

SJ- 26

The reason I believe this legislation should be passed is because this is an important part of our history. This didn't just happen 350 years ago in some far off place that doesn't relate to us whatsoever. No it happened right here in Hartford and the surrounding areas, which are some of the founding cornerstones of the state of Connecticut. Whether or not they thought it was right or wrong at the time, or whether it was legal or illegal then, we still know now it was wrong. So I think it would be a great acknowledgement towards our past if we let it be known that present and future people of Connecticut realize these people were wronged.

Adelaide J. Avery
9th Generation Great Granddaughter
of Mary Sanford convicted
June 13th, 1662

J

Relationship Chart – Sanford to Avery

Mary UNKNOWN (3791)
b.circa 1623
at co. Essex«?», England
d.circa 13 Jun 1662
at Hartford, Hartford, CT
m.circa 1642
at «?»Hartford, Hartford, CT
+Andrew SANFORD (3768)
b.before 1 Nov 1617
at Stanstead Mountfitchet, co. Essex, Engl
d.1684
at Milford, New Haven, CT

Andrew SANFORD (2041)
b.circa 1643
at Hartford, Hartford, CT
d.circa Aug 1705
at Milford, New Haven, CT
m.8 Jan 1667/68
at Milford, New Haven, CT
+Mary BOTSFORD (2038)
b.before 21 May 1643
at Milford, New Haven, CT
d.
at

Mary SANFORD (3764)
b.16 Nov 1668
at Milford, New Haven, CT
d.
at
m.28 Jun 1692
at New Haven, New Haven, CT
+Thomas TUTTLE (3763)
b.27 Oct 1667
at New Haven, New Haven, CT
d.30 Jun 1703
at New Haven, New Haven, CT

Mehitable TUTTLE (895)
b.19 Jun 1699
at New Haven, New Haven, CT
d.
at
m.13 Jan 1725/26
at New Haven, New Haven, CT
+Barnabas BALDWIN (888)
b.circa 1688
at Milford, New Haven, CT
d.
at

Thomas BALDWIN (149)
b.10 Jul 1742
at New Haven, New Haven, CT
d.14 Jul 1834
at Woodbridge, New Haven, CT
m.circa 1784
at Derby«?», New Haven, CT
+Hannah HINE (150)
b.before 4 Dec 1763
at Milford, New Haven, CT
d.17 Jun 1829
at Woodbridge, New Haven, CT

Elizabeth BALDWIN (124)
b.17 Oct 1793
at Woodbrige, New Haven, CT
d.1 Oct 1838
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
m.9 Dec 1819
at Woodbridge, New Haven, CT
+Glover BASSETT (123)
b.14 Oct 1793
at Derby (Great Hill), New Haven, CT
d.10 Feb 1847
at Seymour, New Haven, CT

Amos BASSETT (117)
b.5 Oct 1820
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
d.31 Aug 1862
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
m.10 Sep 1845
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
+Hulda Keziah ROWE (118)
b.17 Feb 1825
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
d.26 Oct 1873
at Seymour, New Haven, CT

Alice Jane BASSETT (107)
b.30 Apr 1851
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
d.14 Sep 1918
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
m.13 Sep 1866
at Woodbridge, New Haven, CT
+Robert HEALEY (106)
b.24 Feb 1842
at LND, England
d.14 Jul 1915
at Seymour, New Haven, CT

Harry Amos HEALEY (5)
b.11 Oct 1869
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
d.13 Oct 1956
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
m.1 Jun 1911
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
+Amelia Jennie GRESSOT (6)
b.19 Apr 1893
at Lime Rock, Salisbury, Litchfield, CT
d.8 Apr 1975
at Seymour, New Haven, CT

Katherine Bassett HEALEY (68)
b.5 Jul 1918
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
d.
at
m.1 Jun 1940
at
+Vincent ROSSIGNOL (73)
b.2 Dec 1915
at New York City, NY
d.14 Aug 1994
at New Milford, Litchfield, CT

Debra Lynne ROSSIGNOL (87)
b.23 Dec 1958
at Mahopac, Carmel, Putnam, NY
d.
at
m.14 Jun 1986
at Seymour, New Haven, CT
+Kevin Martin AVERY (24746)
b.1 Jun 1959
at Malone, Franklin, NY
d.
at

Adelaide Jean AVERY (24748)
b.23 May 1993
at Napa, Napa, CA
d.
at
m.
at

Adelaide Jean AVERY (24748) is the 9th great-granddaughter of **Mary UNKNOWN (3791)**.

Printed on: 23 May 2007
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Exoneration of Connecticut's Convicted "Witches"

"Mary Sanford thou art here indited by the name of Mary Sanford the wife of Andrew Sanford for not haveing the feare of God before thyne eyes thou hast entertained familiarity with Satan the Great enemy of God and mankind and by his help hast acted and also hast come to ye Knowledg of secrets in a preternaturall way beyond the ordinary course of nature to ye great disturbance of severall members of this common wealth for wch according to ye Law of god and ye established Law of this Colony thou deservest to die.

Verdict. Respecting Mary Sanford the prisoner at ye Barr ye Jury find her Guilty of ye Inditement."

This is the only existing official statement in the Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut dated June 13th, 1662 regarding Mary Sanford my 8th generation Great Grandmother and 9th generation for my daughter Addie Avery. According to historians on the subject of witchcraft trials Mary is presumed hanged due to the guilty verdict handed down. Mary was 39 years old and the mother of five children ages 5 to 19 when convicted and hanged until dead. The only other reference to her was in the deposition of Rebecca Greensmith six months after Mary was hanged. Goodwife Greensmith's testimony as related in John M. Taylor's The Witchcraft Delusion states "I also testify that I being in ye wood at a meeting there was wth me Goody Seager Goodwife Sanford & Goodwife Ayres..." A meeting in the woods, the only apparent cause for her to be found guilty of familiarity with Satan. Mary's husband Andrew was indicted as well but was acquitted. Records show he moved to Milford with their five children and remarried.

Historically there have been a myriad of reasons for this kind of judicial scapegoating. Many times it was a simple need to find someone to blame for misfortunes that fell upon the people. During the great witch hunts of Europe it was political gain sought when opposition to religious conversion surfaced. Greed was another motivation as when someone was convicted for a capital crime their property would revert to the colony for sale allowing disgruntled neighbors a way to acquire others' real property.

In modern times the same motivations can be seen though not so overt. The 1950's saw judicial scapegoating in the witch hunts of the McCarthyism era; rooting out Communist sympathizers while ruining the lives and careers of many Americans. More recently, in December of 2007 the New York Times as well as the London Observer reported witch hunts in Nigeria accusing very young children of being evil. As quoted in the Observer, "Children and babies branded as evil are being abused, abandoned and even murdered while the preachers make money out of the fear of their parents and their communities...the more children the pastor declares witches, the more famous he gets and the more money he can make."

Why exonerate our citizens wrongly accused so many years ago? Though the governing body of colonial times in Connecticut believed they were protecting their community members by prosecuting those suspected of practicing witchcraft, today we recognize that those convictions were unfounded and acknowledgement of their innocence through a formal resolution will serve to correct the official record as well as educate the public on the dangers of judicial scapegoating. Mob rule has left its ugly mark many times during social unrest in America from the colonial witch hunts to the lynchings in the segregated south. The term witch

hunt is still used today when we perceive an unjust search for the truth. Where do we draw the line as a society when we engage as a people in self examination of our morals?

There is precedence for exonerating the twelve women and two men convicted of witchcraft in Connecticut. In 2001 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed "An Act Relative to the Witchcraft Trial of 1692" exonerating the last of the Salem Witch Trial victims. In 2004 Baron Gordon Prestounrange of Scotland's Prestopans Township pardoned 81 "witches" posthumously as his last official act before his ancient feudal power of pardoning would be stripped by legislation that ended Scotland's feudal system. In 2006 Governor Timothy M. Kaine of Virginia pardoned Grace Sherwood known as the Witch of Pungo who spent seven years in jail on a conviction of witchcraft. As noted in the Washington Post "Grace Sherwood's problems with her neighbors started as such spats typically do. In the 1680s, Sherwood inherited nearly 200 acres from her father..." Governor Kaine stated in the official pardon that "We also can celebrate the fact that a woman's equality is constitutionally protected today, and women have the freedom to pursue their hopes and dreams."

Formally righting these wrongs reminds us of who we were as a people and acknowledges who we are now. These convictions stand in the Connecticut judicial record and therefore should be corrected in the official public record. Those convicted were among the very first settlers in New England. They chose a new life and the freedom this country was founded on. They deserve to be remembered and honored for the hardships they endured to forge their way in laying down the very roots of our life and liberties in America.

Debra Rossignol Avery
8th Generation Great Granddaughter
of Mary Sanford convicted
June 13th, 1662

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Genealogy of Lydia Gilbert to Laura M Barber..... | 2 |
| My Legislative Panel Testimony | 4 |
| Trainband Exercises, Windsor, Connecticut, 1651 | 4 |
| Henry Stiles and Thomas/Lydia Gilbert as Neighbors | 5 |
| Thomas Allyn is Found Guilty | 5 |
| Lydia Gilbert is Accused since “well-behaved women rarely make history” | 5 |
| The Gilbert’s reputation is destroyed..... | 6 |
| Conclusion | 6 |
| Sources/Further Reading..... | 7 |

Note: The photo on the front cover is from Ralph Gardiner, *England’s Grievance Discovered*, – 1655. The photo was found in Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem: the other witch hunt of 1692*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2005, p121

Genealogy of Lydia Gilbert to Laura M Barber

Lydia is spouse of Thomas Gilbert, Jr. (#2) and Laura is daughter of Charles Robert Barber (#12)

Direct Descendants of Thomas GILBERT

- 1 Thomas GILBERT 1382-1639
- +Elizabeth BENNETT
- 2 Ezekiel GILBERT
- 2 Thomas GILBERT, Jr. 1611/12-1662
- 2 Jonathan GILBERT 1618-1682
- 2 Sarah GILBERT 1624-
- 2 Josiah GILBERT 1628-1688
- +Elizabeth BELCHER 1632-1682
- 3 Benjamin GILBERT 1632-1711
- 3 Elizabeth GILBERT 1634-1714
- 3 Lydia GILBERT 1636-
- 3 Josiah GILBERT, Jr. 1639-170405
- 3 Sarah GILBERT 1661-
- 3 Eleazar GILBERT 1663-
- 3 Moses GILBERT 1666-1713
- +Jennetje DIRCK 1674-
- 4 Elizabeth GILBERT
- 4 Josiah GILBERT -1760
- 4 Sarah GILBERT -1767
- +John BRADLEY, Sr. 1705-1776
- 1 Hannah BRADLEY 1726-1749
- +Cornelia BANKS 1712-1795
- 6 Marianna BANKS 1745-1770
- +Samuel WHITNEY, Jr. 1740/41-1820
- 7 Samuel WHITNEY III 1766-
- 7 Hannah WHITNEY 1768-1824
- +Abel DOWNS 1768-1837
- 8 Maria DOWNS 1795-
- 8 Maria DOWNS 1795-
- 8 Mabel DOWNS 1795-
- 8 Emaline DOWNS 1805-1907
- +Cris Baldwin BARBER 1803-1845
- 9 George Washington BARBER 1834-1907
- 9 Matthew Lindley BARBER 1836-1913
- +Cora B. OSBORNE 1862-1916
- +Rosana Willis OSBORNE 1840-1907
- 10 Cris Lindley BARBER 1873-1955
- +Carric Lois GILES 1875-1938
- 11 Mary Rosana BARBER 1898-1960
- 11 Cris Matthew BARBER 1900-1949
- 11 Earl Lloyd BARBER 1902-1974
- 11 Charles Robert BARBER 1904-1937
- +Lucas Mable MILLIKEN 1905-
- 12 Cris Wilber BARBER 1927-
- 12 Elaine Dolores BARBER 1930-
- 12 Robert Milton BARBER 1933-
- 12 Phyllis Claire BARBER 1935-
- 12 Terrance Neil BARBER 1937-
- +Helen SCHAEFER 1927-
- 12 Susan Mary BARBER 1951-
- 12 Peter Charles BARBER 1955-
- 12 Carol Anne BARBER 1978-
- 12 Laura Margaret BARBER 1962-
- 12 Nancy Ellen BARBER 1965-
- 11 Ruth Lilian BARBER 1908-
- 10 Charles Elliott BARBER 1876-1949
- 10 Robert Willie BARBER 1878-1952
- 6 Thomas BANKS 1747-
- 6 Jane BANKS 1749-1749
- 3 Lois BRADLEY 1729-1801
- 3 John BRADLEY, Jr. 1731-1817
- 3 Ruben BRADLEY 1732/33-1771
- 3 Seth BRADLEY 1735-1798
- 3 Miriam BRADLEY 1736/37-1781
- 3 Ezra BRADLEY 1739-1814
- 3 Lockwood BRADLEY 1742-1745
- 3 Ephraim BRADLEY 1744-
- 3 Moses BRADLEY 1746-1797
- 3 Abel BRADLEY 1750-1814
- 3 Isaac BRADLEY 1754-1791
- +James GRAY 1710-1778
- 4 Hannah GILBERT 1700-1767
- 4 Catharine GILBERT 1709-1777.

My Legislative Panel Testimony

I am Laura Barber Cayer from Mansfield, Connecticut. I am here to tell the story of my ancestor, Lydia Gilbert¹ (see genealogy on page 2). Henry was accidentally killed by Thomas Allyn during Trainband exercises in 1651. Lydia was not present when this happened and Thomas Allyn confessed and was convicted of the crime in 1651. Three years later, in 1654, when Thomas Allyn is asked to pay his fine; Lydia was accused and convicted of causing Thomas Allyn's gun to fire by means of witchcraft. It seems that Thomas Allyn did not have to pay his fine after Lydia was convicted. Thank you.

Trainband² Exercises, Windsor, Connecticut, 1651

Her story begins in Windsor, Connecticut, when Lydia was not even present, on October 3, 1651, during Trainband exercises. Here is the story.

It was when "a group of local militiamen has assembled for training exercises. They drill in their usual manner through the morning, then pause for rest and refreshment. Several of the younger recruits begin a moment's horseplay; one of these-a certain Thomas Allen-cocks his musket and inadvertently knocks it against a tree. The weapon fires, and a few yards away a bystander falls heavily to the ground. The unfortunate victim is an older man, also a trainee, Henry Stiles by name. Quickly, the group converges on Stiles, and bears him to the house of the local physician. But the bullet has fatally pierced his heart."³

¹ Ellery Bicknell Crane, *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical Personal Memoirs of Worcester County Massachusetts with a History of Worcester Society of Antiquity*, The Lewis Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1907, Volume IV, p200

² A band or company of militia; specifically, a volunteer body trained as a kind of militia.

³ John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, Online Posting, March 2008, <www.americanheritage.com>, American Heritage Magazine, Volume 29, Issue 5, August/September 1978, p1

Henry Stiles and Thomas/Lydia Gilbert as Neighbors

Lydia's only connection to Henry Stiles was that he was a neighbor and she provided board⁴ to Henry Stiles for three shillings each week.⁵

Thomas Allyn is Found Guilty

The story continues with Thomas Allyn, who confesses to accidentally shooting Henry Stiles and was found guilty of "homicide by misadventure" in December 1651.⁶ The court put him under a ten pound bond, good behavior for a year and he could not bears arms for a year. The court also ordered him to pay a fine of twenty pounds sterling which was not enforced until three years later on October 3, 1654.⁷ I believe that is when the trouble began for Lydia.

Lydia Gilbert is Accused since "Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History"⁸

There is no evidence on who accused Lydia Gilbert. The records show that after a trail, Lydia was indicted for causing the death of Henry Stiles by witchcraft on November 28, 1654.⁹ It has been written in several sources that Lydia may have been offended in some way by Henry Stiles.¹⁰ The neighbors could recall frequent

⁴ To furnish with food regularly for pay. According to *The Stiles Family in America*, listed in the Inventory of the Estate of Henry Stiles under debts due, it shows "that Henry Stiles, being a bachelor, boarded with Gilbert; that the last settlement made between the two, prior to Stiles' death, was on March 25, 1649; and that he was paying Gilbert "three shillings per week for diet."

⁵ Henry Reed Stiles, A.M.; M. D., *The Stiles Family In America. Genealogies of the Connecticut Family, Descendants of John Stiles, of Windsor, Conn., and of Mr. Francis Stiles, of Windsor and Stratford, Conn., 1635-1894; Also the Connecticut New Jersey Families, 1720-1894; and the Southern (or Bermuda-Georgia) Family, 1635-1894. With Contributions to the Genealogies of some New York and Pennsylvania Families. And An Appendix, containing Information Concerning the English Families of the Name.*, Doan & Pilson Printers, Jersey City, New Jersey, 1895, p34.

⁶ John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, Online Posting, March 2008, <www.americanheritage.com>, American Heritage Magazine, Volume 29, Issue 5, August/September 1978, p1

⁷ R. G. Tomlinson, *Witchcraft Trials of Connecticut: the first comprehensive documented history of witchcraft trials in colonial Connecticut*, The Bond Press, Inc., Hartford, Conn., 1978, p11

⁸ Quote by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

⁹ John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, Online Posting, March 2008, <www.americanheritage.com>, American Heritage Magazine, Volume 29, Issue 5, August/September 1978, p1

¹⁰ Henry Reed Stiles, A.M.; M. D., *The Stiles Family In America. Genealogies of the Connecticut Family, Descendants of John Stiles, of Windsor, Conn., and of Mr. Francis Stiles, of Windsor and Stratford, Conn., 1635-1894; Also the Connecticut New Jersey Families, 1720-1894; and the Southern (or Bermuda-Georgia) Family, 1635-1894. With Contributions to the Genealogies of some New York and Pennsylvania Families. And An Appendix, containing Information Concerning the English Families of the Name.*, Doan & Pilson Printers, Jersey City, New Jersey, 1895, p34.

quarreling.¹¹ Also, in Stiles' Estate Inventory he owed the Gilbert's more than they owed him. It could be argued that this may have been a source of tension between the two or was it because Lydia was not well-behaved according to the Puritan standards on women during this time period in history? Or perhaps, was it because Thomas Allyn was not able or not willing to pay his fine?

The Gilbert's Reputation is Destroyed

Lydia's fate is unknown but "the reasonable probability is that she was hanged"¹². After her conviction and probable execution, her husband, Thomas Gilbert, Jr. moved to Springfield, Massachusetts in 1655.¹³ He could no longer stay in Windsor, Connecticut.

Conclusion

I think you can conclude from my testimony today that my ancestor, Lydia Gilbert, was certainly convicted of a crime she did not commit. Passing this bill would not only restore my faith in the legislative process but would also rectify an injustice. Thank you

¹¹ John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, Online Posting, March 2008, <www.americanheritage.com>, American Heritage Magazine, Volume 29, Issue 5, August/September 1978, p1

¹² John M. Taylor, *The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut; 1647-1697*, J. Edmund Edwards, Publisher, Stratford, Conn., 1969, p148

¹³ Ellery Bicknell Crane, *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical Personal Memoirs of Worcester County Massachusetts with a History of Worcester Society of Antiquity*, The Lewis Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1907, Volume IV, p200

Sources/Further Reading

1. Ellery Bicknell Crane, *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical Personal Memoirs of Worcester County Massachusetts with a History of Worcester Society of Antiquity*, The Lewis Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1907, Volume IV
2. Henry Reed Stiles, A.M.; M. D., *The Stiles Family In America. Genealogies of the Connecticut Family, Descendants of John Stiles, of Windsor, Conn., and of Mr. Francis Stiles, of Windsor and Stratford, Conn., 1635-1894; Also the Connecticut New Jersey Families, 1720-1894; and the Southern (or Bermuda-Georgia) Family, 1635-1894. With Contributions to the Genealogies of some New York and Pennsylvania Families. And An Appendix, containing Information Concerning the English Families of the Name.*, Doan & Pilson Printers, Jersey City, New Jersey, 1895
3. John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, Online Posting, March 2008, <www.americanheritage.com>, American Heritage Magazine, Volume 29, Issue 5, August/September 1978
4. Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman; witchcraft in colonial New England*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1987
5. John M. Taylor, *The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut; 1647-1697*, J. Edmund Edwards, Publisher, Stratford, Conn., 1969
6. R. G. Tomlinson, *Witchcraft Trials of Connecticut: the first comprehensive documented history of witchcraft trials in colonial Connecticut*, The Bond Press, Inc., Hartford, Conn., 1978
7. Rev. William DeLoss Love, Ph. D., *The Colonial History of Hartford Gathered Form the Original Records*, The Plimpton Press, Norwood, Mass., 1914
8. Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem: the other witch hunt of 1692*, Oxford University Press, 2005 New York; Oxford, 2005

Patricia Borris
12366 Spring Creek Road
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303-840-8912
March 30, 2007

State Representative Mike Lawlor
Legislative Office Building
Room 2500
Hartford, CT 06106-1594

Re: Connecticut's Convicted Witches

Dear Representative Lawlor,

I am writing to you in support of Adelaide Avery's project to secure exoneration for Connecticut citizens wrongly convicted of and executed for witchcraft during Colonial times.

As with Adelaide, I have a personal interest in legislation regarding this matter. I am a descendant of John and Joan Carrington who were both tried for witchcraft in a Hartford Colony Court. They are my great grandparents, 10 generations back. They were indicted on Feb. 20, 1651 and found guilty on March 6, 1651. They were both executed.

I never considered trying to get my ancestors exonerated until I read about Adelaide's project in *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*. I contacted her and have corresponded with her about her research. I agree with her logic and her reasons for asking for legislation. I admire her efforts in this cause.

I hope you will help pass legislation exonerating our ancestors and all those who were so wrongly persecuted and executed. It is never too late to right a wrong.

Thank you in advance for your support of this issue.

Sincerely,

Patricia Borris

cc: Governor M. Jodi Rell
State Senator Andrew McDonald
State Senator Andrew Roraback
State Representative Arthur O'Neill
State Representative Roberta Willis

Senate Joint Resolution No. 26

I wish to make a brief statement in favor of Senate Joint Resolution No. 26 that asks the General Assembly to acknowledge the excesses of the criminal prosecution of witchcraft in seventeenth-century Connecticut. Some historical context helps to understand the rationale for the resolution.

The capital crime of witchcraft was disproportionately directed at women. Eleven people were hanged in public executions for the offense. Nine of these were women; the two men were husbands of the condemned, who were guilty by association. Three others, all women, were convicted of witchcraft but spared the gallows.

Satan, according to lore, made unholy pacts with willing disciples, particularly women, the flawed sisters of the archetypal femme fatale, Eve. A virulent misogyny, especially at times of community crisis, projected anxiety about sexuality and reproduction upon aged women, who were the antithesis of fecund maternity. They were, for example, charged with causing stillbirths or stopping lactation. In addition, low status women, those on the margins of society, and those of questionable repute were particularly vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft.

From the perspective of Anglo-Puritan jurisprudence, the supernatural essence of witchcraft made it a legal quagmire that confounded empirical ways of knowing. Diabolical magic suspended rational thought at the heart of judicial inquiry. Deponents testified that defendants had flown, appeared as black animals, or sickened a child, statements whose corroboration rested on other phantasms. In the constricted world of the Puritan village, the witch, a wicked woman, was a scapegoat for neighborly complaints, communal stress, and larger patterns of discontent. Prominent people, particularly ministers, hounded the accused to confess to save their souls. No other capital crime so challenged routine standards of the day for admissible evidence and the impartial rule of law.

The resolution properly speaks to these abuses. And it rightfully acknowledges that “no disgrace or cause for distress” be cast upon their descendants. I urge its due consideration and passage.

Lawrence B. Goodheart
Professor of History
University of Connecticut

March 19, 2008

RE: Connecticut State Assembly Joint Resolution No. 26
Resolution Concerning Certain Convictions in Colonial Connecticut

I am writing in support of Joint Resolution No. 26, "Resolution Concerning Certain Convictions in Colonial Connecticut." As Executive Director of Stanley-Whitman House, a museum of early New England history, I have done extensive research on Mary Barnes, one of the victims of the Greater Hartford witchcraft panic of the 1660's. This research has given me a deep understanding of this historical episode in Connecticut's history, as well as a profound belief in that the episode can serve a contemporary lesson.

In adopting this resolution, the people of Connecticut, through the action of our legislature, make a statement: that we are a people who will not be governed by fear; that we tolerate and celebrate diversity in religion and culture; that we will not be swayed by fundamentalist thought, but rather cleave to open discourse and documentary evidence to reach decisions.

The 17th-century era of the witchcraft prosecutions was a much different time than our own. Even educated people believed that witches were to blame for natural disasters and personal tragedies. The belief in witchcraft and their zeal to prosecute suspected witches came from the combination of European tradition, Puritan thought, and fear. The English brought the belief in witchcraft with them from Europe, where witchcraft prosecutions often dovetailed with brutal religious wars. The New England witchcraft prosecutions also bore the brand of fundamentalist Puritan religious thought. Puritan communities felt an obligation to assure that all within its bounds were as free of sin as possible, a Bible commonwealth "wherein the least known evils are not to be tolerated," to quote the Puritan theologian Cotton Mather.

But the critical factor that pushed early Connecticut colonists into community-wide witchcraft panics was fear. In a strange new land far from familiar homes; surrounded by people of other countries and cultures whom they viewed as hostile; held in place by a religious theology that assume their unworthiness and offered no comfort – when the Colony's governance began to weaken, these people turned in panic to prosecuting neighbors, friends and even family members for witchcraft – a ritual they know all too well from their English traditions.

History allows us to study people and the choices they made, within the environments and conditions in which they lived. Resolution No. 26 allows us to examine the actions of Connecticut's earliest settlers with compassion and clarity, and to make a statement that demonstrates how far we have come as a people. I urge the General Assembly to take advantage of this opportunity and pass this resolution.

Lisa Johnson, Executive Director
Stanley-Whitman House
37 High Street, Farmington, Connecticut 06032

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1 April 2007

State Representative Mike Lawlor
Legislative Office Building
Room 2500
Hartford, CT 06106-1594

Dear Representative Lawlor,

This is written in support of the request by Adelaide J. Avery (letter to you of 26 March '07) to exonerate not only her ancestor, Mary Sanford, but all people declared witches by the state of Connecticut. At least, the State should declare an official error in so designating such people.

In my family, a collateral relative adopted the son of a woman, Mary Johnson, who was declared a witch and hung. The General Court in Hartford appeared to have evidence and Mary's confession (who knows how secured). She was indicted of "familiarity with the Devil." Cotton Mather wrote about her death: "And she dy'd in a frame extreamly to the satisfaction of them that were spectators of it."¹

My ancestor was one of the founders of Hartford, and as a past resident of both New Haven and Stamford, and one who has spent many hours in the Connecticut State Library, I feel a special bond with Connecticut. I hope you will work toward the removal of this witch designation from our ancestors and others of many years ago.

Very truly yours,

1. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana Vol II* Silas Andrus, Hartford, 1820 pg. 396

cc: Governor M. Jodi Rell
State Senator Andrew McDonald
State Senator Andrew Roraback
State Representative Arthur O'Neill
State Representative Roberta Willis

Dear Rep. Lawlor,

As curatorial assistant of a local historical museum, I know the value of history and the importance of our past generations. On a daily basis I strive to educate myself and others to the history of my community and those that have shaped it. Without the endeavors of our past descendants, our community would not be the picturesque New England town that we cherish.

Quite frequently, I receive requests from people in their genealogical search for past ancestors. I have aided a woman from Calif, after 3 years of searching, step into our museum and after 15 mins. find the necessary documents to allow her to become a DAR member. I have helped eighth graders to connect to present descendants of a Civil War soldier they were studying from their town. Unfortunately, I have also learned of a local family who's own genealogical search ended in finding their ancestor had been accused of witchcraft and hung in Hartford!

It is with sadness that I look at the atrocities that were committed against men and women accused of witchcraft. It is unfortunate this stain of immorality remains without legislature being passed to exonerate those wrongly accused and punished of witchcraft. I request that such legislature be initiated and passed. Due honor may then be restored to family names.

Respectively,

Margaret D. Freeland
Gunn Museum

3.19.08

To whom it may concern:

We support passage of Resolution 26.

Sincerely,

Ken Cornet & Joe Mustich

404 Nettleton Hollow Rd

Washington CT 06793



General Assembly

Senate Joint

Resolution No. 26

February Session, 2008

LCO No. 3390



Referred to Committee on Judiciary

Introduced by:

(JUD)

RESOLUTION CONCERNING CERTAIN CONVICTIONS IN COLONIAL CONNECTICUT.

Resolved by this Assembly:

WHEREAS, in colonial Connecticut various men and women were accused by their neighbors and townfolk of practicing witchcraft; and

WHEREAS, such accusations were made for a variety of reasons; and

WHEREAS, such accusations were sometimes made because a person was associated with the sudden and unexplained illness of another person, or predicted the illness or recovery from illness of another person, or had knowledge of past or future events; and

WHEREAS, such accusations were sometimes made simply because a person habitually muttered to himself or herself, or talked to unseen persons, or used vulgar language, or gave evil looks, or was a notorious liar, or was a nonconformist, or caused discord among his or her neighbors; and

WHEREAS, some of the accused persons were indicted and put on trial for practicing witchcraft; and

WHEREAS, these trials were conducted without the evidentiary procedures and safeguards that are standard in Connecticut's criminal justice system today; and

WHEREAS, some of the accused persons were found guilty of practicing witchcraft and sentenced to death by hanging.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that although the facts of the accusations, prosecutions, trials and executions of persons for practicing witchcraft in colonial Connecticut cannot be undone or changed, the General Assembly declares its belief that such proceedings, even if lawful under the then existing law of the colony of Connecticut, were shocking, and the result of community-wide hysteria and fear, and that no disgrace or cause for distress should attach to the descendants of these accused and convicted persons by reason of such proceedings; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the adoption of this resolution does not bestow on the state, any political subdivision of the state or any person any right that did not exist prior to its adoption, or authorize any suit or other proceeding, or deprive any party to a suit or other proceeding of any defense that such party previously had, or affect in any way the title to or rights in any real or personal property, or require or permit the remission of any penalty, fine or forfeiture previously imposed or incurred.