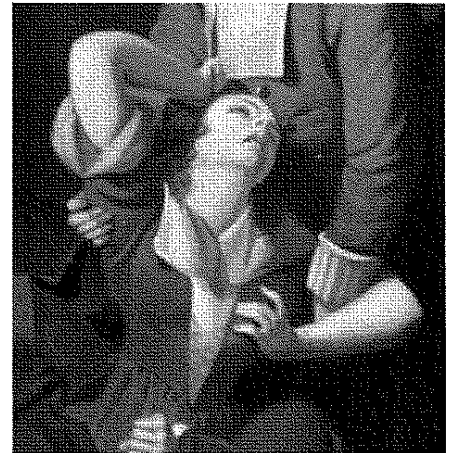
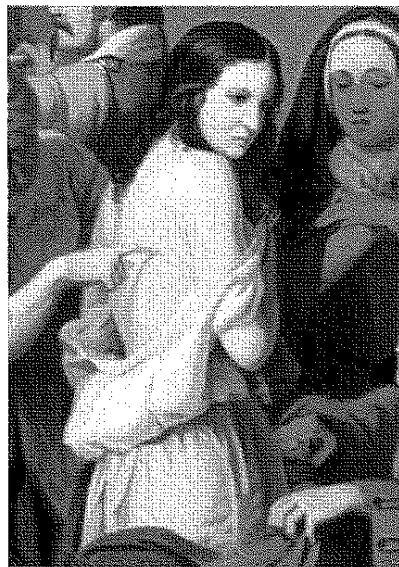
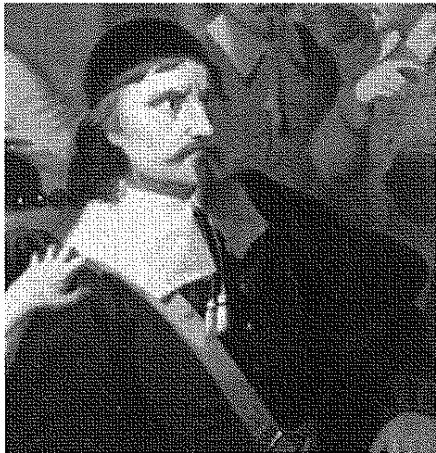

What Caused The Salem Witch Trial Hysteria of 1692?



Documents & Questions

Source: Adapted from Salem Court Records.

SALEM WITCHCRAFT HANGINGS 1692

June 10	Bridget Bishop
July 19	Sarah Good
July 19	Elizabeth Howe
July 19	Susannah Martin
July 19	Rebecca Nurse
July 19	Sarah Wildes
August 19	George Burroughs
August 19	Martha Carrier
August 19	George Jacobs
August 19	John Proctor
August 19	John Willard
September 19	Giles Cory (pressed to death)
September 22	Martha Cory
September 22	Mary Easty
September 22	Alice Parker
September 22	Mary Parker
September 22	Ann Pudeater
September 22	Margaret Scott
September 22	Wilmot Redd
September 22	Samuel Wardwell

ACCUSED WHO DIED IN JAIL

Sarah Good's child died prior to July 19, 1692.

May 10, 1692	Sarah Osborne
June 16, 1692	Roger Toothaker
December 3, 1692	Ann Foster
March 10, 1693	Lydia Dustin

Source: Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, Boston, 1689.

These evil spirits are all around. There is confined unto the atmosphere of our air a vast power or army of evil spirits under the government of a Prince (Satan) who employs them in a continual opposition to the designs of God.... Go tell mankind, that there are devils and witches.... New England has had examples of their existence...and that not only the wigwams of Indians...but the houses of Christians, where our God has had his constant worship, have undergone the annoyance of evil spirits.

Note: Cotton Mather was one of Colonial New England's leading ministers and intellectuals. His words were read and taken very seriously by much of the Puritan population.

Source: "Examination of a Witch," painting by T.H. Matteson, 1853. Reprinted by permission of the Peabody Essex Museum.



Source: John Demos, "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of 17th Century New England."
American Historical Review, June, 1970.

The Accused (Salem, 1692)

Marital Status

	<i>Single</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Widowed</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	8	15	1	24
Female	29	61	20	110
Total	37	76	21	134

Age

	<i>Under 20</i>	<i>21-40</i>	<i>41-60</i>	<i>Over 60</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	6	6	11	7	30
Female	18	15	41	14	88
Total	24	21	52	21	118

The Accusers (Salem, 1692)

Marital Status

	<i>Single</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Widowed</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	5	0	0	5
Female	23	6	0	29
Total	28	6	0	34

Age

	<i>Under 11</i>	<i>11-15</i>	<i>16-20</i>	<i>Over 21</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	0	1	1	0	2
Female	1	7	13	6	27
Total	1	8	14	6	29

Source: The Examination of Bridget Bishop at Salem Village 19. Apr. 1692, recorded by Samuel Parris.

—*As soon as she came near all (the afflicted girls) fell into fits....*

(Examiner): Bridget Bishop, you are now brought before Authority to give account of what witchcrafts you are conversant in.

(Bishop): I take all this people (turning her head and eyes about) to witness that I am clear.

(Examiner): (speaking to afflicted girls) Hath this woman hurt you?

—*Eliz. Hubbard, Ann Putnam, Abigail Williams and Mercy Lewes affirmed that she had hurt them.*

(Examiner) You are here accused by 4 or 5 for hurting them, what do you say to it?

(Bishop): I never saw these persons before, nor I never was in this place before...

(Examiner): They say you bewitched your first husband to death.

(Bishop): If it please your worship I know nothing of it.

—*She shook her head and the afflicted were tortured.*

—*(The same thing happened) again upon the motion of her head.*

—*Sam. Braybrook affirmed that she told him today that she had been accounted a witch these 10 years, but she was no witch. The Devil cannot hurt her.*

(Bishop): I am no witch

(Examiner): Why if you have not wrote in the book, yet tell me how far you have gone? Have you not to do with familiar spirits?

(Bishop): I have no familiarity with the Devil.

(Examiner): How is it then, that your appearance doth hurt these?

(Bishop): I am innocent.

(Examiner): Why you seem to act witchcraft before us by the motion of your body which seems to have influence upon the afflicted.

(Bishop): I know nothing of it. I am innocent to a witch. I know not what a witch is.

(Examiner): How do you know then that you are not a witch? And yet not know what a witch is?

(Bishop): I do not understand what you say.

(Examiner): How can you know, you are no witch, and yet not know what a witch is?

(Bishop): I am clear: if I were any such person you should know it.

(Examiner): You may threaten, but you can do no more than you are permitted.

(Bishop): I am innocent of a witch.

(Examiner): What do you say of those murders you are charged with?

(Bishop): I hope, I am not guilty of murder.

—*Then she turned up her eyes, and the eyes of the afflicted were turned up.*

(Examiner): It may be you do not know, that any have confessed to day, who have been examined before you, that they are witches.

(Bishop): No, I know nothing of it.

—John Hutchinson and John Lewis in open Court affirmed that they had told her.

(Examiner): Why look you, you are taken now in a flat lie.

(Bishop): I did not hear them.

Note Sam. Gold saith that after this examination he asked Bridget Bishop if she were not troubled to see the afflicted persons so tormented, said Bishop answered no she was not troubled for them. Then he asked her whether she thought they were bewitched she said she could not tell what to think about them. Will Good and John Buxton Junior was by and he supposeth they heard her also.

Salem Village, April the 19th, 1692, Mr. Samuel Parris being desired to take into writing the Examination of Bridget Bishop, hath delivered it as aforesaid. And upon hearing the same and seeing what we did then see, together with the charge of the afflicted persons then present; we committed said Bridget Oliver

John Hathorne

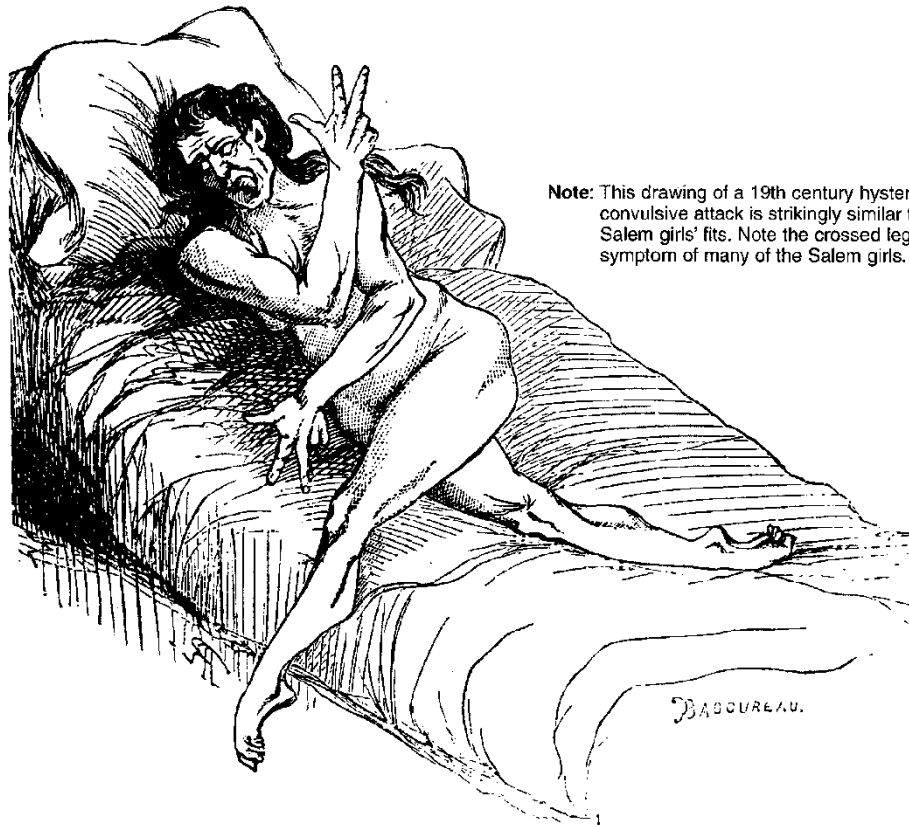
Note: Samuel Parris was the minister of Salem Village. Parris's nine-year-old daughter Betty had earlier made charges of witchcraft against the family's Caribbean slave, Tituba.

Source: Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, Boston, 1867.

What are we to think of those persons who commenced and continued the accusations – the “afflicted children” and their associates?... It was perhaps their original design to gratify a love of notoriety or of mischief by creating...excitement in their neighborhood.... They soon, however, became intoxicated by the terrible success of their imposture, and were swept along by the frenzy they had occasioned.... Once or twice they were caught in their own snare; and nothing but the blindness of the bewildered community saved them from disgraceful exposure and well-deserved punishment. They appeared as prosecutors of every poor creature that was tried.... It is dreadful to reflect upon the enormity of their wickedness ... there can be no doubt that they were great actors.

Source: James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact*, 1982.

The diagnosis of hysteria goes a long way toward resolving the historical debate over the afflicted girls' motivation. Adolescents, especially in the presence of Tituba, might very well have succumbed to the suggestion of bewitchment. The fits they experienced were very likely genuine, born of anxiety over a magic that threatened to overpower them. The diagnosis also explains many of the adult fits experienced by those who were convinced that their neighbors were conjuring against them. This is not to say that there was no acting at all; indeed, hysterics are notably suggestible, and no doubt the girls shaped their performances, at least instinctively, to the expectations of the community.



Note: This drawing of a 19th century hysterical convulsive attack is strikingly similar to the Salem girls' fits. Note the crossed legs – a symptom of many of the Salem girls.

Source: Linda Caporael, "Ergotism: the Satan Loosed in Salem?" *Science*, April 2, 1976. Reprinted by permission of author.

Ergot (a parasitic fungus) grows on a large variety of cereal grains – especially rye.... (Ergot) has 10 per cent of the activity of LSD, (and) is also found in morning glory seeds, the ritual hallucinogenic drug used by the Aztecs.... Warm, damp, rainy springs and summers favor ergot infestation.... (O)ne field may be heavily ergotized while the adjacent field is not. The fungus may (damage) a crop one year and not reappear again for many years....

Ergotism, or long-term ergot poisoning, was once a common condition resulting from eating contaminated rye bread. In some epidemics it appears that females were more liable to the disease than males. Children and pregnant women are most likely to be affected by the condition.... Ergotism is characterized by a number of symptoms. These include crawling sensations in the skin, tingling in the fingers, vertigo, ...hallucinations,...mania, melancholia, psychosis, and delirium. All of these symptoms are alluded to in the Salem witchcraft records.

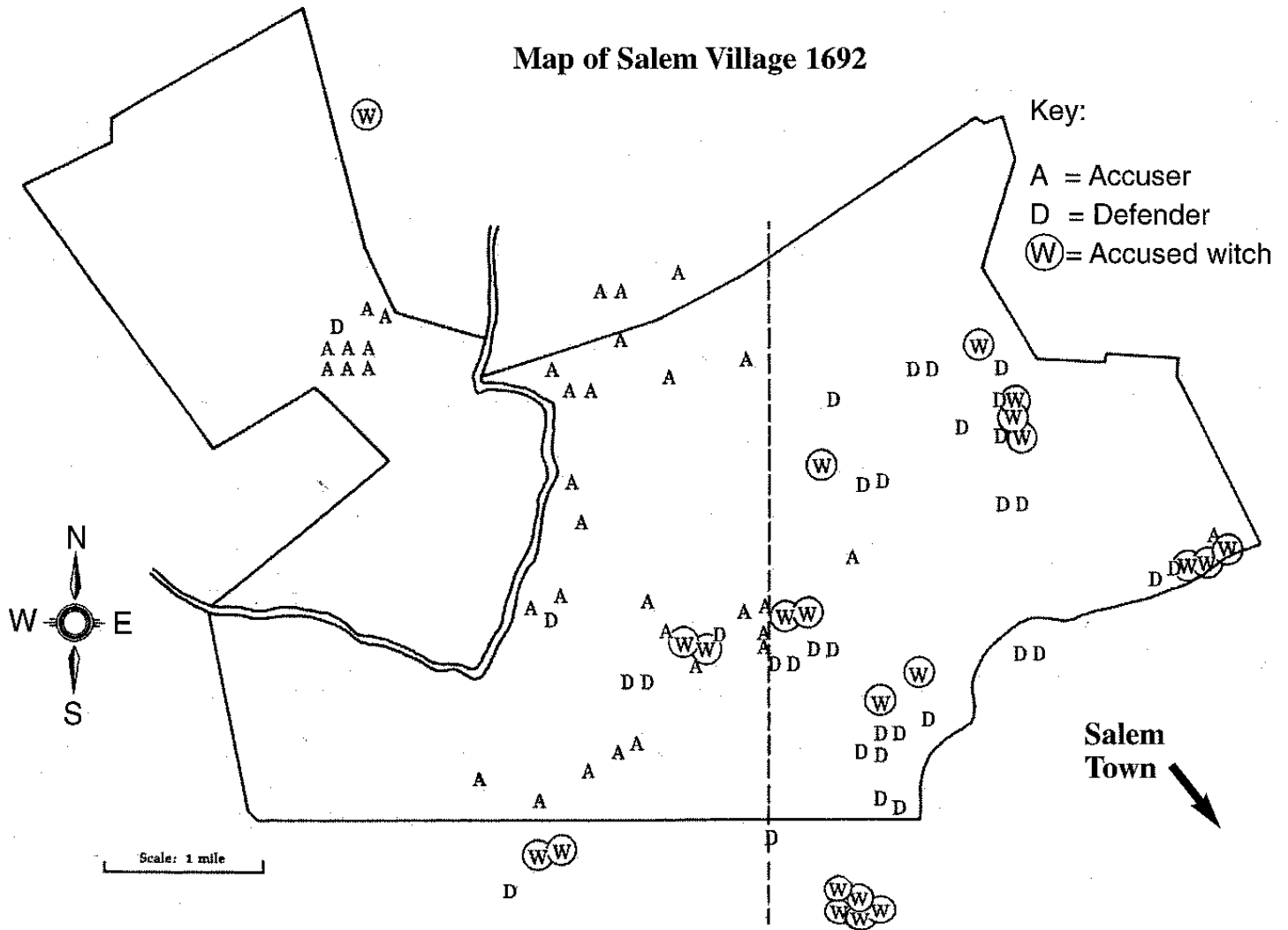
Rye...was a well established New England Crop.... Seed time for the rye was April and the harvesting took place in August.... The timing of Salem events fits this cycle.

Threshing probably occurred shortly before Thanksgiving, the only holiday the Puritans observed. The children's symptoms appeared in December 1691. Late the next fall, 1692, the witchcraft crisis ended abruptly....

Certain climatic conditions, that is, warm, rainy springs and summer, promote heavier than usual fungus infestation. The pattern of weather in 1691 and 1692 is apparent from brief comments in Samuel Sewall's diary. Early rains and warm weather in the spring progressed to a hot and stormy summer in 1691. There was a drought the next year, 1692, thus no contamination of the grain that year would be expected.

...(A) large measure of the Putnam farm, which was located in the western sector of Salem Village, consisted of swampy meadows... (and) may have been an area of contamination.... Three of the (afflicted) girls...lived in the Putnam residence Two afflicted girls, the daughter and niece of Samuel Parris, (a minister), lived in...the center of the village Two thirds of Parris' salary was paid in provisions.... Since Putnam was one of the largest landholders and an avid supporter of Parris...an ample store of ergotized grain would be anticipated in Parris' larder.

Source: Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press from *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*, by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright (c) 1974 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.



Source: Boyer et. al., *The Enduring Vision*, 1992.

A sharp distinction emerged between the port's (Salem Town) residents...and outlying farmers (Salem Village). Prior to 1661 the richest 10 percent of Salem residents owned 21 percent of the town's property, but by 1681 the richest tenth possessed 62 percent of all wealth. (Salem Village) was divided between supporters of the Porter and Putnam families. Well connected with the merchant elite, the Porters enjoyed political prestige in Salem Town and lived in the village's eastern section, whose residents farmed richer soils and benefited somewhat from Salem Town's prosperity. In contrast, most Putnams lived in Salem Village's less fertile western half, had little chance to share in Salem Town's commercial expansion, and had lost the political influence that they once held in town.