

The Joint Committee on Judiciary

IN SUPPORT of House Joint Resolution 34, RESOLUTION CONCERNING CERTAIN WITCHCRAFT CONVICTIONS IN CONNECTICUT

My name is Kimberly Black and I am submitting this testimony as part of the Connecticut Witch Trial Exoneration Project.

360 years ago my 14th. generation great grandmother, Mary Sanford, was hanged as a witch during the Great Hartford Witch Panic, she was the first to be hanged. She was 39 years old, the same age I am now. She was also a mother like myself and she had 5 children.

She was charged with "familiarity of Satan" and her crime was having "acted and also come to knowledge of secrets in a preternatural way beyond the course of nature to the great disturbance of several members of this Commonwealth."

Mary along with others were named in attending a Christmas party and she was seen dancing and drinking on the South Green, which is now Barnard Park. Puritans did not believe in celebrating Christmas and the party was construed as a coven and meeting with the devil. Dancing is seen as engaging in forbidden pleasure. It represents temptation and sin. Many of the Puritans accused people of witchcraft who deviated from social norms or who seemed to threaten church teachings and codes of behavior. Women were considered weaker in the soul.

It is a misconception to believe that the Witch Trials were all about magic or witchcraft & working with the Devil. They largely weren't. Those things were used to justify the executions, but make no mistake, it was about destroying the Feminine so patriarchy could rule. This shows in the fact that Mary's husband, my grandfather Andrew Sanford, was also accused of witchcraft and he was acquitted. My 12th. generation great grandfather, Nicholas Disborough Jr. was suspected of witchcraft in 1683, but his charges were later dropped. Walter Woodward, a state historian in Connecticut, says women in Connecticut were four times more likely to be accused of witchcraft than men. Out of the 11 who were executed, 2 were men and out of the 22 others who were accused, 7 were men. In total out of 34, 9 were men.

I remember my grandmother, it doesn't matter how many generations back she is. For I am Mary & she is me. Without her existence & without her struggle, I would not be here today. She lost her voice so that now, 360 years later, it has come full circle and I may use mine without fear. What better way to use my voice than to honor her by getting this bill passed and sharing her story along with the stories of the other victims from the Connecticut Witch Trials. Mary Sanford's legacy is more than being a fallen victim of witchcraft hysteria, her legacy is my family & she will continue to live on through us.

Recently I went on a genealogy trip to Connecticut. We had 3 generations of Mary's descendants. It was a very emotional trip as we went to the sites that related to her trial. We danced and drank in Mary's honor in Barnard Park. It wasn't lost on us that here we were 360 years later in the same spot doing the exact same thing that got our ancestor killed. We stood on the steps of the Old State House, which is where her so called "trial" took place and it's also said

to be where the hangings took place. We went to the Capital as well because some historians believe that that is where the hangings took place, on Gallows Hill.

This trip was also to bring closure for my ancestors who were on the other side of the Witch Trials that happened in Connecticut. I descend from 5 ancestors who took part in the Witch Trials and I feel it is my duty to apologize for their wrongdoings.

Thomas Wells was a juror for my grandparents Mary and Andrew Sanford's trials as well as Elizabeth Seager's. Mary was convicted and hanged while Andrew was acquitted. He was Magistrate for Mary Johnson's and she was convicted and hanged. He was also Magistrate for Elizabeth Garlick's. He went on to become Deputy Governor and the Governor of Wethersfield.

Capt. Samuel Marshall was a juror on both Rebecca Greensmith trial and Katherine Harrison's first trial. Rebecca was convicted and hanged.

Benjamin Fenn was Magistrate for both Elizabeth Goodman's trial and Katherine Harrison's second trial.

Capt. Thomas Throwbridge was on Winfred Benham SR's first trial.

David Wilton was a juror on Joane and John Carrington's trial.

From the trials that my ancestors were part of, Mary Sanford, Mary Johnson and Rebecca Greensmith were all convicted and hanged. However, for those who were accused, damage was done. Those who were not killed were often ousted from their hometowns or fled from them in fear. This included my grandfather, Andrew Sanford, after Mary was hanged he took the kids and moved to Milford, Connecticut.

I ask that you all please support this bill. I feel it is not only for the victims, but also for the accusers. There are others like myself who descend from both the victims and the accusers, the so called "Witch" and the witch hunter. By acknowledging the mistakes of the past, we educate the public that similar actions are not acceptable today. There are still people pointing fingers at each other for being different and this can send a message about the dangers of alienating people. This also gives us the opportunity to educate the public on the Connecticut Witch Trials, which most people have no knowledge of as it's been lost in history and now we can shine a light on them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Black