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OLR RESEARCH REPORT

December 18, 2006

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2006-R-0718

CONNECTICUT WITCH TRIALS AND POSTHUMOUS PARDONS

By: Sandra Norman-Eady, Chief Attorney
Jennifer Bernier, Librarian

You asked a series of questions about Connecticut's witch trials, including whether any witches have been pardoned posthumously. You also wanted to know if any other state has granted a witch a posthumous pardon. We answer each question separately below based on records and accounts of local historians. We relied primarily on works by John M. Taylor, author of *The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut 1647-1697*; Connecticut historian Walter W. Woodard, author of soon to be published *Prosperos America: John Winthrop, Jr., Alchemy and the Creation of New England Culture 1606-1676*; and John Putman Demos, author of *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*.

What is the Origin of the Crime of "Witchcraft?"

The crime of witchcraft was included in laws enacted by the parliament of England during Queen Elizabeth I's reign (1558-1603). Witchcraft and its penalty were thought to be the express law of God as stated in Exodus 22:18 ("Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"), Leviticus 20:27 ("A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them"), and Deuteronomy 18: 10 ("There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or

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an enchanter, or a witch" (quotes from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version).

In each of the New England colonies, witchcraft was a capital crime that involved having some type of relationship with or entertaining Satan. The earliest laws of Connecticut and New Haven colonies, the Blue Laws, make it a capital offense for "any man or woman [to] bee a Witch, that is, hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit, they shall bee put to death." Although the witchcraft crimes did not require any harm to result from this relationship or entertainment, in practice there had to be harm that warranted the effort and expense of a formal proceeding. In addition to a formal witchcraft charge, allegations of witchcraft were often the bases for civil suits for slander.

When were Connecticut's Witch Trials Held and What Gave Rise to Them?

Connecticut's witch trials were held in the mid to late 1600's, between 1647 and 1697. However, no alleged witches were executed after 1662. Although historians cannot say with absolute certainty what gave rise to the witch trials, many believe that fear was the primary caused. The colonists held strong religious beliefs and years of fighting Native Americans, floods, and epidemical sickness may have caused them to look for someone (Satan) to blame for their hardships.

Describe the Legal Proceedings

Although all proceedings appeared to have been documented, many of the trial records no longer exist. Of those that survive, historians have discovered that a formal complaint started the process. Following the complaint, local magistrates would collect evidence, usually consisting of depositions from witnesses and an examination of the accused. A single witness was all it took to support a witchcraft conviction prior to 1662. Beginning that year, Connecticut required simultaneous witnessing of the same incident by two or more people.

Once gathered, the information was forwarded to higher courts authorized to try capital cases. The high court would refer the cases to a grand jury for indictment. Full consideration was given to the written evidence and, where possible, there was a personal reaffirmation of the testimony by the deponents. If indicted, cases went to a jury trial. The governor's assistant served as prosecutor and as such he shaped the jury's understanding of the case. The prosecutor and the accused called witnesses (it is unclear whether the accused were represented by counsel). Once all of the evidence was presented, the jury delivered its

verdict and the magistrate (the governor) imposed sentence. If the jury returned a verdict with which the magistrate disagreed, he could overturn it.

Did the Equivalent of Today's General Assembly Have Any Role in the Trials?

No, the then-General Court did not have a role in the trials.

Names of People Tried as Witches and Case Outcomes

Many court records have been lost or destroyed; thus, there are varying accounts of the number of witch trials in Connecticut. Table 1 shows the names of people who were accused of witchcraft as reported by John Putman Demos in his book *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*. If they were tried as witches, the table shows the years the trials were held and outcomes where known. The table includes cases of slander brought by suspected witches. If the suspected witches did not go to trial, the table also shows those (1) accused, which includes cases for which there is evidence of witchcraft accusation or suspicion but no record of any court action, or (2) indicted, which means they appeared in court before trial.

Table 1: People Accused Of Witchcraft In Connecticut

<i>People Accused of Witchcraft</i>	<i>Accusation Date and Place</i>	<i>Verdict or Sentence</i>
Alice Young	1647 Windsor	Hanged
Mary Johnson	1648 Wethersfield	Pressured into a confession and probably executed
John and Joan Carrington	1651 Wethersfield	Guilty, executed
Goodwife Bassett	1651 Fairfield	Convicted and hung
Goodwife Knapp	1653 Fairfield	Convicted and hung
Elizabeth Goodman	1653 and 1655 New Haven	Charged with Slander in 1653. In 1655, acquitted of witchcraft and released with a reprimand and warning.
Mary Staples	1654 New Haven	Slander
Lydia Gilbert	1654 Windsor	Probably executed
Nicholas Bailey & wife	1655	Acquitted and banished
William Meaker	1657 New Haven	Slander

Table 1 (continued)

Elizabeth Garlick	1658 Easthampton*	Acquitted
Katherine Palmer	1660 and 1672	Slander
Nicholas & Margaret Jennings	1661 Saybrook	Acquitted
Judith Varlet	1662-63 Hartford	Probably acquitted
Goody Ayres	1662 Hartford	Fled the colony with her husband, who also appears to have been accused
Rebecca Greensmith	1662 Hartford	Hanged
Nathaniel Greensmith	1662 Hartford	Hanged
Mary Sanford	1662 Hartford	Probably hanged
Andrew Sanford	1662 Hartford	Acquitted
Mary Barnes	1662-3 Farmington	Hanged
Elizabeth and John Blackleach	1662-3 Wethersfield	Complaint filed
James Wakeley	1662 and 1665 Hartford	Fled both times
Elizabeth Seager	1663 Hartford	Tried twice and acquitted both times
Mary Hall	1664 Setauket*	Indicted
Elizabeth Seager	1665 Hartford	Convicted, however the governor reversed the verdict
Ralph and Mary Hall	1664 Setauket*	Acquitted
Hannah Griswold	1667 Saybrook	Slander
William Graves	1667 Stamford	Complaint filed, probably indicted
Katherine Harrison	1669 Wethersfield	Guilty, however verdict was overturned and Harrison left Connecticut
Goody Messenger	1673 Windsor	Slander
Goody Burr	1678 Wethersfield	Slander
Goody Bowden	1689 New Haven	Slander
Mercy Disborough	1692 Fairfield	Subjected to the water test** and later convicted and sentenced to death, however given a reprieve by the General Assembly
Elizabeth Clawson	1692 Stamford	Subjected to the water test** and acquitted

Table 1 (continued)

Mary Staples	1692 Fairfield	Indicted
Mary Harvey	1692 Fairfield	Indicted
Hannah Harvey	1692 Fairfield	Indicted
Goody Miller	1692 Fairfield	Accusation
Winifred Benham	1692 Wallingford	Indicted
Hugh Croasia	1692 Stratford	Indicted
Winifred Benham	1697 Wallingford	Acquitted

* This town in Long Island, which today belongs to New York, was initially within the jurisdiction of the Connecticut Colony.

** Suspected witches were sometimes dropped into a body of water to determine if they possessed evil spirits. The theory behind the so-called "ducking test" was that if the person sank she was innocent but if she floated she was guilty because the pure water cast out her evil spirit.

Has Connecticut's Board of Pardons and Paroles Ever Granted a Pardon, Posthumously?

No. According to the board, there is no procedure for granting such a pardon.

Has any Other State Granted a Posthumous Pardon?

It appears that two states (Massachusetts and Virginia) have granted witches posthumous pardons. On October 17, 1711, the governor and General Court reversed the conviction against several people tried as witches in 1692 and ordered restitution. Years later, on August 28, 1957, the General Court of Massachusetts issued a resolution (attached) (1) finding that Ann Pudeator and others executed for witchcraft in 1692 may have been illegally tried, convicted, and sentenced; (2) declaring its belief that witchcraft trials were shocking and the result of a wave of popular hysterical fear of the Devil in the community; and (3) declaring that the resolution did not (a) bestow rights that did not exist before its passage, (b) authorize any suits or deprive anyone of a suit or defense that existed before its passage, (c) alter property rights, or (d) require or permit the remission of any imposed penalty, fine, or forfeiture.

On October 1, 2001, the Massachusetts legislature amended the 1957 resolution by adding the names of the five other people executed for witchcraft in 1692. Those added were Bridget Bishop, Susannah Martin, Alice Parker, Margaret Scott, and Wilmot Redd. We have attached a copy of the amendment.

On July 10, 2006, the governor of Virginia granted an informal or ceremonial pardon to Grace Sherwood, who 300 years ago became the only person in that state convicted as a witch tried by water. The pardon, which restored Sherwood's good name, was in the form of a letter to the mayor of Virginia Beach, the site of the water trial.

In addition to the two states, one town has posthumously exonerated a witch. In 1938, the Town of Hampton, New Hampshire, by resolution (attached), exonerated the one person in the town who had been accused of witchcraft. The town declared its belief that Eunice (Goody) Cole was unjustly accused of witchcraft and familiarity with the devil in the 17th century. It restored her rightful place as a citizen of the town and ordered the selectmen to burn certified copies of all official documents relating to the false accusations.

Although New York has not posthumously pardoned witches, the state recently (2003) pardoned Comedian Lenny Bruce, who was convicted of giving an obscene performance in 1964 during a Greenwich Village performance. Bruce died of a drug overdose two years later.

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ACTS
AND
RESOLVES

General Court of Massachusetts

1957

EDWARD J. CRONIN
Secretary of the Commonwealth



BOSTON
WRIGHT & POTTER PRINTING COMPANY
1957

of selectmen of the cities and towns constituting said districts, for the purpose of representing the joint interests of said municipalities and of the public in consultation with the officials of the metropolitan district commission.

Said special commission shall be furnished by the metropolitan district commission with such technical and other assistance as it may require, and shall have the right to call upon other state departments, boards or commissions and upon city and town departments, boards or commissions for such information and assistance as it may deem necessary for its purposes. It shall be provided with quarters in the state house or elsewhere, may travel within and without the commonwealth, and may incur such expense as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this resolve, and for said purposes may expend the unexpended balance available in item 0257-14 in section two of chapter seven hundred and forty-six of the acts of nineteen hundred and fifty-six and the balance of the sum of fifteen thousand dollars appropriated from the General Fund in advance of the general appropriation for the current year.

It is further provided that the expenditures made by the special commission under chapter one hundred and twenty-five of the resolves of the year nineteen hundred and fifty-six and under chapter forty-five of the resolves of nineteen hundred and fifty-seven and under this resolve are to be assessed fifty per cent on the metropolitan water district, twenty-five per cent on the north sewerage district, and twenty-five on the south sewerage district.

Said special commission may report from time to time to the general court the results of its investigation and study hereunder, and its recommendations, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry its recommendations into effect, by filing the same with the clerk of the senate, but in any event shall file its final report with said clerk on or before the fourth Wednesday of January, nineteen hundred and fifty-eight.

Approved August 28, 1957.

RESOLVE RELATIVE TO THE IMPROVEMENT, TRIAL, CONVICTION AND EXECUTION OF ANN FUDGEATOR AND CERTAIN OTHER PERSONS FOR "WITCHGRAVE" IN THE YEAR SIXTEEN HUNDRED AND NINETY-TWO.

Whereas, One Ann Fudgeator and certain other persons were indicted, tried, found guilty, sentenced to death and executed in the year sixteen hundred and ninety-two for "Witchcraft"; and

Whereas, Said persons may have been illegally tried, convicted and sentenced by a possibly illegal court of the Province without authority under the Province Charter of Massachusetts Bay; and

RESOLVE RELATIVE TO THE IMPROVEMENT, TRIAL, CONVICTION AND EXECUTION OF ANN FUDGEATOR AND CERTAIN OTHER PERSONS FOR "WITCHGRAVE" IN THE YEAR SIXTEEN HUNDRED AND NINETY-TWO.

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 August 28, 1957.

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the former elevated structure. Said authority and depart-
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subway and rapid transit facilities in substitution therefor
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Forest Hills station in the city of Boston and the
elevated structure of the metropolitan transit authority be-
program in Massachusetts, providing for the removal of the
any other act for a project, to be made part of the highway
will be available under the Federal Highway Act or under
tain from federal public works officials whether federal funds
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Resolved, That the metropolitan transit authority and the
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Chap. 146

Approved August 28, 1957

feature hitherto imposed or incurred.
it require or permit the remission of any penalty, fine or for-
tide to or rights in any real or personal property, nor shall
he hitherto had, shall not affect in any way whatever the
any party to a suit or other proceeding of any defense which
shall not authorize any suit or other proceeding nor deprive
person any right which did not exist prior to said passage,
on the commonwealth or any of its subdivisions, or on any

Resolved, That the passage of this resolve shall not bestow
of them by reason of said proceedings, and be it further
or cause for distress attaches to the said descendants or any
done and superseded by our more civilized laws no disgrace
even if then legally conducted, have been long since aban-
clares that, as all the laws under which said proceedings,
fenceal fear of the Devil in the community, and further de-
and are shocking, and the result of a wave of popular hye-
Chapter and the law of Massachusetts as it then was, were
that such proceedings, even if lawful under the Province
ated the General Court of Massachusetts declares its belief
although the facts of such proceedings cannot be oblit-

Resolved, That in order to alleviate such distress and
ceedings, therefore be it
other persons are still distressed by the record of said pro-
that certain descendants of said Ann Fudge and said
The General Court of Massachusetts is informed
Whereas, The General Court of Massachusetts is informed
them, and
the proceedings, but no other action taken in regard to
public Fast Day proclaimed and observed in repentance for
and by all the members of the "Witchcraft" jury, and a
Sewall, one of the judges of the so-called "Witchcraft Court",
Whereas, Although there was a public repentance by Judge

Chapter 122 of the Acts of 2001

AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE WITCHCRAFT TRIAL OF 1692.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. Chapter 145 of the resolves of 1957 is hereby amended by striking out, in line 1, the words "One Ann Pudeator and certain other persons" and inserting in place thereof the following words:- Ann Pudeator, Bridget Bishop, Susannah Martin, Alice Parker, Margaret Scott and Wilmot Redd.

SECTION 2. Said chapter 145 is hereby further amended by striking out, in line 5, the word "Said" and inserting in place thereof the following words:- The above named.

SECTION 3. Said chapter 145 is hereby further amended by striking out, in lines 17 and 18, the words "and said other persons" and inserting in place thereof the following words:- Bridget Bishop, Susannah Martin, Alice Parker, Margaret Scott and Wilmot Redd.

Approved October 31, 2001.

Return to:
List of Laws passed in 2001 Session
General Court home page, or
[Commonwealth of Massachusetts home page.](#)



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Timothy M. Kaine
Governor

July 10, 2006

Ms. Belinda Nash
801 Cathedral Drive
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23455

Dear Ms. Nash:

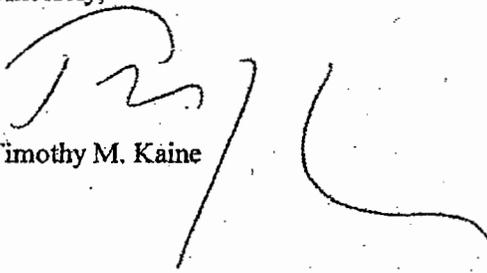
I am pleased to join the Mayor of Virginia Beach in extending best wishes as you work to promote justice in the 1706 "witch ducking" case of Grace Sherwood.

With 300 years of hindsight, we all certainly can agree that trial by water is an injustice. 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.

The historical records that survive indicate that Ms. Sherwood, a midwife and widowed mother of three, survived her "trial by water" in 1706. Those records also indicate that one of my predecessors, Governor Alexander Spotswood, eventually helped her reclaim her property. The record also indicates Ms. Sherwood led an otherwise quiet and law-abiding life until she died at the age of 80.

Today, July 10, 2006, as 70th Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, I am pleased to officially restore the good name of Grace Sherwood.

Sincerely,


Timothy M. Kaine

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atters thereof; lay out and maintain,
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se if the town will vote to raise and

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75 for a new portable fire pump.

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Article 16. To see if the town will vote to adopt the following resolution:

Resolved: that we, the citizens of the town of Hampton in town meeting assembled do hereby declare that we believe that Eunice (Goody) Cole was unjustly accused of witchcraft and of familiarity with the devil in the seven-teenth century, and we do hereby restore to the said Eunice (Goody) Cole her rightful place as a citizen of the town of Hampton.

Be it further resolved: that at such time as the Selectmen shall elect during the Tercentenary of the town of Hampton, appropriate and fitting ceremonies shall be held to carry out the purposes of this resolution by publicly burning certified copies of all official documents relating to the false accusations against Eunice (Goody) Cole, and that the burned documents together with soil from the reputed last resting places and from the site of the home of Eunice (Goody) Cole be gathered in an urn and reverently placed in the ground at such place in the town of Hampton as the Selectmen shall designate.

Article 17. To see if the Town will vote to sell R. H. Lovely a strip of land near the incinerator plant.

Article 18. To transact any other business that may come before said meeting.

Given under our hands and seals this Twenty-first day of February in the year of our Lord 1938.

EDWARD S. BATCHELDER,
ELROY G. SHAW,
HARRY D. MUNSEY,

Selectmen of Hampton, N. H.

(Reversal of Attainder – October 17, 1711.)

Province of the Massachusetts Bay: Anno Regni Anna Reginae Decimo.

An Act to reverse the attainders of George Burroughs and others for Witchcraft

Forasmuch as in the year of our Lord one Thousand six hundred ninety two several Towns within this Province were Infested with a horrible Witchcraft or possession of devils; And at a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer holden at Salem in the County of Essex in the same year 1692. George Burroughs of Wells, John Procter, George Jacobs, John Willard, Giles Core, and [] his wife, Rebecca Nurse and Sarah Good all of Salem aforesaid Elizabeth How of Ipswich, Mary eastey, Sarah Wild and Abigail Hobbs all of Topsfield, Samuel

Wardell, Mary Parker ; Martha Carrier, Abigail Falkner : Anne Foster, Rebecca Eames, Mary Post and Mary Lacey all of Andover, Mary Bradbury, of Salisbury, and Dorcas Hoar of Beverley Were severally Indicted convicted and attainted of Witchcraft and some of them put to death, others lying still under the like sentance of the said Court, and liable to have the same Executed upon them.

The Influence and Energy of the Evil Spirits so great at that time acting in and upon those who were the principal accusers and Witnesses proceeding so far as to cause a Prosecution to be had of persons of known and good reputation, which caused a great dissatisfaction and a stop to be put thereunto until their Majesty's pleasure should be known therein: And upon a Representation thereof accordingly made her late Majesty Queen Mary the second of blessed memory by Her Royal Letter given at her Court at Whitehall the fifteenth of April 1693. was Graciously pleased to approve the care and Circumspection therein; and to Will and require that in all proceedings ag't persons accused for Witchcraft, or being possessed by the devil, the greatest Moderation and all due Circumspection be used, so far as the same may be without Impediment to the Ordinary course of Justice.

And some of the principal Accusers and Witnesses in those dark and severe prosecutions have since discovered themselves to be persons of profligate and vicious conversation.

Upon the humble Petition and suit of several of the s'd persons and of the children of others of them whose Parents were Executed. Be it Declared and Enacted by his Excellency the Governor Council and Representatives in General Court assembled and by the authority of the same That the several convictions Judgments and Attainders against the said George Borroughs, John Procter, George Jacob, John Willard, Giles Core and [] Core, Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Good, Elizabeth How, Mary Easty, Sarah W[ild] Abigail Hobbs, Samuel Wardell, Mary Parker, Martha Carrier, Abigail Falkner, Anne Foster, Rebecca Eame[s,] Mary Post, Mary Lacey, Mary Bradbury, and Dorcas [Hoar], and every of them Be and hereby are reversed made and d[eclared] to be null and void to all Intents, Constructions and purposes wh[atso] ever, as if no such convictions, Judgments or Attainders had ever [been] had or given. And that no penalties or forfeitures of Goods or Chattels be by the said Judgments and attainders or either of them had or Incurrd.

Any Law Usage or Custom to the contrary notwithstanding. And that no Sheriffe, Constable, Goaler or other officer shall be Liable to

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any prosecution in the Law for anything they then Legally did in the Execution of their respective offices.

Made and Pass'd by the Great and General Court or Assembly of her Majestys Province of the Massachusetts Bay: in New England held at Boston the 17th day of october. 1711.

(Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 2 Page 63)

(Governor Dudley's Order for Payment)

By his Excellency the Governor

Whereas the Generall Assembly in thier last Session accepted the report of thier comitte appointed to consider of the Damages sustained by Sundry persons prosecuted for Witchcraft in the year 1692 vizt:

	£ s. d.
To Elizabeth How	12 0 0
George Jacobs	79 0 0
Mary Eastey	20 0 0
Mary Parker	08 0 0
George Burroughs	50 0 0
Giles cory & wife	21 0 0
Rebecca Nurse	25 0 0
John Willard	20 0 0
Sarah Good	30 0 0
Martha Carrier	7 6 0
Samuel Wardwell & wife	36 15 0
	309 1 0
John Procter and wife	150 0 0
Sar[a]h Wild	014 0 0
Mary Bradbury	20 0 0
Abigail Faulkner	20 0 0
Abigail Hobbs	10 0 0
Anne Foster	6 10 0
Rebecca Eames	10 0 0

Dorcas Hoar	21 17 0
Mary Post	8 14 0
Mary Lacey	8 10 0
	269 11 0
	309 1 0
	578 12 0

The whole amounting unto Five hundred seventy eight poundes and Twelve Shillings.

I doe by & with the advice and consent of her Maj'tys council hereby order you to pay the above sum of five hundred seventy eight poundes & Twelve shillings to Stephen Sewall Esq'r. who together

-1018-

with the Gentlemen of the Committe that Estimated and Reported the said Damages are desired & directed to distribute the same in proportion as above to such of the said persons as are Living, and to those that legally represent them that are dead according as the law directs & for which this shall be your Warrant.

Given under my hand at BoSton the 17 Day of December 1711

*J Dudley

(Reverse) Margaret Towne v-12-8

Margert Willard 3-4-6

(Reverse) Allowance to persons who were prosecuted for witchcraft

[To Mr Treasurer Taylor By order of the Governor & Council Isa Addington Secrty.]

(Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 2 Page 64)

