

The Salem Witch Trials

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Introduction

It was a very normal day for the Parris household when suddenly one of his children started acting up and mumble strange things.⁵ Then his niece started to do the same thing, all fingers were pointed to Tituba the Parris family slave. Did she cause this to happen or was it the beggar that show up at the Parris family home a few days earlier, or maybe it was an old farm woman who hadn't gone to church in a year. In the end, all three women were thrown in jail, and more people followed, some were even killed. Many people were affected by this tragic event and a lot of families were torn apart. The Salem Witch Trials were a tragedy that only saw triumph when the colonies stopped trying witches in May 1693.³

Background

Roger Conant first founded Salem, Massachusetts in 1626.¹ John Winthrop sailed to Salem in 1630 looking for religious freedom. He then founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony.² In 1680 Reverend Samuel Parris came to the capital of Massachusetts Bay Colony, Boston with his two slaves John Indian and Tituba. Later Parris married Elizabeth Eldridge, they had three children together. The first was Thomas then came Betty and last there was Susannah.⁴ Abigail Williams, Parris's niece lived in the Parris household, she was eleven at the time of The Salem Witch Trials.³ During an interview with Rachel Christ, The Director of Education for the Salem Witch Trials Museum she stated that not much is known about Abigail or her parents. All that is known is that she came to live with her uncle after her parents died. Nothing is known on how her parents died either.

On one day in January 1692 Betty and Abigail had begun to have fits, crouch under furniture, speak words that no one could understand. A few days past and the girls only got

worse. Parris began to think the god was sending him a sign, he was very worried about his girls and their safety, what is during one of the many fits they had one was to hit her head on something, which would just make everything a lot worse than it already was. Parris tried consulting with many different doctors, but none of them could think of what was wrong with the girls. A physician that was named William Griggs, who lived close to the Salem village, said that the girls were in fact bewitched and that they were possessed by the devil himself.³ In Massachusetts witchcraft or doing anything related to the devil was strictly forbidden and was punishable by death.⁸

Parris wanted to know who had bewitched his girls. Eventually, the girls started to say names during the fits. The first name that the girls said was Sarah Good a beggar that had come to the Parris household and asked for food for her two children. The second name was Sarah Osborn, an old farm woman. Osborn had not gone to any sort of church for more than a year. Parris blamed Tituba for his girls miss behavior. On February 29th, 1692 all three of the accused witches were arrested.³

On March 1, all three of the accused witches were to be questioned. They were Questioned to see if they needed to appear before a grand jury. In the end, all three of the accused witches were put back in jail. Good tried to plead innocent, Osborn also pleaded innocent. Tituba did what Parris wanted her to do and pleaded guilty. On March 7th all three of the accused witches were taken to a jail in Boston. They were charged for every day that they stayed there, they had to pay the cost of there shackles as well. All three of the girls that claimed to be afflicted by a witch were still experiencing fits, even after the women they claimed to be witches were in jail. By late March the witch hunts officially began.³ More than 200 people were

accused of being witches, between 140 and 150 people were arrested for witchcraft, 20 people were killed.³

Tragedy

The Salem Witch Trials were a very tragic event. There were nine “afflicted” girls Elizabeth Booth, Elizabeth Hubbard, Mercy Lewis, Betty Parris, Ann Putnam, Jr., Susannah Sheldon, Abigail Williams, Mary Walcott, and Mary Warren. They all claimed to be tortured by a witch. In current time modern studies show the girls might have Epilepsy, a mental illness, or even just boredom. In total 20 people were killed, 19 people were hanged, the other person Giles Corey, a wealthy farmer who lived outside of Salem was tortured to death. My resources so that he was pressed to death with two wooden boards. All of the people who were hanged were hanged on Gallows Hill, a small hill near the Salem Village. Many people were arrested, between 140 and 150. They were taken to multiple jails located in Salem, Ipswich, and Boston. Most of the prisoners were taken to the jail in Salem but due to overcrowding everyone was split up and taken to separate jails. Four people died in prison, Sarah Osborne, Roger Toothaker, Ann Foster, and Lydia Dustin.⁶ The main tragedy was that 20 people were falsely accused and killed because so many people were jumping to conclusions without enough evidence.⁵

Triumph

The Salem Witch Trials officially ended May 1693. Most people started to realize that the accusers might be faking and making things up. Most of the people who were still in jail were tried again and found not guilty and released from jail. The few that were still found guilty were pardoned by the governor and released from jail. In 1711 some of the families that had a conflicted witch in their family received compensation of £600 (US\$789.54.) There was a bill

passed to restore their families members names. Not all of the families wanted to have the family member listed. In all 22 names were restored including some of the people who were killed. In 1957 the state of Massachusetts cleared the rest of the names of people who were not included during 1711. The state of Massachusetts officially apologized for the terrible mistakes that were made during the time of the Salem Witch Trials. Many letters were sent out to the families of who had a family member killed.⁵

Legacy

In modern time the art of witchcraft is now a protected religion, if you practice this religion you are a Wiccan. There are many different rituals and festivals, the four main holidays that Wiccans celebrate are called Sabbats, they are held on equinoxes and solstices. Four other Wiccan Sabbats are Imbolc celebrated on February 1st or 2nd, the festival of Beltane on April 30th or May 1st, Lammas on August, and last, there is the New Year's festival of Samhain, for most people, it is known as Halloween on October 31st. Not very many people in modern time participate in this religion. Some people are very scared about this religion in certain places you are not allowed to celebrate Halloween, because they say it is a sign of witchcraft.⁷

There Also are many laws so that this horrible event cannot happen again. The court has to have full evidence, not just pieces of evidence to make a decision in modern days. I feel this has taught America to be more cautious when it comes to putting people on trial and deciding whether they are guilty or not. The court system takes full care to make sure they are making a good decision.⁷

Conclusion

The Salem Witch Trials were a tragic event that did not see triumph until it all ended. It all started with the Parris family when Reverend Parris's daughter, Betty Parris and his niece Abigail Williams started experiencing fits. Then names were said during one of the many fits, Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba, all three of these women were thrown in jail.³ Between 140 and 150 people were arrested and put in jail, there were four different jails that all the arrested went, mostly due to overcrowding at each jail. Over 200 people were accused of being witches and participating in witchcraft. Gladly only 20 people were killed during this event 19 of which were hanged and Giles Corey was tortured to death.⁶ There were nine "afflicted girls" which all claimed to be tortured by a witch.⁵ The Salem Witch Trials officially ended in May 1693, due to a lack of evidence people realized the accusers might be faking. All of the victims who were still in jail were released. In modern time witchcraft is a religion that some people practice. They have different holidays that they celebrated each year. The court system is more careful when it comes to making their decisions on if someone should be called guilty or not. America has learned from this tragic event and hopefully, nothing like this will ever happen again.⁷

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