods of witch panic because they could either serve as victims or accomplices. They are also useful tools for understanding witchcraft in the early-modern period. Like people, animals are susceptible to disease and the natural elements.<sup>140</sup> Witches provided a possible explanation for animal illnesses or deaths. One of these witches was Elizabeth Morse in 1680. Morse, the supposed attacker of dozens of farm animals in her community,<sup>141</sup> received the death sentence on May 27, 1680, by the Grand Jury at the First Church of Boston. However, the Governor and Assistants granted Morse a reprieve on June 1 set to last until the next session of the Court in Boston. This decision was not a popular one as noted in this quote from Clerk William Torrey:

“The Deputies, on perusal of the Acts of the Honored Court of Assistants, relating to the woman condemned for witchcraft, do not understand the reason why the sentence, given against her by said Court, is not executed: and the second reprieve seems to us beyond what the law will allow, and do therefore drudge meet to

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<sup>140</sup> Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 53.

<sup>141</sup> Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 140.

declare ourselves against it, with reference to the concurrence of the honored magistrates hereto.”<sup>142</sup>

Additionally, animals served as a witches’ familiars. One recorded instance of an accused witch using a familiar comes from the examination of Sarah Carrier in 1692. In this examination, Sarah confided to the magistrates that her mother, Martha Carrier, forced her to become a witch at six years old and that her mother appeared to her as a black cat. The document detailing the examination states:

Q: How did you afflict folks?

A: I pinched them, and she said she had no puppets, but she went to them that she afflicted. Being asked whether she went in her body or her spirit, she said in her spirit. She said her mother carried her thither to afflict.

Q: How did your mother carry you when she was in prison?

A: She came like a black cat.

Q: How did you know that it was your mother?

A: The cat told me so that she was my mother. She said she afflicted Phelp’s child last Saturday, and Elizabeth Johnson joined with her to do it. She had a wooden spear, about as long as her finger, of Elizabeth Johnson, and she had it of the devil. She would not own that she had ever been at the witch meeting at the village. This is the substance.<sup>143</sup>

Sarah’s mother Martha was hanged for witchcraft a week later.

## **Conclusion**

Colonists faced the task of establishing communities that were safe, prosperous, religious, and politically stable all while overcoming additional challenges brought about by ingrained misunderstandings about the New World. The harsh reality of what colonists found when they arrived at New England in the seventeenth century set them

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<sup>142</sup> Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: with an account of Salem Village*, 449-450.

<sup>143</sup> “The American Yawp Reader: A Documentary Companion to the American Yawp, Volume 1” (Stanford University Press), 45. <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/wp-content/uploads/The-American-Yawp-Reader-Vol-1-Fall-2020.pdf>.

on a path to trying and executing individuals for witchcraft across Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts in an attempt to explain and justify hardships brought about by their inexperience, mispreparation, and incompatible ideas brought from the Old World.

### **Chapter 3- Not Very Neighborly: The New England Witch Trials as the Culmination of New World Exacerbated Anxieties**

Contrary to popular belief, the early New England colonists were not obsessed with witchcraft. Rather, the colonists desperately needed to manipulate their new and unfamiliar natural world, leading them to impose strict controls and hierarchical systems reminiscent of England anywhere they could. A key piece of evidence that supports this argument resides with two New England Puritan ministers, Increase Mather and Cotton Mather. Combined, this father and son duo wrote and published more than five hundred works though only a handful of these works discuss the topic of witchcraft and were all published during times of heightened anxieties. While some of these works were written and used during the New England witch trials, the fact that there are only a few on the topic suggests that witchcraft was not an “obsession” but rather a means to explain challenges within the local communities. The New World disrupted the colonists’ Old World expectations of how ideas about politics, society, religion, and the natural world should function when they arrived in New England during the seventeenth century. The culmination of this incompatibility was witch hunts. There is no better example proving historian William Cronon’s statement that “human groups often have significantly *unstable* interactions with their environments”<sup>144</sup> than the New England witch trials in seventeenth-century Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

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<sup>144</sup> Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 13.

Although witch hunts occurred across New England, no two witch hunts were the same. As historian Richard Godbeer discusses in *Escaping Salem*, “the scale and intensity of hysteria” in the 1692 Salem Witch Trials have encouraged a stereotype of early New Englanders as “quick to accuse and condemn.” This, however, was not the case in Connecticut or New Hampshire.<sup>145</sup>

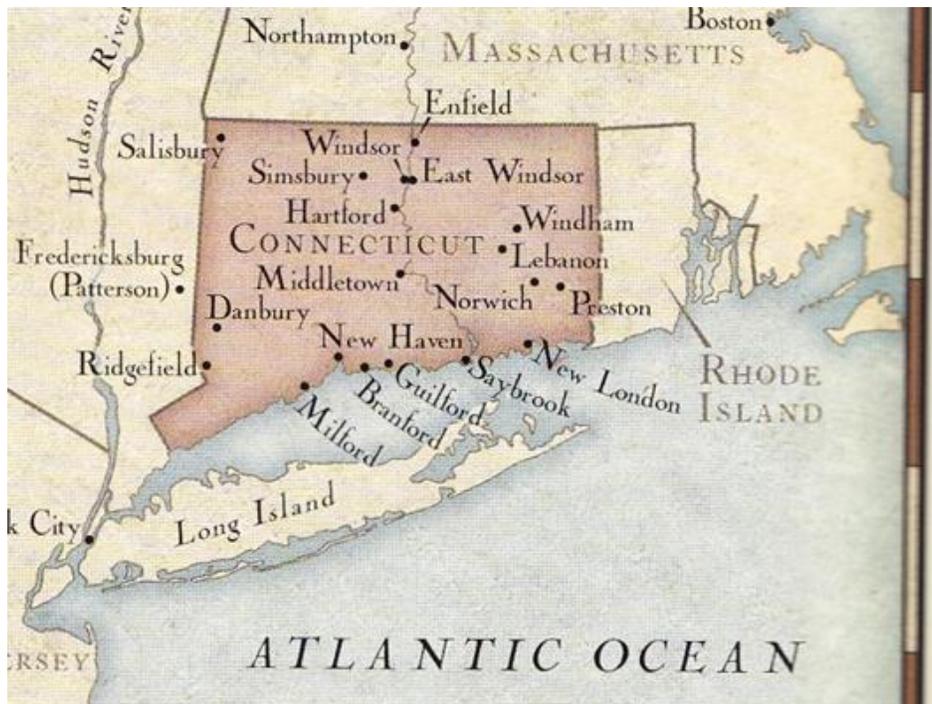
Since the New England communities were small in population and far away from each other, the concept of being neighbors was important. The responsibility that came with being neighbors in seventeenth-century New England exceeds our expectations of today. Neighbors in colonial New England certainly faced more challenges, and cases of property line disputes were abundant, with resources being a common spark in these disputes as colonists began creating borders along their properties. Additional community responsibilities came about when caring for and maintaining livestock because the colonists proved more successful than southern colonies in replicating English animal husbandry in which communal regulations were more specific. For example, because towns had more scarce resources than southern plantations, New England communities designated communal meadows to promote good husbandry practices. As Virginia Anderson states in *Creatures of Empire*, “People kept an eye not just on their neighbors, but on their neighbors’ cattle, horses, and hogs, in the interest of keeping good order in their communities.”<sup>146</sup> Community was important during times of witch trials because your neighbors could either condemn or condone your actions.

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<sup>145</sup> Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 8

<sup>146</sup> Anderson, *Creatures of Empire*, 142.

It is worth noting that in the following events, the colonial court records employ the old style of dating in which the new year began March 25, not in January. This style of dating was used until 1752. For the purposes of this work the years follow the new style of dating with the year changing in January.



*Figure 6: Map of Colonial Connecticut*

### **Connecticut Witch Hunts**

The timeline of events relating to anxieties of witchcraft in Connecticut is more difficult to piece together than that of the better-documented Salem. This is unexpected because the areas surrounding Hartford, Connecticut, were the sites of the first New England witch hunts, preceding the witch hunts in New Hampshire by a decade and Salem, Massachusetts by four decades. In total, seventeenth-century Connecticut saw forty-three witchcraft cases, sixteen of which ended in executions.

“One \_\_\_ of Windsor,” John Winthrop wrote, “arraigned & executed at Hartford for a witche.”<sup>147</sup> Alice Young was a wife and mother of unknown age when she arrived at the gallows. In Hartford, Connecticut, on May 26, 1647, Alse, as her name was recorded in some records, became the first person hanged for witchcraft in colonial America<sup>148</sup>, forty-five years before the famous Salem Witch Trials. After reviewing church burial records, some historians believe Alice served as a scapegoat for a local epidemic, a common provocation for witchcraft accusations in both in New England and in Europe. Alice’s husband John left their home in Windsor, Connecticut two years after his wife’s execution, something that was not unusual for families of accused and executed witches. John Young left behind no heir and no one claimed his estate when he died in April 1661. The couple’s daughter, Alice Young Beamon, who married in Windsor in 1654, gives a clue as to the age of her mother, who could not have been more than forty years old at the time of her execution. Alice Young Beamon was herself accused of witchcraft in the 1680s as a widow living in Springfield, Massachusetts. Although she was never found guilty, her accusation shows the danger of being related to a convicted witch as discussed in chapter two.<sup>149</sup> Several more Connecticut cases followed this first execution until the Hartford Witch Panic of 1662 culminated in twelve accusations and four executions. After this chaos, executions of accused witches were put to an end thanks to Governor John Winthrop Jr.’s regulations regarding the validity

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<sup>147</sup> John Winthrop et al., *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630-1649* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 687.

<sup>148</sup> James Kendall Hosmer, ed., *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England, 1630-1649, vol. 2* (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1908), 323; Matthew Grant, “Diary, 1637-1654,” (Connecticut State Library), 95; Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America*, 40.

<sup>149</sup> For more discussion of Alice Young’s case and her family, see: Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 505; Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 104; Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 21; John M Taylor, *The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut, 1647-1697* (Stratford, CT: J. Edmund Edwards, 1969), 35, 145-147, 156.

and reliability of evidence presented by accusers at trials<sup>150</sup>, at least until widespread panic resumed in 1692.

Mary Johnson, once believed to have been the first witch executed in New England, gained notoriety as the first person in the English colonies to confess to the crime of witchcraft in 1648.<sup>151</sup> As Cotton Mather wrote in *Magnalia Christi Americana*:

There was one *Mary Johnson* try'd at *Hertford* in this country, upon an indictment of *familiarity with the Devil*, and was found guilty thereof, chiefly upon her own confession. Her confession was attended with such convictive circumstances, that it could not be slighted... In the time of her *imprisonment*, the famous Mr. *Stone* was at great pains to promote her conversion from the *Devil to God*; and she was by the best observers judged very penitent, both before her execution and at it; and she went out of the world with comfortable hopes of *mercy* from God through the merit of our Savior.<sup>152</sup>

Two additional figures tried, convicted, and executed for witchcraft in colonial Connecticut were John and Joan Carrington. Nothing specific is known about the circumstances surrounding the couple's execution, but the records of their trial in Hartford on February 20, 1650, survive, stating,

John Carrington thou art indicted by the name of John Carrington of Wethersfield carpenter, that not having the fear of God before thine eyes thou hast entertained familiarity with Satan the great enemy of God and mankind and by his help hast done works about the course of nature for which

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<sup>150</sup> Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 53; Walter W Woodward, "New England's Other Witch hunt: The Hartford Witch hunt of the 1660s and Changing Patterns in Witchcraft Prosecution," *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 4 (2003), 17-18.

<sup>151</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 23.

<sup>152</sup> Cotton Mather and Thomas Parkhurst, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford: Roberts & Burr Printers, 1702), 396, available online through The Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/magnaliachristia00math>

both according to the law of God and of the established law  
of this commonwealth thou deservest to die.<sup>153</sup>

The indictment of Joan Carrington contains the same phrasing. The official jury  
indictment date of the Carringtons was March 6, 1650/51.<sup>154</sup>

New Haven Colony, which eventually joined Connecticut in 1664, saw several  
accused witches in the early 1650s. The first of which, Goodwife Bassett of Stratford,  
was executed in 1651. Goodwife Bassett's ability to induce anxieties surrounding  
witchcraft did not end with her executions, as she stated before her execution that there  
"was another witch in Fairfield." The link between Goodwife Bassett, Goodwife Knapp,  
and Mary Staples formed when Roger Ludlow, a neighbor of Mary Staples and her  
husband in Fairfield, Connecticut, stated that Mary had "'made a trade of lying' and was  
probably a witch." The connection tightened when Ludlow claimed that before Goodwife  
Knapp was executed for witchcraft in 1653, she told him Mary Staples was a witch.  
Community members viewed Mary Staples as a suspicious figure, though she had the  
support of Reverend John Davenport, who testified on her behalf as the leading minister  
in New Haven Colony. Despite not being convicted at the time of her initial accusation,  
the suspicion surrounding Mary Staples and her suspected involvement with witchcraft  
followed her for decades and she was indicted again for the crime in 1692, along with  
her daughter and granddaughter, though all of these cases ended with acquittals.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 27.

<sup>154</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 27.

<sup>155</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 74-86.

Elizabeth Godman, a prominent widow living in New Haven, Connecticut, was accused of witchcraft for the first time in May 1653. Mrs. Godman was not a community church member and the suspicions surrounding her were of a usual nature, being that she caused the death or illness of individuals and animals or that misfortune took hold of anyone who refused to aid her when requested. Elizabeth Godman appeared to have an unusual interest in witches and the court records concerning her are full of references to witchcraft. Godman became known as a repeat offender when she was once again accused of witchcraft in August 1654. After her first trial authorities sentenced Godman to time in jail while they merely reprimanded her at the end of her second trial. This trial ended with her being released for good behavior on January 1, 1655/56.<sup>156</sup>

The community of Windsor, Connecticut accused Lydia Gilbert of killing Henry Stiles, who was the victim of an accidental gunshot, on October 3, 1651, by using witchcraft. Initially, Stiles' death was blamed on Thomas Allyn, who was holding the gun, but Allyn's penalty was a fine. Nothing much is known about the decision to charge Lydia with the death of Henry Stiles in 1654, three years after the incident, but we know that the jury found her guilty, and it is highly likely she was executed.<sup>157</sup> This case exemplifies the tendency discussed in chapter two to blame accidents on the existence of witchcraft.

The "possession" of Ann Cole sparked the Hartford Witch Hunt, which took place from 1662-1665. At the time Cole was a woman living in Hartford who had become

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<sup>156</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 61-73.

<sup>157</sup> Hall. *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 88-89.

afflicted with strange fits characterized by outbursts about the Devil and speaking perfect Dutch with a Dutch accent, a language she did not know. To account for her believed demonic possession, Cole named Elizabeth Seager as the individual responsible for her torment, a woman who had been accused of witchcraft before. Neighbors gave their support for to this accusation and Ann Cole named Rebecca Greensmith as an additional guilty party.<sup>158</sup> In addition to Ann Cole, an eight-year-old girl named Elizabeth Kelly began accusing people in Hartford of witchcraft. Her first accusation fell upon Goodwife Ayres. Elizabeth Kelly's parents, John and Bethia, wrote a vivid description of the daughter's illness, which was fatal. After the initial accusation, officials questioned Goodwife Ayres and her husband about their involvement, and Rebecca Greensmith was blamed again.<sup>159</sup>

Nathaniel and Rebecca Greensmith were a married couple living in Connecticut when they became the subjects of these accusations. Rebecca maintained a poor reputation with the local minister and the Hartford community. Religious authorities described her as a "lewd and ignorant woman," making her a prime target for accusation and indicating that colonists were as invested in the actions of their neighbors and congregations in New England as they were in England.<sup>160</sup> The court indicted the couple in December of 1662. While imprisoned, Rebecca Greensmith confessed to having "familiarity with the devil" and implicated several individuals, including Elizabeth Seager, Goodwife Sanford, Goodwife Ayres, James Wakeley, the

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<sup>158</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 147-148. Ann Cole's possession was reported to Increase Mather by Hartford minister John Whiting.

<sup>159</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 147.

<sup>160</sup> Demos, *The Enemy Within*, 111; Drake, "Witchcraft in the American Colonies, 1647-62," 722.

wives of Peter Grant and Henry Palmer, and Judith Varlet, during her questioning by saying she met with them in the woods to commune with the Devil. Rebecca also implicated her husband Nathaniel, whom she claimed had odd abilities attributed to unnatural strength. Her confession led to the execution of four people and the fleeing of the Ayres and Judith Varlet from Hartford following the panic of 1662.<sup>161</sup> After the Greensmiths were hanged “the maid [Ann Cole] was well.”<sup>162</sup> We know from sources left by Increase Mather that two individuals were subjected to the swimming test during their trial and it is likely, though not explicitly known, that these two individuals were the Greensmiths.<sup>163</sup> The court tried Elizabeth Seager for adultery and witchcraft twice in 1663 and again for witchcraft during a separate trial in 1665. In this instance, Governor John Winthrop Jr. did not carry out her sentence.

### *The Stamford-Fairfield Witch Hunt*

Like Massachusetts, Connecticut also had a witch hunt that took place during 1692. These trials, located in the Stamford-Fairfield area of Connecticut, provide a typical example of witch hunts.<sup>164</sup> The witch trials in 1692 Connecticut began when seventeen-year-old Katherine Branch, servant of Daniel and Abigail Wescot, appeared to be in a potentially bewitched state. Starting in April of 1692, Katherine Branch began collapsing into convulsions and claiming that invisible creatures tormented her in addition to entering a trance-like state of paralysis, under which she saw women transforming into animal forms to attack. Stamford was a typical, orderly, and faithful Puritan community located in the southwest corner of New England, and its residents

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<sup>161</sup> Drake, “Witchcraft in the American Colonies, 1647-62,” 722.

<sup>162</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 358.

<sup>163</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 148.

<sup>164</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 315-354.

were not all immediately convinced that the young servant girl was bewitched. However, one individual who immediately believed the community was under attack by supernatural forces was Ebenezer Bishop, who was convinced that afflictions like that of Katherine Branch were the work of neighbors responding to arguments through the use of supernatural powers. The Wescots, Katherine's masters, were also early, though not immediate, believers that their servant was in a bewitched state and called upon the local midwife to uncover the cause of Katherine's fits. Despite the midwife's reassurances that Katherine's afflictions were natural in origin, the Wescots became convinced of supernatural forces working against them.<sup>165</sup>

Neighbors and community members alike visited the Wescots' home to see Katherine's fits for themselves. The occurrences witnessed by Stamford community members, such as "mysterious lights that entered and traveled through the house at night; the inexplicable appearance of bruises on Kate's body; the materialization of pins in her hand that Kate claimed were put there by witches; and, of course, the fits themselves," slowly turned the minds of townsfolk to the idea that witches walked among them.<sup>166</sup> Almost immediately suspicions fell upon Elizabeth Clawson, a resident of Stamford known for bring argumentative and spiteful. Katherine named Clawson as one of her tormentors along with Mercy Disborough, a resident of Fairfield, a town a few miles from Stamford. The community knew both Clawson and Disborough to quarrel with the Wescots, making Katherine's accusations more believable in the eyes of community members. Additional accusations followed, prompting Stamford residents to

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<sup>165</sup> Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 1-4; Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 315.

<sup>166</sup> Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 5.

question how many witches were in Connecticut, though only Clawson and Disborough went to trial because courts in Connecticut only allowed evidence from individuals that were not Katherine herself.<sup>167</sup>

An official examination of Katherine Branch's body, performed by Jonathan Selleck, an official of Stamford, took place on May 27, 1692. It was after this examination that the courts searched Clawson and Disborough for witch marks and the women proclaimed their innocence. The results of their body searches proved inconclusive to officials. On June 6, 1692, special court session met in Fairfield to further pursue the accusations against the two women. At this court session, Mercy Disborough voluntarily subjected herself to the ducking test, a slight variation of the swimming test mentioned earlier. She floated, which spurred on more support and for Katherine Branch in her tormented state, but still, not all community members were convinced of the accused's guilt. Branch also accused Goodwife Miller and Mary Staples, as well as Staples' daughter Mary Harvey and granddaughter Hannah Harvey.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 5-6, 9.

<sup>168</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 315-316.



Figure 7: *The Duckingstool* by Charles Stanley Reinhart, 1900

The question of what to do with the accused lingered in the minds of Stamford townsfolk as the witch hunt continued in September of 1692 when news arrived of girls and young women in a small town outside of Boston, named Salem, being afflicted with fits similar to those of Katherine Branch. Because there were no colonial newspapers at the time, letters and travelers slowly spread information from one end of New England to the other meaning that by the time word got to Stamford about the Salem Witch Trials, Massachusetts had already arrested, convicted, and executed accused individuals.<sup>169</sup> The grand jury of the court of oyer and terminer that met on September 14, 1692, indicted both Clawson and Disborough. They also declared there was sufficient evidence to try Marty Staples and the Harveys, though magistrates did not

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<sup>169</sup> Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 6-7.

follow through with this second trial. After reviewing the depositions collected, the jury was unable to reach a verdict, stating on October 13, 1692:

The governor having given an account how far they have proceeded against Elizabeth Clawson and Marcy Disborough by reason that the jury could not agree to make a verdict, this Court desire the governor to appoint time for the said court to meet again as soon as may be, and that the jury be called together and that they make a verdict upon the case and the court to put a final issue thereto.<sup>170</sup>

This resulted in a second search of the two accused women. Clawson proved innocent. Disborough was sentenced to die.<sup>171</sup>

Magistrates granted Disborough a reprieve just as locals began to question whether or not Katherine Branch was faking her fits in the name of inter-family tensions. The reprieve, however, did not reflect the magistrates and locals denying the possible existence of witchcraft, but rather only the procedure for convicting someone of the crime. The official explanation of the reprieve, published in Hall's *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, states:

First. The jury that brought her in guilty (which verdict was the ground of her condemnation) was not the same jury who were first charged with this prisoner's deliverance and who had it in charge many weeks...Secondly. We had a good account of the evidences given against her that none of them amounted to what Mr. Perkins, Mr. Bernard, and Mr. Mather with others state as sufficiently convictive of witchcraft... Namely first confession (this there was none of)[.] Secondly two good witnesses proving some art or arts done by the person which would not be but by help of the devil. This is the sum of what they center in as their books show [.]... These in brief are our reasons for reprieving this prisoner. May 12, 1693. Samuel Willis William Pitkin Nathaniel Stanley.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 347.

<sup>171</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 316, 347.

<sup>172</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 351.

Individuals also grew suspicious of the fact that no other individuals were afflicted in the way Branch was, which further separates this instance of witch hunting in Connecticut from the one occurring in Salem, Massachusetts.<sup>173</sup>



Figure 8: Map of New Hampshire

### New Hampshire Witch Hunts

Communities in New Hampshire also experienced anxieties regarding the existence of witches in the second half of the seventeenth century. The witchcraft cases of New Hampshire exemplify the broad range of suspicions and occurrences that could lead to witchcraft accusations in New England. In 1656 Jane Walford became the first

<sup>173</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 316.

woman in New Hampshire brought to court on suspicions of witchcraft. Not much is known about Jane Walford, but it is generally accepted that she and her husband, Thomas Walford, moved to New England in 1623 from Essex County, England. After almost a decade living in Charlestown, Massachusetts, the Walfords relocated to Portsmouth, New Hampshire after they were found to not fully share Puritan ideologies and sympathies.<sup>174</sup>

A complaint against Jane Walford was made by Susannah Trimmings after Walford visited Trimmings to request a pound of cotton. Trimmings refused and the account of her complaint states:

She said I had better have done it; that my sorrow was great already, and it should be greater—for I was going a great journey but should never come there. She then left me, and I was struck *as with a clap of fire* on the back, and she vanished toward the water side, in my apprehension in the *shape of a cat*. She had on her head a white linen hood tied under her chin, and her waistcoat and petticoat were red, with an old green apron and a black hat upon her head.<sup>175</sup>

Other community members shared stories of Walford appearing as an apparition and her own husband was said to have called her a witch. Jane Walford was seen by the Court of Associates in June 1656. Walford's case was dropped after the court failed to prove she was responsible for any community damages. Walford was accused of witchcraft again in 1669, but she took her accusers to court for slander, won the case, and escaped conviction.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 95.

<sup>175</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 95-96.

<sup>176</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 96-97.

According to historian Bruce Ingmire, landownership and healing played an interesting role in the case of Jane Walford. Walford's husband was a prosperous landowner in Portsmouth, an area where competition for land was high, and Jane inherited the land upon her husband's death in 1666. Because witchcraft was a capital punishment in New England, an accused witch lost rights to own land upon conviction. This meant neighbors and other community members could buy this forfeited land and further their own positions. Additionally, Jane Walford was said to have skills for healing, some of which she learned from Native American she befriended, further removing herself from the community's trust in her skills because she blurred the line between what they knew and what they did not know.<sup>177</sup>

Eunice Cole, a resident of Hampton, New Hampshire, was accused of witchcraft multiple times, but her initial accusation came in 1656. One deposition in this case, from Thomas Philbrick on September 5, 1656, stated, "this deponent saith that Goodwife Cole said that if this deponent's calves if they did eat any of her grass she wished it might poison them or choke them and one of them I never see it more and the other calf came home and died about a week after."<sup>178</sup> Rather than receiving an execution order, officials sentenced Cole to imprisonment in Boston and a public whipping. 1673 saw Cole charged with witchcraft again, though this time the court believed her to be innocent despite the complaints against her and the assertion that Cole possessed an animal familiar. Cole once again spent time in prison after her third charge of witchcraft in September 1680.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> New Hampshire Public Radio, *From The Archives: N.H.'s Own Witch Hunt*, June 18, 2015, <https://www.nhpr.org/nhpr-blogs/2015-06-18/from-the-archives-n-h-s-own-witch-hunt>.

<sup>178</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 215.

<sup>179</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 213-228.

Upon the death of infant Moses Godfrey in July 1680, Rachel Fuller was accused of being a witch. Rachel had two children of her own when she married John Fuller in 1677. The couple had several more children after their marriage. Authorities arrested and imprisoned Isabelle Towle alongside Fuller in the summer of 1680, though both women were released on bond in June 1681. Nothing more is known about Towle, however, Fuller claimed there were other witches in town and presented names to officials, one of which was Eunice Cole. Authorities did not investigate Fuller's claims, which helps signify a shift in witch trial practices in the later decades of the seventeenth century when compared to the practices decades earlier.<sup>180</sup>



Figure 9: Map of Massachusetts, ca. 1677. National Geographic Society, 2007.

<sup>180</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England, 191-196.*

## **The Witch Trials of Salem, Massachusetts**

Fear of witches and the Devil plagued the town of Salem, Massachusetts and its surrounding towns and villages during the famous Salem Witch Trials from January 1692 through May 1693. However, the presence of suspected witches in Massachusetts predates this famous series of events.<sup>181</sup> As previously mentioned, infanticide and illicit sexual behavior were female dominated crimes in both the Old and New Worlds that often ended in witchcraft accusations. One woman this applied to was Alice Lake, wife of Henry Lake living in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Officials convicted and executed Alice for witchcraft in about 1650.<sup>182</sup>

The story of the Salem Witch Trials began when Samuel Parris, along with his family and two slaves, Tituba and Indian John, arrived in Salem Village in the fall of 1689 where he served as a preacher. His arrival marked the early beginnings of paranoia for Salem Village. Tensions in the village continued to build throughout 1690 and 1691 and worsened after Samuel Parris's middle child Betty, short for Elizabeth, fell ill in January 1692. This initial illness created a domino effect and suddenly Betty's cousin Abigail Williams, neighbor Ann Putnam Jr., and a few other young girls in the village followed suit. After physician William Griggs declared the mysterious illnesses to be of a supernatural origin, the community asked Tituba to bake a witch cake, typically a mix of meal and the afflicted individual's urine, which would locate the person responsible for the affliction.<sup>183</sup> Shortly after this request Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah

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<sup>181</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 1.

<sup>182</sup> Hall, *Witch hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 28.

<sup>183</sup> John Hale, *A Modest Enquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft, and How Persons Guilty of that Crime may be Convicted: And the means used for their Discovery Discussed, both Negatively and Affirmatively, according to Scripture and Experience*, (Boston: Printed by B. Green, and J. Allen, for Benjamin Eliot, 1702), 23. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N00872.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

Osburn were accused by the afflicted girls of causing their illnesses and visiting them in spectral forms. By the end of February 1692, the Putnam family sought the help of Salem magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne, who began an official inquiry into the accusations.<sup>184</sup>



*Figure 10: Site of the Salem Village Parsonage*

Just a few days later, on March 1, 1692, officials took Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborn to the Salem Village meeting house where they were examined. Tituba confessed her guilt, stating “the devil came to me and bid me serve him.”<sup>185</sup> At this point

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<sup>184</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 147-148; Hathorne’s and Corwin’s names appear in the warrants for the three women dated February 29, 1691/2. These warrants are published in Bernard Rosenthal, ed., *Records of the Salem Witch hunt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 125-126.

<sup>185</sup> “Examinations of Sarah Good, Sarah Osburn, & Tituba, as Recorded by Ezekiel Cheever,” published in Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch hunt*, 128. For additional accounts of the examinations, see Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch hunt*, 126-136.

the situation in Salem Village began to escalate. On March 12, Ann Putnam Jr. accused Martha Corey of witchcraft and by March 19 Abigail Williams accused Rebecca Nurse. Magistrates Corwin and Hathorne examined Martha Corey on March 21, just over a week after her accusation. Officials detained Rebecca Nurse five days after her accusation.<sup>186</sup> The situation worsened still and by late March 1692 the Salem community denounced the Proctors as witches.



*Figure 11: Martha Corey and her Prosecutors, Salem, Massachusetts (ca. 1692). A print from Cassell's History of the United States, by Edmund Ollier, Volume I, Cassel Petter and Galpin, London, c. 1880. Artist Unknown (Photo by The Print Collector/Getty Images)*

Early April 1692 saw the first recantation. Mary Warren, one of the Proctors' servants and accusers, admitted she had lied about her accusation and accused the other girls of lying as well. In the period between April 11 and May 20, 1692, the court examined more than a dozen accused witches from Salem and the surrounding area

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<sup>186</sup> Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch hunt*, 142-160.

including the Proctors, Abigail Hobbs, Bridget Bishop, Giles Corey, Mary Warren, Mary Esty, George Burroughs, and Margaret Jacobs.<sup>187</sup>

May 14, 1692 saw the arrival of Increase Mather and the new governor of Massachusetts, William Phips, in Boston from England, bringing with them a new Province Charter, dated October 8, 1691, and insight into the events that occurred in England since the English colonies' founding, like the English Civil War and religious realignment and tolerance discussed in chapter one. This transaction of information induced a second wave of information spreading from England to New England. Governor Phips read this new charter at a meeting taking place two days after his arrival. This meeting saw the appointment of twenty-eight individuals to the council.<sup>188</sup>

It was Governor Phips who instituted a court of oyer and terminer to hear and oversee the witch trials at Salem. Members of the new court included Lieutenant Governor William Stoughton as the presiding judge, as well as Nathaniel Saltonstall, Wait Winthrop, Bartholomew Gedney, Peter Sargeant, John Richards, and John Hathorne. The individual chosen to prosecute for Massachusetts colony was Salem lawyer Thomas Newton.<sup>189</sup> Accusations in Salem spread so fast because of this court's allowance of spectral evidence in trials and the encouragement of officials for individuals to give names of guilty parties to earn leniency.

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<sup>187</sup> After her admission of lying, Mary Warren was examined on April 19, but then rejoined the side of the accusers.

<sup>188</sup> Sewall and Thomas, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, 291.

<sup>189</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 147-149. William Stoughton and Wait Winthrop were appointed to the new government of Massachusetts in the 1680s after the original charter was lost, while Nathaniel Saltonstall, though appointed, refused to join.



Figure 12: *The Execution of Bridget Bishop (ca. 1632-1692), the first woman execution on charges of witchcraft at Salem 1692* (Photo by Briggs Co./ George Eastman Museum/ Getty Images)

Bridget Bishop was tried and found guilty of witchcraft on June 2, 1692. Officials executed her on June 10, spurring Saltonstall to remove himself from the court. John Corwin replaced him. On June 15 the twelve ministers asked Cotton Mather to write a letter to the court requesting that spectral evidence not be allowed in the courts overseeing the witch trials. Over the course of June 29 and June 30, the court tried Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes, Sarah Good, and Elizabeth Howe and convicted them for the crime of witchcraft with an execution date set for July 19, 1692. In mid-July 1692, Abigail Williams and the other accusers traveled to Andover where they began to accuse people of being witches. Samuel Willard, a Boston minister, preached that the trials were condemning innocent people. On July 27, Anthony Checkley replaced Thomas Newton as Massachusetts colony's attorney general.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 149; Sewall and Thomas, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, 292.

The beginning of August saw more individuals tried and convicted for witchcraft, including George Jacobs, Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John and Elizabeth Proctor, and John Willard. On August 19, 1692, the day in which officials executed these individuals for witchcraft, with the exception of a pregnant Elizabeth Proctor, Samuel Sewall's diary reads:

This day [*in the margin*, Dolefull! Witchcraft] George Burrough, John Willard, Jn<sup>o</sup> Proctor, Martha Carrier and George Jacobs were executed at Salem, a very great number of Spectators being present. Mr. Cotton Mather was there, Mr. Sims, Hale, Noyes, Chiever, &c. All of them said they were innocent, Carrier and all. Mr. Mather says they all died by a Righteous Sentence. Mr. Burrough by his Speech, Prayer, protestation of his Innocence, did much move unthinking persons, which occasions their speaking hardly concerning his being executed.<sup>191</sup>

It was at this execution that Cotton Mather was forced to pacify the crowd as they began to request a stay of the sentence for George Burroughs after he was able to recite the Lord's Prayer just before his hanging, something a witch would have been unable to do, which shows the community's respect and commitment to religion. Mather, forced to reassure the crowd, stated that it was a diabolical trick played by Burroughs and that his execution must continue. It did.

On September 9 and 17, 1692, the Court of Oyer and Terminer convened to try and convict several individuals. The six individuals tried, convicted, and sentenced on September 9 included: Martha Corey, Mary Esty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Dorcas Hoar, and Mary Bradbury. Nine more individuals followed on September 17 and two days later, on September 19, 1692, "About noon, at Salem, Giles Corey was press'd to

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<sup>191</sup> Sewall and Thomas, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, 293-294.

death for standing Mute; much pains was used with him two days, one after another, by the Court and Capt. Gardner of Nantucket who had been of his acquaintance: but all in vain.”<sup>192</sup> Of the group convicted of witchcraft in September, only Dorcas Hoar confessed her guilt, leading to her eventual survival of the witch trials. She escaped her death by one day. The other five women were not as lucky and were executed on September 22, 1692.<sup>193</sup>

Following the execution that took place on September 22, Cotton Mather began to write a defense of the court judges. Having written to the Clerk of the Special Court of Oyer and Terminer, Stephen Sewall, on September 20, Cotton Mather requested “what you kindly promised, of giving me a Narrative of y<sup>e</sup> Evidences given in at y<sup>e</sup> Trials of half a dozen, or if you please a dozen, of y<sup>e</sup> principal Witches, that have been condemned.” Mather used this information in his defense *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, published at the end of 1692.<sup>194</sup>

After Governor Phips created a gag order against the publication of anything regarding the witchcraft trials, Samuel Willard chose to write a condemnation of the trials under a pseudonym. By early October, the court barred the use of spectral evidence after Increase Mather presented a treatise warning against its use to Governor Phips. After disbanding the court of oyer and terminer in Massachusetts, Governor Phips traveled to England to justify his actions to the king’s advisers from October 12-29, 1692. By this point, England had slowed their search for and prosecution of witches,

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<sup>192</sup> Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, 295.

<sup>193</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 149-150.

<sup>194</sup> Sewall and Thomas, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, 297.

making what was happening in New England seem even more out of place.<sup>195</sup> Governor Phips returned from England with a new charter authorizing the colony to pass their own legislation after which the General Court created a Superior Court of Judicature responsible for overseeing “all crimes of life and limb.” Witchcraft became one of these crimes overseen by the court whose judges were Stoughton, Winthrop, Richards, Sewall, and Danforth.<sup>196</sup>

Witch trials resumed in January through February, but because spectral evidence was not allowed in the court, only three individuals were convicted out of the fifty-six indicted. In the spring of 1693, there were only two more trials with no convictions and Governor Phips granted pardons to those in custody and those awaiting executions. Minister Parris, unable to make amends with the Salem Village community, left the community for another. By the late 1690s Cotton Mather issued an apology to the community and family members of the accused began to petition the General Court of Massachusetts for reparations to be made.<sup>197</sup>

The official site of the 1692 executions was unknown to the official historical record until recent years. It was originally thought that the site of the executions was Gallows Hill. However, upon examination it was concluded that Gallows Hill was too high to in elevation and difficult to get to while carting prisoners for execution. Additional evidence for Gallows Hill not being the site of the executions comes from Rebecca Nurse’s son who rowed a boat from a creek at the Nurse homestead to the North River

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<sup>195</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 149-150.

<sup>196</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 151.

<sup>197</sup> Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*, 151. For full recorded accounts of the Salem Witch Trials, see Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch hunt*.

at the base of the hill to collect his mother's body after her execution. The execution site had to be somewhere else. That site was Proctor's Ledge, which was officially confirmed after a 2010 project, "The Gallows Hill Project," made up of leading historians on the subject of witchcraft, reopened a near century's old claim for where the location of the Salem Witch Trial executions took place. In 1921, historian Sidney Perley identified the location and in 1936 the town of Salem purchased a small piece of land to be kept as a public park in response to Perley's findings. However, the land was never marked and was eventually forgotten. After six years of research, "The Gallows Hill Project" officially confirmed Perley's findings as the site of the famous executions in 2016. Now, Proctor's Ledge is a dedicated memorial to the nineteen victims of the trials.<sup>198</sup>



*Figure 13: Proctor's Ledge Memorial*

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<sup>198</sup> Rebecca Beatrice Brooks, "Proctor's Ledge Memorial," History of Massachusetts Blog, May 5, 2019. <https://historyofmassachusetts.org/proctors-ledge-memorial/#:~:text=In%201921%2C%20historian%20Sidney%20Perley,the%20Essex%20Institute%20Historical%20Collections.>

## **Conclusion**

Denied a Christian burial, individuals executed for witchcraft were buried in mass, unmarked graves. The crevice in which those executed at Salem were buried was too shallow for the bodies to be buried there for the past 300 years. No one knows where their bodies, or the bodies of those executed in Connecticut, went. This question is not a concern for New Hampshire because they did not execute anyone for witchcraft. Legend has it that John Proctor's family took his body in the middle of the night after his execution to give him a proper burial. It is said that they reburied him in a far corner of their estate, but due to recent construction in the area that is highly unlikely where he remains today.

One contemporary theory sometimes used to explain the behavior of the young girls during the Salem Witch Trials in particular is that the colonists ingested cereal crops, specifically rye, from bad harvests and suffered from ergotism as a result. This theory, while partially convincing, does not account for the spreading of witchcraft accusations and trials across New England. An additional theory often used to explain the witch trials is conversion disorder. Under this disorder, the body expresses emotional stress through physical symptoms. For example, if an individual's emotional stress is great enough and if they are deeply troubled or afraid, they may convulse or believe they have been injured, even if there is no actual sign of physical harm. It is, very simply, a physical manifestation of the stress of everyday life.

It is difficult to compare witch hunts, even those occurring in close proximity both geographically and chronologically. One reason behind the difficulty of comparing the witch trials of Connecticut and New Hampshire with Massachusetts is that records of

Connecticut and New Hampshire's witch hunts are poorly documented in comparison to the records from Massachusetts. This is in part because Connecticut never fully acknowledged that their witch hunts happened while the number of cases in New Hampshire was smaller in comparison to both. In addition to this, Connecticut's Board of Pardons and Paroles has no protocol for granting pardons posthumously whereas other states do. No matter how many similarities or differences can be drawn between Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts witch trials, one thing is certain and that is that the incompatibility and inability of New England colonists to implement Old World structures and beliefs in the New World was an incredible stressor.

## Conclusion

All across New England lay the trial and execution sites of witches known and unknown to the historical record. Famous etchings of trying, burning, hanging, and swimming witches influence contemporary thoughts and opinions of witch hunts and the individuals involved. Witch hunts began and were a near constant presence in the English colonies from the mid-seventeenth century through the turn of the eighteenth century, though “obsessed” is not a term one can use to describe the New England colonists’ concern with witchcraft. Nor can the term “witch craze” be a synonym for “witch hunt,” as Brian Levack argued in *The Witch hunt in Early-Modern Europe*, because the term implies “that the set of beliefs which underlay the prosecution of witches was the product of some sort of mental disorder, which was certainly not the case.”<sup>199</sup> Trying to explain witch hunts in seventeenth-century New England requires patience and an open mind because as historian John Putnam Demos states, “witchcraft is, if nothing else, an open window on the irrational.”<sup>200</sup> Before there was scientific reasoning to explain disease and natural disasters, there were witches. Nowhere in the world was immune to the fear and superstitions surrounding witchcraft.

The final witchcraft execution in New England took place in the early eighteenth century, but that does not mean the fear and superstitions surrounding witchcraft went

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<sup>199</sup> Levack, *The Witch hunt in Early-Modern Europe*, 2.

<sup>200</sup> John Demos, “Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England,” *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 5 (1970), 1314.

away. Witchcraft remained a dominant fear into the nineteenth century, despite its disappearance from the records of legal proceedings. Like the existence of political anxieties, gender expectations, religious beliefs, and understandings of the natural world, witchcraft grew and evolved in the modern world and the concept is still very much present in society today.

The historiography of witchcraft as a whole seems to be never ending. But when you break down the subcategories of the history of witchcraft, there are noticeable gaps, and it is difficult to find discussion of the New World's impact on the mindset of New Englanders as it related to the Old World structures and beliefs the colonists would have been familiar and travelled with, which led to the witch hunts of seventeenth-century New England. And as seen in chapter one of this work, the historiography of witchcraft in Europe, whose witch trials would have certainly impacted the mindsets of those living through witch trials in later centuries, was informed by forgeries. The ways in which the natural world influenced the New England witch trials is underrepresented in the scholarship of witchcraft, and as evidenced in Jean Grove's work, *The Little Ice Age*, this is because "Assessments of the importance of climatic change in human affairs have often been unsatisfactory, partly because climatology and history are such different disciplines and adequate communication between their practitioners has been lacking, partly because of the very complexity of the interactions of climate, biosphere and human activity."<sup>201</sup> The historiography of witchcraft in New England would benefit

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<sup>201</sup> Grove, *The Little Ice Age*, 415.

greatly from a more in-depth discussion of the difficulty of implementing Old World structures and beliefs in an unfamiliar, challenging, and evolving natural landscape.

The representation of witches in popular culture has kept the fascination with witch trials alive well to the present, but this fascination promotes glaring inaccuracies, which in turn discredit the true history of the New England witch trials and their victims. In many instances, the use of the term “witch hunt,” or in the case of the popular, though controversial, play “The Crucible” by Arthur Miller, witchcraft and the Salem Witch Trials became an allegory used to criticize the United States government during the height of the Cold War and McCarthyism in the 1950s. As described in “Witchcraft and the Status of Women--the Case of England,” “There are indeed many parallels between witch mania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the political or racial ‘witch hunts’ which have occurred more recently...that is, in the construction of a successful scapegoat, beliefs, fears and prejudices which *already* exist are normally drawn upon.”<sup>202</sup> For example, former United States President Donald Trump has used the term “witch hunt” hundreds of times in tweets to defend himself and his actions. A 2019 article published by “The Nation,” states that “Calling himself the victim of a witch hunt allows Trump to label charges against him as not just inaccurate but fundamentally impossible...As witch hunts became less frequent in Europe and North America, and witch hunts of the past came to be disdained as backward and fundamentally unjust, the phrase “witch hunt” became a metaphor for unfair persecution.”<sup>203</sup> The turn from witch hunts being a way to explain away community-wide anxieties to the term “witch hunt”

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<sup>202</sup> Levack, Anderson, and Gordon, “Witchcraft and the Status of Women--the Case of England,” 28.

<sup>203</sup> Alice Markham-Cantor, “What Trump Really Means When He Cries ‘Witch Hunt,’” The Nation, October 28, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/trump-witch-hunt/>

being used by rich politicians claiming innocence in the face of public criticism is frustrating and promotes historical inaccuracies and misunderstandings.

The sites associated with the 1692 Salem Witch Trials have been incorporated into and embraced by their modern-day communities as proven the numerous memorials to the victims. For example, the Salem Witch Trials Memorial, located at the Charter Street Cemetery in present-day Salem, has benches dedicated to the numerous victims of the trials. There is also a Witchcraft Victims Memorial, located in present-day Danvers at the site of the Salem Village Meeting House, and a memorial located at Proctor's Ledge, located in present-day Salem. An additional point of interest is the Salem Village Parsonage Site, located in present-day Danvers, where Reverend Samuel Parris lived with his family upon their move to Salem Village in 1689 and where Betty Parris first fell ill, sparking a chain of events that culminated in the Salem Witch Trials in 1692. Images of these memorial sites can be found in Appendix B. There are no official memorials to the victims of the Connecticut witch trials, though there are local groups working to convince the state to publicly recognize its witch trials and the victims. The Eunice Cole Memorial Stone remains the only marker dedicated to New Hampshire's only convicted witch.

Witch hunts in Europe and New England represented a way for communities to explain away political, social, and religious anxieties, alongside challenges brought forth by the natural world in the medieval and early-modern period. The modern fascination with witches represents something else. The belief and fear in the supernatural did not survive the evolution of society into the modern world, however, it remains in the form of history, entertainment, references made by political leaders, and a new age form of

religion called Wicca. The modern world's shift away from superstition and the invisible world to visible, science-based explanations has pushed us away from the possibility of witch hunts occurring as they once existed.

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## Appendix A

The following chart lists the major European works concerning witchcraft from 1400 to 1700. This chart can also be found in Wolfgang Behringer's *Witches and Witch hunts, a Global History* on page 102.

Major European Works Concerning Witchcraft, 1400-1700			
<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Persecution</i>
1435	<i>Errores Gazariorum</i>	Anonymous inquisitor	1428-35 Savoy
1436	<i>Ut Magorum Errores</i>	Claude Tholosan	1428-35 Dauphiné
1437	<i>Formicarius</i>	Johannes Nider	1390-1435 Switzerland
1486	<i>Malleus Maleficarum</i>	Heinrich Kramer	1481-85 Upper Germany
1490	<i>Lamiarum Opuscula</i>	Girolamo Visconti	1480-90 Upper Italy
1505	<i>De la Strie</i>	Samuel Cassinensis	1480-1505 Milan
1506	<i>Apologia Dodi</i>	Vincente Dodo	1480-1505 Milan
1508	<i>De Strigibus</i>	Bernard of Como	1480-1505 Como
1520	<i>De Lamiis</i>	Gianfrancesc Ponzinibio	1510-20 Milan
1523	<i>De Strigibus et Lamiis</i>	Bartolomeo de Spina	1510-20 Milan
1563	<i>De Praestigiis Daemonum</i>	Johann Weyer	1562-3 Netherlands
1571	<i>Von Hexen</i>	Heinrich Bullinger	1568-71 Switzerland
1572	<i>Les Sorciers</i>	Lambert Daneau	1568-72 Savoy
1575	<i>Admonitio</i>	Nils Hemmingsen	1570-5 Denmark
1580	<i>Démonomanie</i>	Jean Bodin	1570-80 France
1584	<i>Discovery of Witchcraft</i>	Reginald Scot	1581-4 Kent
1589	<i>De Confessionibus</i>	Peter Binsfeld	1581-9 Kurtrier
1595	<i>Daemonolatria</i>	Nicholas Rémy	1580-95 Lorraine
1597	<i>Daemonologie</i>	James VI	1590-7 Scotland
1600	<i>Disquisitiones Magicae</i>	Martin Delrio	1592-1600 Netherlands
1602	<i>Discours de Sorciers</i>	Henry Boguet	1600-2 Franche Comté
1612	<i>Tableau de l'Inconstance</i>	Pierre de l'Ancre	1609-11 Labourd
1627	<i>Malleus Judicum</i>	Cornelius Ieyer	1626-7 Franconia
1631	<i>Cautio Criminalis</i>	Friedrich Spee	1626-30 Kurköln
1634	<i>Ausführliche Instruction</i>	Heinrich Schultheis	1626-30 Kurköln
1647	<i>Discovery of Witches</i>	Matthew Hopkins	1645-8 England
1648	<i>Confirmation</i>	John Stearne	1645-8 England
1689	<i>Invisible World</i>	Cotton Mather	1690-2 New England

## Appendix B

The following images were taken in the towns of Salem and Danvers in Massachusetts in January 2022. The first two images show the Charter Street Cemetery in Salem, Massachusetts, which is the site of the Salem Witch Trials Memorial. The following twenty images show stone benches with the names, date of death, and reason for death, of the Salem Witch Trials victims. The remaining photos are from the Salem Witch Trials Victims Memorial, located at the site of the Salem Village Meeting House in present-day Danvers, Massachusetts. Together these images show how these communities work to remember their unpleasant past.

































REBECCA NURSE  
HANGED  
JULY 19, 1692

















## Appendix C

The following image depicts locations plotted on a map using Google Maps. The pinpoints represent some of the known locations, or areas, of sites from the New England witch hunts that occurred in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts in the seventeenth century. Use the link below to view the map online and interact with each location.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Aei5B0OTuUzjdKouigkxMi1exV3SE2W&ll=41.99901635913092%2C-72.1907915&z=8>

