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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Bachelor's thesis deals with witch trials held in the American Colonies in the early modern period. Its objective is to show the nature of witch persecutions, its beginnings, methods and consequences. The topic was selected because of my interest in the matter of magic and its history during medieval times and the early modern period.

The thesis consists of three main parts and is structured into five main chapters with several sub-chapters. The first part, including the first chapter, provides information about terminology used in connection with witchcraft, reasons for its punishment and the relation between religion and witchcraft. Some causes of the witch hunts are also mentioned as well as methods used to prove the accused person guilty.

The next part consists of three chapters which provide the description of the actual trials in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Virginia. These chapters are divided into sub-chapters according to the periods of the trials. The chapter referring to the trials in Massachusetts includes a further sub-chapter which contains examples of theories explaining Salem witch-hunts.

The last part contains the chapter which provides a brief summary of a famous play about the Salem witch trials, *The Crucible*. Each act of the play is analyzed with regard to the actual trials (e.g. what really happened or to what situation the author refers).

Most of the sources used for writing the thesis are books written in English. Most of the books concerning the witch trials held in the colonies are about Salem, Massachusetts. The reason is that the Salem witch-hunt was the biggest witch persecution in North America and most of the records from the hearings still exist. On the contrary, records about the trials held in other towns or villages are not so clear or do not exist. Thus the chapter referring to the trials held in Connecticut provides just a brief summary of the cases and the chapter referring to the trials held in

Virginia contains description of only one case whose records was available.

Other sources were available on the Internet. These sources were mostly records from the trials provided by University of the Virginia and documentaries from the National Geographic series.

## 2 BACKGROUND

"Thou shall not suffer a witch to live." <sup>[1]</sup>

Book of Exodus 22:18

### 2.1 Witch

The basic question relating to the topic of witch trials or witch persecutions all over the world is: what or who is a witch? Dictionaries define witch as a woman who possesses some supernatural powers and uses magic. Nowadays, when we talk about a witch we imagine an ugly old woman who is evil and tries to harm someone. But originally the word *witch* came from Anglo-Saxon words *wicca*, used for women, and *wicce*, used for men, and it referred to a person who used magic in general. There was no difference between using magic for good purposes and using it to cause harm. However, in the context of the witch persecution it gained the meaning of someone who is evil and cannot do any good.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 2.2 Sabbat

Sabbat is a nocturnal assembly of witches that take place at deserted places usually in the woods. Satan himself is present. This ritual is characterized by sexual orgies and devil-worship. However the origin of Sabbat does not lie in the times of witch persecutions. Ecclesiastical texts supported the theories about the heretics and pictured them as diabolical persons or even cannibals. The picture of such evil rites was created from different myths and legends of demons, witchcraft and magic. Thus everything harmful, mysterious or suspect was considered a sign of the influence of the Devil and connected with him.<sup>[3]</sup>

Many authors wrote about Sabbat during the times of the witch trials, their description is usually based on the confessions of accused witches questioned by inquisition. However, it is obvious that many of the descriptions provided by accused witches are influenced by local myths and legends and by the questioning of the inquisitors. The Sabbat can be connected with meetings held by poor villagers who were connected with orgies. Sabbat horrors were described in ecclesiastical literature of the sixteenth century. Also, it was said, tortured people were willing to confess almost everything, thus, they confirmed that they were connected to the Devil and provided details about their participation in Sabbats. The corporal existence of demons was also described in *The Hammer of Witches* as well as the sexual intercourse with them and women's inclination to it. (for more detail see chapter 2.5)<sup>[4]</sup>

The theories concerning Sabbat and witches described in the witch hunter's manuals were known to people and thus the accused witches usually confessed describing the form of Sabbat and activities which were known in their culture. It can be seen in the case of Tituba, an Indian slave accused in Salem Village, who confessed to be a witch. She claimed that she was participating in Sabbats, but her description of the course of these meetings of witches was the description related to the English view of witchcraft and witches in spite of the fact that she lived in Barbados with her master's family. (for more detail see chapter 4.2.2)<sup>[5]</sup>

### **2.3 To reveal a witch**

As the power of the Catholic Church grew the heresy was considered inadmissible and heretics were enemies of the Church. By 1221 the inquisition was established by Pope Gregory IX for the purpose of exposing and punishing heresy.<sup>[6]</sup> In 1326 Pope John XXII proclaimed sorcery a crime and psychic powers were designated as witchcraft. In 1484 Witchcraft was declared a heresy by Pope Innocent VIII and the

punishment for heresy was death. Also disbelief was considered as heresy.<sup>[7]</sup>

In the Middle Ages there existed a sort of list of demons used by church investigators in cases of demonic possession and witchcraft. A person who practiced exorcism had to have charisma and authority, all depended on the ability to expel evil. But later in witch hunts evil was represented by dangerous people and their conspiracies.<sup>[8]</sup>

If people traditionally resolved tensions and competition with neighbours, or dealt with those neighbours malicious powers, through negotiations and avoidance, now in witch-panics these forms of resolution are replaced with an anxiety to purge completely all powers of human malice. The problem of the community is no longer one malevolent individual and his or her secret sorcery, but a far more terrifying specter: a cult of witches.<sup>[9]</sup>

Of course people believed in witches and supernatural powers before but since a witch was convinced by the authorities it became real. First to find and accuse witches were so called witch-finders, later it was a possessed person who figured in witch hunts in Europe and New England.

## **2.4 Causes**

There are many theories about the causes of the witchcraft persecutions, which are based on historical, religious or social background. One of them concerns the change of gender roles, when original form of midwifery dominated by women was replaced by medicine dominated by men. Midwifery became to be considered as barbaric, uncivilized and pagan. This theory is supported by the fact that many of the women accused during the witch hunts were somehow connected to midwifery.<sup>[10]</sup> Even the fact that most of the male witches accused in the colonies were related or somehow connected to the female witches

already accused or even convinced, which can be seen in the examples of trials described in chapters 3, 4 and 5, supports the theory about the opinion of Puritans concerning women and witchcraft.

Also as it can be seen in the examples of trials mentioned in following chapters the patriarchal society of Puritans did not tolerate anything that is not in accordance with their beliefs and rules and it did not tolerate free will of women too. The first case of such violation of their rules is the case of Ann Hutchinson, a midwife who disagreed with the Puritan theology in some ways. She believed that woman was as good as men and was holding a meeting of women in her house.<sup>[11]</sup> Another aggravation was that she befriended a midwife, Jane Hawkins, accused of being in contact with the Devil because she assisted with the birth of a deformed child in 1637.<sup>[12]</sup> As Anne was a threat to Puritan's belief that woman should be submissive to her husband and obey the rules, she was exiled.

As it can be seen in some cases of Salem Village, the accused women were also expressing their own free will. For example Sarah Osborne broke the rules when after the death of her husband she lived with her lover for some time and then even married him. (for more detail see chapter 4.2.2)<sup>[13]</sup> The fact that she did not have any male heir was not well received in that time, because she was wealthy and independent, as is obvious from the fact that she married her lover. Thus she was not considered a good Christian by the society.

Connected to this subordination was a common male view of women as both sexually less restrained and intellectually less developed. Many of the crimes associated with witchcraft mirrored cultural activities in which women predominated. Killing babies and using their corpses could be associated with childbirth; giving suck to demons, with nursing infants; poisoning, with cooking; and spoiling milk and butter, with milking cows and churning. Women had a reputation for gossiping, which was actually against the law in early modern times.<sup>[14]</sup>



Other theory refers to the Church's suspicion of sex in all forms which caused condemnation of any forms of sexual behaviour. This can be related to the fact that catholic priests are supposed to live celibate. The Puritans were not supposed to live this way but their point of view concerning witchcraft was influenced by the persecutions in Europe, thus they knew about the theories concerning sexuality related to demons which were discussed over Europe because of the influence of witch-hunter's manuals and according to some historians witch-hunters were obsessed with sex.<sup>[15]</sup> These manuals were usually written by witchfinders or inquisitors and presented their view of witches, usually women.

## **2.5 Hammer of Witches**

In case of accusation of witchcraft the proof was necessary to find such a person guilty. As there was no such thing as general rules on how to recognise a witch, a sort of guidebook was published. The guidebook on finding witches called *Malleus Maleficarum*, or the Hammer of the Witches, was published in 1486. It provides the definition of witchcraft and how to recognize it, rules on how to examine and judge the cases as well as the witch death penalty.<sup>[16]</sup> The book can be considered even misogynist because of the description of women, why they are more susceptible to witchcraft and seductions of the Devil. The first part of it contains also the description of sexual intercourse with demons.

But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives.<sup>[17]</sup>

There is even mentioned one unmistakable sign of a witch, so called devil's mark or witch's teat. The devil's mark was clear proof of connection between the witch and the Devil. It was believed that familiar

spirits, usually animal spirits which serve them, suckle blood through it. For the test of this mark it was necessary to shave all her or his hair, including the genitals, to be able to find it. Once it was found it was pierced by needle or pin, if there was no pain and no blood it was not natural and it might be a witch's mark.<sup>[18]</sup>

Of course there existed many manuals before *Malleus Maleficarum* that explained the links between witches and Satan, as mentioned above, but they were not so notorious and read. Nevertheless, a tract called *Formicarius* by Johannes Nider, which consist of five books of tales illustrating the problems of sin where the last book is about witchcraft, is often cited in *Malleus Maleficarum*.<sup>[19]</sup> The thing that made the book so powerful was the witchcraft bull, *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, a document signed by Pope Innocent VIII. It recognized the existence of witches and gave the permission to prosecute witches to Heinrich Kramer, and it was included in almost all editions.

Thus it seemed that the Vatican agrees with all that is written in *Malleus Maleficarum*, but it does not say anything about it. The book is not mentioned there and the bull is dated three years before it was even published. The signature of a respectable member of the University of Cologne Jacob Sprenger can be considered another sign of credibility. Thanks to the Guttenberg's invention *Malleus Maleficarum* could be printed and distributed in more than 30000 copies across Europe and the American colonies. The book was so powerful that it is estimated that by the end of the eighteenth century there were about forty to sixty thousand victims sentenced to death on the basis of the content of *Malleus Maleficarum*.<sup>[20]</sup>

## 2.6 Testing a witch

Besides witch's mark another proof was used during the witch trials in the American colonies, so called "spectral evidence" which played

important role during the witch trials in Salem. Spectral evidence means that someone sees a specter, spirit, of the person accused of witchcraft, usually the specter is trying to hurt a person who sees it or to make the person sign the devil's book.[21] Also many methods to prove someone guilty of witchcraft were used. These methods were usually methods of torture and there are not many records about witch trials in the American colonies concerning torture. However, some records from the trials in Salem, mostly personal documents, mention the usage of torture.

In England and its colonies, torture as such was normally used only in cases of alleged treason. However, there are indications that "neck and heels" binding was practised in Salem; this involved tying a person for long periods with the legs drawn up tightly beneath the chin. Incarceration in a filthy hole of a jail for months, without adequate food, heat, or ventilation, might have broken many a strong person.<sup>[22]</sup>

A method common in testing a witch was a water test, called "ducking" and sometimes "swimming". The accused person was thrown into the water tied up, hand to foot, and if the person sank then was considered innocent. In case the person floated was considered guilty of witchcraft. This test was based on the belief that witches denied their baptism as they were connected to the Devil, thus, the water, and God, rejected them as impure.<sup>[23]</sup>

## **2.7 Witchcraft acts**

Until the year 1776 the American colonies belonged to England. Thus, the colonies fell under the British law. As England was affected by the witch hunts in other European countries, the laws concerning witchcraft had to be passed. Witchcraft was punished even before any law was passed, but it was most likely to be tried by the ecclesiastical courts as a heresy. However, a monarch of England is the head of the

Church of England, for English magistrates the practice of witchcraft was a crime against the Church and the state.

The first such law was adopted under the rule of Henry VIII in 1542. *The Bill ayest conjuracons and wichecraftes and sorcery and enchantements* defines witchcraft as a crime punishable by death and loss of property. In 1563, under the rule of Elizabeth I, *The Bill agaynst Conjuracons Inchantments and Withecraftes* was passed. The punishment defined by this law was not so strict. When witchcraft was used to search for treasure or to cause harm, the punishment was one year in prison for the first conviction and a life sentence with loss of property for the second. The last law that affected the most the trials held in colonies was passed in 1604. This law, passed under the rule of James I, toughen up the punishments. First conviction for search for treasure with help of witchcraft meant a life sentence and death sentence in the case of second conviction. Also a punishment for injuring people was death. This law was valid until 1736, thus it was valid at the time of the trials recorded in the American colonies.<sup>[24]</sup> But as the Puritans left England after this law was passed, they were also influenced by the witch hunts and trials held before 1604 and they were aware of the previous laws. Also the settlers brought from England some literature for and also against witch-hunting. However the trials held in colonies were completely different from those held in Europe. Europe witch-hunts were massive and much harsher because of the Inquisition and usage of torture. As it is mentioned in previous chapter, torture was not so typical to colonies.

### **3 TRIALS IN CONNECTICUT**

The witch trials held in the American colonies started in Springfield, Massachusetts. However, the first person officially executed as a witch was Alice Young. The only fact known about her is that she was hanged in Hartford Connecticut on May 6, 1647.<sup>[25]</sup> Many of the trial records do

not exist, thus, the records of persons accused of witchcraft are not complete. Some of them are known to be tried or even to be found guilty or acquitted, nevertheless, there is sometimes no mention about their fate.

### **3.1 Period between 1648 and 1662**

Cases of persons accused of witchcraft according to John M. Taylor took place before the years 1648 and 1662. The first accused was Mary Johnson of Westerfield who confessed her guilt in the matter of witchcraft, however despite of her confession she was sentenced to death. Her execution was delayed because of her pregnancy and she was hanged in 1650. In 1654 an unusual case of Lydia Gilbert took place as in 1651 a man was killed by an accidental shot of his fellow citizen's gun. However later Lydia Gilbert was accused that she caused the death of this man. She was tried and found guilty in 1654. Nevertheless, there is no record about her execution or acquittal. There is a record about another cases with twelve people accused during this period. Three women and one man were executed, three accused were acquitted and one married couple left the colony. In the case of Nicolas and Margaret Jennings the jury was not able to agree on verdict 1661 and Mary Barnes was found guilty in January 1662, but there is no record about execution.<sup>[26]</sup>

### **3.2 Hartford witch-hunt**

In March 1662 Goody Ayres was accused of bewitching eight-year-old Elizabeth Kelly. The girl suffered from stomach pains and accused her as she was dying. An autopsy was performed by physician Bray Rossiter who found out that Elizabeth did not die of natural causes. Both Goody and her husband William fled the colony. Nathaniel and Rebecca Greensmith were next accused of witchcraft and both were found guilty

and executed. Also Mary Sanford and Mary Barnes was found guilty and hanged. Another accused, Judith Varlett, was lucky, as she was sister-in-law of New Netherlands's Governor Peter Stuyvesant; she was released from prison and allowed to leave the colony. Many of the accused persons left the colony before they could be executed, e.g. James Walkley, Katherine and Henry Palmer. One of the accused of witchcraft, Elizabeth Seager, was tried twice in 1663, but she was acquitted. During the third trial in 1665 she was found guilty of witchcraft, but the Court of Assistants claimed that the jury's verdict was not legal and she was released from prison. However, colony magistrates became very sceptical with the accusations of witchcraft. And Governor John Winthrop, Jr., established new criteria to convince a witch. So called spectral evidence provided by one person was not enough. Two people had to see a witch in the same form and at the same time.<sup>[27]</sup>

In 1668 some accusations of witchcraft began to turn up against Katherine Harrison, a widow and a medical practitioner. She was formally accused in May 1669 and there were almost thirty witnesses who testified against her. The jury was not able to agree on a verdict, the court was adjourned and Katherine Harrison was put in prison. During the next court the jury found out that the testimonies differs and as there was a necessity of two people with the same testimony, mentioned above, they could not find her guilty. In 1670 she was acquitted by the Court of Assistants. This case was the last trial held in Hartford during the 1660's. Although there were some accusations of witchcraft in the seventeenth century, no witch was ever again convinced or executed in Hartford, Connecticut.<sup>[28]</sup>

### **3.3 Last trial in Connecticut**

Even though the Salem witch trials are the most famous, they were not the last cases of witch hunt in the colonies. Another case took place

the same year in Stamford, Connecticut. Six women were accused of bewitching seventeen-year-old servant, Katherine Branch. One of the women, Goody Miller, heard about the accusations and fled from Stamford. Another five women were brought to a hearing by a Court of Oyer and Terminer, created by Governor Phips in Salem. The court was set up purely to examine the accusations of Katherine Branch. The court consisted of Governor Robert Treat, Deputy Governor William Jones and five other members.<sup>[29]</sup>

Three accused, Mary Staples and Mary and Hannah Harvey, were set free, but two women, Elizabeth Clawson and Mercy Disborough, rested under suspicion of witchcraft. In spite of a petition signed by 76 townspeople, written to support Elizabeth Clawson, more people came with their accusations against them. It was decided to put both women through the water test, also called ducking. As they did not sink, they were considered to fail to prove their innocence. Nevertheless, ducking became controversial as many respected men rejected it as a proof. For example Increase Mather saw no natural explanation why a witch's body would float and in addition no such technique is mentioned in the Bible.<sup>[30]</sup>

At first a jury failed to agree on a verdict. But on October 28, 1692, after an examination of the bodies of the accused women, Elizabeth Clawson was not found guilty and released from jail. On the other hand Mercy Disborough was found guilty whereas a strange mark was found on her body. She stayed in prison awaiting her execution. However, a committee of three magistrates was created by the General Court to verify the case. On May 1693 the report of the committee stated that the evidences were insufficient and vacated her death sentence until the case is reconsidered. Mercy Disborough was released from jail and was never executed.<sup>[31]</sup>

## 4 TRIALS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Some forty years before the witch panic in Salem Village, there was a single case of suspicion of witchcraft in Springfield. It was the very first witch trial in New England. The case of Hugh and Mary Parsons is described in detail by Henry M. Burt in *The First Century of the History of Springfield*.

Hugh Parsons, a sawyer and bricklayer, and his wife Mary had three children. They had many disagreements with their neighbours and many rumours were spread about them in relation to witchcraft. In February, 1651, they were officially accused of witchcraft. Mary Parsons was accused of bewitching Martha and Rebecca Moxon and her husband was accused of practicing witchcraft upon several persons. No precise details about the trial of Hugh Parsons are available, but it is known that even her wife testified against him. In March, 1651, their youngest child, five months old Joshua, died. Later, Mary claimed to be a witch and confessed to the murder of Joshua. Both Mary and Hugh were tried in Boston. Mary was tried for witchcraft and acquitted because the evidences were not sufficient, but as she confessed to the murder, she was sentenced to death. In the absence of further records about her or any the mention about her broken health, it is believed that she died in prison as she was reprieved on 29 May. Hugh Parsons was tried in May, 1652, by a Court of Assistants. Many of the testimonies were in a written form as the trial took place in Boston. He was found guilty on the basis of the testimonies and the confession of his wife. However, he was not executed, his case was re-examined by the General Court and Hugh Parsons was acquitted. It cannot be said that after the Parsons prosecution there was no other accusations, but it is known that this was the only case ever brought to trial in Springfield.<sup>[32]</sup>



## 4.1 Possession of the Goodwin Children

After years without any execution came the well-known case of possession of the Goodwin children in Boston, Massachusetts. All this started when thirteen-year-old Martha Goodwin accused their washerwoman of stealing some laundry. The washerwoman's mother verbally attacked Martha and her mumbling later led to the opinion she cursed her. As soon after the dispute Martha and her three siblings fell into fits, the only explanation people could think of was witchcraft. The poor elder widow Glover was just the sort of person whom people suspected of being a witch. She was brought to trial and, as puppets were found in her house, she confessed being a witch. Thus she was convicted of witchcraft and hanged. The children were healed with the help of the investigator Cotton Mather, a prominent Boston minister who wrote a book about this case called *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, where he describes the symptoms of witchcraft. He was experienced in the matter of witchcraft as he was aware of a mass witch hunt in Sweden in 1668-1676 and wrote a book *Wonders of the Invisible World*.<sup>[33]</sup>

## 4.2 Salem

Before the outbreak in Salem the cases of witchcraft usually involved one or two defendants. As the cases described above, most of the accusations never led to a trial or ended in acquittal and accused persons were usually middle-aged women. On the contrary all accusations in Salem led to a trial and hit all the social classes. As evidenced by the following description of the creation of Salem Village the community was strictly puritan and their fight against heresy was even stricter.

### 4.2.1 Salem Village

Salem was the first town established in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and took its name from the Hebrew word *shalom* which means peace. For its founders it was a place where they can live in harmony with their neighbours and with the Lord. Initially they were farmers, but not all New England's land was good enough to earn money by farming, sometimes it was too rocky to farm well or too swampy to be used as pasture. Such kind of land was in property of the well-known family the Putnams. But on the other hand the Porters family owned well located land and was the example of a prosperous family. And this was the point where Salem began to change, many settlers were merchants and had become kind of elite different from the struggling farmers. There were no longer relatively similar farms and the centre of the village was turning into a town.<sup>[34]</sup>

However the situation where some people did not even own land was far from the ideals of the Puritan world, it seemed like people who were prospering lived by new standards. The ministers began to condemn the business mentality and people similar to the Putnams wanted to split away from Salem Town as the hub of Salem was called, and form their own township "Salem Village" with its own rules and church. But the leaders of Salem Town were not very enthusiastic about it. In 1672, Salem Village, now Danvers, was allowed to establish a church not independent of the main congregation of Salem Town.<sup>[35]</sup>

### 4.2.2 First victims and first accusations

As Salem Village was not yet independent, the leaders of Salem Town could influence its church. Nevertheless, at last with the arrival of the new minister in 1688, Salem Village was allowed to run its own church. Unfortunately the new minister, the Reverend Samuel Parris, was

the first to face the witchcraft cases in Salem Village. In the winter of 1692 his nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth and his eleven-year-old niece Abigail Williams began to behave strangely. Both Betty and Abigail were afflicted with strange fits, screamed and seemed to be pinched and pricked with pins.<sup>WH</sup> The afflictions were similar to those of the Goodwin children which Cotton Mather wrote about, and it is known that Reverend Parris came from Boston and owned a copy of this book.<sup>[36]</sup>

In Salem town no one was affected but this strange behaviour began to spread around Salem Village and the first victims appeared. Twelve-year-old Ann Putnam Jr. and seventeen-year-old Mercy Lewis, a local servant living with the Putnams, were affected. So did Mary Walcott, Elizabeth Hubbard seventeen-year-old niece of a local doctor and Mary Warren a twenty-year-old servant.<sup>[37]</sup> Reverend Parris sent for doctor William Griggs who found no physical symptoms which could explain the unusual behaviour of the afflicted girls.<sup>[38]</sup>

Mary Sibley, one of the local women, tried to fight the witchcraft with other kinds of magic. She asked Parris's slave Tituba and her husband Indian John to make a special rye cake. This special cake was made of rye flour and the urine of afflicted women was fed to the Parris's dog who was then supposed to find the witch who cursed the girls. The first witch revealed was Tituba herself. Betty and Ann confirmed that she was the one who pinched, tortured and haunted them as a spirit form of herself. The girls also named two other witches: Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. Sarah Good was a middle-aged woman, she was poor and not well accepted by the society. Sarah Osborne on the other hand was not poor but also was not well accepted as she married her lower-class lover after her husband died. Both of them were suspicious also because they did not attend church.<sup>[39]</sup>

On March 1 under pressure from the authorities all three accused women were brought to court for a pretrial hearing held in the village meeting house. Sarah Good denied hurting the girls and said that Sarah

Osborne is a witch. Because there was no convincing proof of the guilt of the accused women, the spectral evidence was accepted as a sufficient. Both Good and Osborne insisted on their innocence. However on the basis of the spectral evidence and other testimonies of the girls they were found guilty of witchcraft. Tituba denied hurting the girls at first but then she confessed and told a story about her connection to the devil. Her confession concerned her participation in meetings of witches in Boston where she was not physically present but was traveling as a spirit. She confirmed the participation of Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne by describing their familiars. Finally she described what the devil's book looked like, and as she was signing in by her mark in blood she was able to see many more marks in it. Precisely she said that there were nine marks including her own. Nevertheless, Tituba could not read so she gave the judges only names she heard, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. For the people scared by strange behaviour of victims this confession was like a confirmation of existence of witches. For Tituba it was lifesaving. She was sent to prison and survived the trials.<sup>[40]</sup>

### **4.2.3 Accusations continue**

The next witch identified by Ann Putnam Jr. and her mother was Martha Corey, a respected and devout woman. From that moment the accusations did not concern just people living on the fringe of society but also reputable citizens. Because Martha Corey was a good member of the church, two men of her congregation Edward Putnam and Ezekiel Cheevers decided to investigate the accusation. They questioned Ann about the look of Martha Corey, what clothes she was wearing when her spirit was torturing the girl. She answered that she was blinded and could not see anything. Then Martha was the one questioned, but as she was aware of the investigation she was prepared for it.<sup>[41]</sup> Few days later when she went to visit the Putnams and see Ann face to face, Ann started to

behave in a strange way. She seemed to be tortured by Martha's presence and in one moment she claimed to see a yellow bird suckling between Martha's fingers. Soon Marcy Lewis, a servant in Putnam's house, seemed to be afflicted. Then on March 19, it was Abigail Williams who claimed to be attacked by the spirit of Martha Corey.<sup>[42]</sup>

On 21 March Martha Corey was arrested on suspicion of witchcraft. At the time of examination there were at least ten victims, including four adult women, three female servants and the three girls mentioned above. The examination was led by magistrates John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin who repeatedly questioned Martha why she hurt the afflicted persons.<sup>[43]</sup> One of the key questions was how she knew she would be questioned about her clothing. First she said it was her husband who warned her in advance but he denied that he told her so. Then she said she heard the girls were talking about her. In one moment of the examination one of the girls exclaimed that there is a man whispering in Martha's ear.<sup>[44]</sup> Martha denied it and was challenged over and over again to confess. Martha Corey seemed to be proved guilty in the eyes of the authorities of Salem.

Thereafter another devout woman was accused. There was gossip about Rebecca Nurse that her mother was once accused of being a witch. And people of this period believed witchcraft ran in families.<sup>[45]</sup> But septuagenarian Rebecca Nurse was an active church member with a good reputation. During the examination she admitted that the Devil can appear in any form it chose, even in the shape of herself, but rejected to confess her guilt. The actual trial was held about three months later, at the end of June.<sup>[46]</sup>

Anybody who spoke out against the examinations was immediately suspected, even the relatives of accused persons became targets. The youngest accused was four-year-old Dorothy (Dorcas) Good, daughter of Sarah Good. She was arrested and as she confessed, she was put in jail where she stayed for less than a year. Because she was held in terrible

conditions of witch dungeon and following the execution of her mother, she went insane.<sup>[47]</sup>

The examinations of Elizabeth Proctor and Sarah Cloyce, sister of Rebecca Nurse, were conducted by John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin along with a panel of five other judges. This time the accusers were questioned too. John Proctor, husband of Elizabeth Proctor, had some objections against the hearing of his wife and next day he was arrested as well. Within a week followed accusations of Giles Corey, Abigail Hobbs, Bridget Bishop, Mary Warren and Deliverance Hobbs. All of them were arrested and Abigail Hobbs, Mary Warren and Deliverance Hobbs confessed. Many others were arrested and among these were Mary Eastey, sister of Sarah Cloyce and Rebecca Nurse, and the Reverend George Burroughs, the former minister of Salem Village.<sup>[48]</sup>

#### **4.2.4 The court of Oyer and Terminer**

After Sir William Phips, the new governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, has returned from England in May 1692 he found the prisons almost full. He decided that a completely new court has to be created to deal with the witchcraft cases. The chief justice of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, which means “hear and determine”, was Judge William Stoughton. The magistrates Hathorne and Corwin also became the judges of this special court.<sup>[49]</sup> The very first case brought to the new court on June 2, 1692, was the case of Bridget Bishop, a sixty-year-old tavern owner. There were several testimonies of spectral evidence and the witch’s mark was found on her body when Bridget Bishop was examined. She was found guilty and sentenced to death, hanged on Gallows Hill on the 10 June, 1692. Thus Bridget Bishop became the first official Salem witch.<sup>[50]</sup>

Thereafter, in addition to the latest cases, the cases set before the creation of the court of Oyer and Terminer were restored. For example,

the case of Rebecca Nurse was an interesting one. Because of some contradictions in testimonies and her good reputation, the jury said she's not guilty. But as the crowd of accusers went wild and afflictions of victims continued, the jury had to reconsider their verdict and pronounced her guilty and sentenced her to death. And identical sentences followed.<sup>[51]</sup>

Accused witches hanged on Gallows Hill in 1692 were:

- June 10: Bridget Bishop
- July 19: Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Good, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe and Sarah Wildes
- August 19: George Burroughs, Martha Carrier, John Willard, George Jacobs Sr., John Proctor
- September 22: Martha Corey, Mary Eastey, Ann Pudeator, Alice Parker, Mary Parker, Wilmott Redd, Margaret Scott, Samuel Wardwell

The execution of Reverend George Burroughs caused excitement in Salem Village. As he was brought to Gallows Hill, he made a speech and insisted on his innocence. He was able to recite the Lord's Prayer without a fault, which was something witches were not supposedly able to do. But Cotton Mather, who was present at the execution, intervened and reminded the crowd that Burroughs was judged and had his chance at the court.<sup>[52]</sup>

Besides nineteen witches hanged, there was one unique execution. Octogenarian Giles Corey accused of witchcraft refused to plead innocent or guilty and was given sentence of *peine forte et dure*, or pressing. He was stripped to the waist and a wooden frame was put on his chest. Then heavy stones were placed on the frame so he cannot breathe easily. As he refused to enter the plea, the weight on his chest was increased. By the second day of the torture he died being slowly suffocated and with his chest crushed.<sup>[53]</sup>

#### 4.2.5 Nightmare is over

The accusations still went on and the ones who were about to be accused were even the wives of ministers. As the accusers went too far, the court of Oyer and Terminer was dissolved on 29 October, 1692, by Governor Phips. Cases were moved to a new court of five judges, new criteria to prove the guilt was set and spectral evidence was not allowed. By January 1693, there were fifty-two people accused of witchcraft remaining in prison. The general pardon was issued by the governor and they were allowed to leave the prison when their expenses for the stay there were paid. Forty-nine of them were released from prison immediately and three were released a few months later. However, one prisoner, Sarah Dustin, was not able to pay and was left in prison. She died there and became the last victim of the Salem witch hunt. The very first accused, Tituba, was sold as a slave to pay for her stay in prison.<sup>[54]</sup>

Five years later on January, 1697, more than a dozen people admitted to false confessions against the accused. In 1702 Reverend John Hale's book *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft* was published, the book includes the most famous apologies for the trials: "*But such was the darkness of that day, the tortures and lamentations of the afflicted, and the power of former presidents, that we walked in the clouds, and could not see our way.*"<sup>[55]</sup>

In 1706 Ann Putnam Jr. claimed that she was deluded by the Devil and caused by him to take innocent lives. She was the only one of the accusers who ever apologized. Five years later the judgment on twenty-two of thirty-one people who were convicted of witchcraft was recalled by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and their civil rights were restored. Six hundred British pounds were paid in restitution to survivors of the trials and their families.<sup>[56]</sup>

The result of the Salem witch trials was nineteen witches hanged, one pressed to death and at least four who died in prison. Fifty five



people of approximately two hundred accused confessed to save themselves from execution, because the Puritans believed a confession put a person into the hands of the God and it is upon the Lord to forgive the sins. On the other hand when an accused person confesses and knows it is a lie, he or she will never reach the salvation. Because the Puritans strictly believed that the Bible must be obeyed, they knew very well that lying means to commit a capital sin and they may end up in purgatory and go to Hell.

#### **4.2.6 Reasons**

There is no clear evidence how this mass witch hunt began. Even though there exist over five hundred surviving documents reflecting one hundred and sixty cases approximately of witchcraft accusations, which consist of warrants, depositions against various people and some death warrants.

Many theories exist about the possessions of accusers in Salem, from the absence of any excitement needed by children to the ergot poisoning which can cause hallucinations.<sup>[57]</sup> It is true that the daily life of a Puritan consisted only of hard work and prayers. The basis of the Puritan community was living by God's laws, they believed that salvation is entirely up to God. The fate is predetermined and they have to search for clues if they are predestined for heaven or hell. Puritan women were expected to be silent helpmates to their husbands and mothers to their children. The children were supposed not to be seen or heard. Childhood as we know it did not exist, children were given a lot of responsibility and were not allowed to play. Boys were prepared to be able to support a family, thus, they learned hunting, farming and building. Also they had to be able to read and write so they could comprehend the Bible. Girls, on the other hand, were not required to be literate, they learned sewing, cooking and other domestic skills.<sup>[58]</sup> Also the rooms were dark, because

of small windows, and full of smoke from fireplace. In seventeenth century no street lighting existed and as the belief in witches was part of that era, even adults were more likely to be afraid of every shadow. Also at this time there were not many other villages or towns near Salem Village.

The end of the seventeenth century can be also characterized as a period of stress, full of epidemics and diseases like smallpox. People who lived in Salem Village were also influenced by Indian wars and many of them experienced the wars in person. Many of the girls who led the accusations became orphans during the King William's War, or Second Indian War as it is also called. The case of Mercy Short is just the example of connection between Indian Wars and witchcraft persecutions. In 1690, during the King's William War, she saw the murder of her parents and siblings and was kidnapped by Indians. She spent two years as a captive and saw many terrible things, like a man burned alive by Indians. After she was ransomed, Mercy returned to Boston and started to work as a servant. When she was sent to handle some errand in a prison where several accused witches were locked up, she started to have fits after the conversation with them. Her case was examined by Cotton Mather who healed her with his prayers and patience, but as the witch trials in Salem got near to their end his findings and opinions were not accepted well by the society.<sup>[59]</sup>

Another fact concerning the trials is that judges who were present at the first hearings can be considered not well-educated in the matter of appropriate law. They were mostly local magistrates who had no experience with cases concerning heresy or witchcraft, and such was the case of judges Hathorne and Corwin according to Marion Starkey.<sup>[60]</sup>

Neither was without practical experience, since both were of the General Court, but neither had had any formal legal training, nor for that matter had anyone else currently administering the law in Massachusetts. The one professional school, Harvard, had been founded to provide training for one profession only, the ministry; recently it had made some sketchy provision for medical training, but

a Law School had not been thought of and would not be for time to come. The Puritans had a low opinion of lawyers and did not permit the professional practice of law in the colony.<sup>[61]</sup>

## 5 TRIALS IN VIRGINIA

The witch trials held in Virginia are not so well known and also most of the records were destroyed in the colonial era. Thus not many court records relating to accusations of witchcraft were preserved. Though according to the historians there were more than a dozen cases concerning witchcraft but exact dates of some of them are not known. However, one trial is known as there is a record of the trial of Grace Sherwood of Princess Ann County. This trial can be also considered as the last real trial held in the colonies.<sup>[62]</sup>

Grace Sherwood was accused by Luke Hill and his wife. She was brought to a trial and in June, 1706, she was put through an examination of her body. The panel of 10 women found two black marks, which appeared unusual to them and were considered as teats. On 5 July the Court decided that she is to be tried in water by ducking, but it was raining that day and the test was put off. The ducking was held on 10 July and Grace Sherwood was watched over not to drown during the test. She failed because she was floating and did not sink. Another examination of her body was ordered and two marks were found on her genitals again. She was found guilty and ordered to stay in the county and to be held in a prison until another trial. As there is no record about another trial or about her execution, she is considered to have survived in prison or to have been released.<sup>[63]</sup>

## 6 THE CRUCIBLE

As the case of Grace Sherwood, described in the previous chapter, was the last trial held in the colonies, the era of witch persecution came to its end. Thus the dark times of the early modern period ended but their legacy is still notable even today as it can be seen in the most famous play written by Arthur Miller in 1952. The Crucible is a play about the witch trials in Salem Village, however it has hidden overtones too as it reflects the period of McCarthyism and political “witch-hunts” because of the resemblance of methods of accusations, examinations and forcing a confession.<sup>[64]</sup> This chapter provides a brief summary of the play and explanation of details used in it within the context of the Salem trials.

### 6.1 Act I

In the beginning of the play Reverend Parris is praying next to the bed where lies his daughter Betty unable to move. When his niece Abigail enters the room and talks to him, he accuses her of being in the woods and dancing around the fire with other girls and his own slave Tituba. After Reverend Parris leaves the room, enters John Proctor and Abigail tries to seduce him. However when Betty hears a psalm sung in the house, she starts to scream. Many characters then enter the room one by one and start a dispute about the witchcraft. Reverend John Hale questions Abigail and she accuses Tituba who confesses to being a witch. With her confession Betty gets up and along with Abigail name other people they saw with the Devil.<sup>[65]</sup>

This part is based on the theory believed in by many historians that girls were practicing fortune telling with the Indian slave Tituba and they were afflicted because of their fear based upon disobeying the Bible and fear of punishment. The character of Abigail is older to fit in the story and other characters are omitted. The behaviour of Betty is based on a

supposal that witches and possessed persons are not able to listen to the prayers. Also the story of Tituba's confession is shortened, as in reality she was brought to a hearing and denied to confess for the first time.

## **6.2 Act II**

John Proctor came home later than usual and his wife Elizabeth is telling him about the accusations in Salem while preparing a dinner for him. After the return of their servant Mary, who was supposed to help Elizabeth with household chores, John becomes angry because he forbade her to go to Salem. However Mary defends herself by claiming that she had to be in Salem as a witness at a court. When Elizabeth finds out that accusers are led by Abigail she asks John to have a talk with Abigail. Mary gives Elizabeth a puppet which she made during the court and when she is asked to talk about how does the mood in Salem look like, she tells them that thirty-nine people are accused and Sarah Osbourne is about to be hanged. John says that they are accused and tried without any solid evidence. Later they are visited by Reverend Hale and asked about their opinion on witches and their poor attendance to church. Giles Corey and Francis Nurse come in to tell them that their wives were arrested and then Ezekiel Cheevers enters to arrest Elizabeth on the basis of accusation from Abigail. The puppet is found and considered as evidence, but Mary is afraid to testify at the court that she made the puppet and gave it to Elizabeth.<sup>[66]</sup>

In this act the role of wife in Puritan society is clearly visible. Although Elizabeth knows about the affair between her husband and Abigail, she is pretending nothing happened and is acting as a real Puritan wife. She prepared a dinner for her husband trying to do her best. The number of accused shows how fast the witch panic was spreading around the Village. Also the aversion for the trials is impersonated by the character of John proctor who expresses his dislike for Reverend Parris.

Reverend Parris was not very popular during his stay in Salem and after the trials he was forced to leave Salem. The characters of Giles Corey and Francis Nurse were angry about the trials too as their wives were devout and respected women as can be seen in the chapter 4.2.3. Rebecca Nurse's trial caused big uncertainty about the accusations. The puppet made by Mary refers to puppets really found during the actual trials in homes of some accused which were taken to the court as evidence.

### **6.3 Act III**

During the hearing of Martha Corey her husband interrupts the questioning by declaring that Thomas Putnam is trying to reach out for their land. He is ordered to leave the courtroom and is joined by judge Hathorne, Deputy Governor Danforth and others. Then John Proctor appears with Mary who claims that she did not see any spirits, she just thought she can see them and knows there are not any. As the girls who led the accusations are ordered to the room, they begin to cry out that Mary is attacking them. John Proctor steps in and claims that Abigail is lying and confesses that he had affair with her. Abigail denies it and Elizabeth is called in to confirm her husband's confession. However as she does not know about it, she pretends not knowing about any affair. That lie proves her guilt in the eyes of judges. And Mary in order to save her life falls into fits and claims that John Proctor is in connection with the Devil and tried to force her to the testimony. John Proctor is arrested and Reverend Hale leaves the room saying "I denounce these proceedings".<sup>[67]</sup>

Thomas Putnam's effort to gain the land of accused neighbours, mentioned by Giles Corey, refers to the fact that the property of convinced witches was confiscated. Also the fact that John Proctor was arrested and Mary denied her testimony and joined the accusers shows

how it worked during the trials. As it was said in chapter 4.2.3, every person who spoke out against the examinations was immediately suspected and so was the person who tried to impeach the testimonies of the accusers. The departure of Reverend Hale represents the scepticism of some judges and it can particularly refer to the case of Nathaniel Saltonstall, a judge formerly appointed to the Court of Oyer and Terminer, who refused to continue his participation in the trials because he did not consider the evidences and testimonies credible and sufficient and was replaced by Jonathan Corwin.<sup>[68]</sup>

## **6.4 Act IV**

The last act of the game takes place in prison. Reverend Parris is scared because John Proctor and other respected members of the church and Salem Village are going to be executed. And tells to judge Hathorne and Governor Danforth that Abigail and Mercy Lewis, one of the afflicted girls, escaped with some of his money. They decide to allow the meeting of John Proctor with his wife Elizabeth, who is pregnant, to make him confess. Elizabeth tells him about Giles Corey who was pressed to death because he refused to enter the plea. John decides to confess but then he changes his mind as he finds out that his confession is to be posted up for public to see and he realizes that it would destroy his name. The play ends at the moment when John Proctor, Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey are led to Gallows Hill.<sup>[69]</sup>

The last act of the play implies that the trials started to threaten even the persons who were leading the trials and supporting them and their families. They realized that they can be accused as well. Also the escape indicates that the girls did not feel well after they caused so many people to die. The meeting of John Proctor and his wife shows not only physical torture, which was used in the case of Giles Corey (for more detail see chapter 4.2.4), was used during the trials but also a psychological form of it to

make accused person confess. When John refused the confession, because it would be posted for the public, he knows that he avoided the capital sin of lying and his name is not tainted by it. He realized that his wife and his unborn will have his name even after he is dead. The play ends when the characters are led to the Gallows and it implies the inevitability of executions.



## 7 CONCLUSION

The witch trials held in North America can be divided into four main periods. The first period of trials concerned the cases which were influenced by persecutions in Europe the most. These cases were mostly individual and included only one or two accused persons who were tested according to the methods used in Europe and described by the witch-hunter's manuals (e.g. ducking, witch mark).

The next period is the period of witch hunting in Hartford which began in 1662. The accusations were different during this period as there were more persons accused of witchcraft at the same time. These accusations followed one by one and it was like a chain reaction, thus many people fled the colony for fear they can be accused or at worse, executed.

The accusations of witchcraft still went on, but the third period is characteristic because there were no execution between 1663 and 1688, when a single execution of widow Glover took place in Boston.

The last period of the trials include the famous Salem witch hunt. This series of trials was completely different from all the previous cases of witchcraft accusations, there has never been so massive witch hunt in the history of the United States. The number of people accused of witchcraft, with more than twenty people dead, overshadows all the previous trials.

The way of proving the witch's guilt included a group of accusers who claimed to see specter of person who tortured them, and this group included the same people for most of the accusations. Except this proof, no other methods were considered sufficient and were used just to support the spectral evidence as it can be seen in the case of Grace Sherwood who was put through a water test but was not convicted on the basis of it.

With the last trial the witch persecution started to fall into oblivion. Most of the records do not exist and no one can describe or explain what

really happened and why. The fact is that everyone knows about the Salem witch trials but no one knows the reality of it, or even the number of people who were executed, and do not know anything about the trials held in other places in the United States.

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## 10 ABSTRACT

The Bachelor's thesis deals with the witch trials held in North America in the early modern period. The thesis provides information on terminology connected with witch persecutions and describes the background of the trials, which started in Europe in the medieval times and was influenced by the mentality of medieval society and by the Church. Next part of the thesis describes the actual trials held in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Virginia. The last part of the thesis contains the analysis of the play *The Crucible* with regard to the trials held in Salem Village.

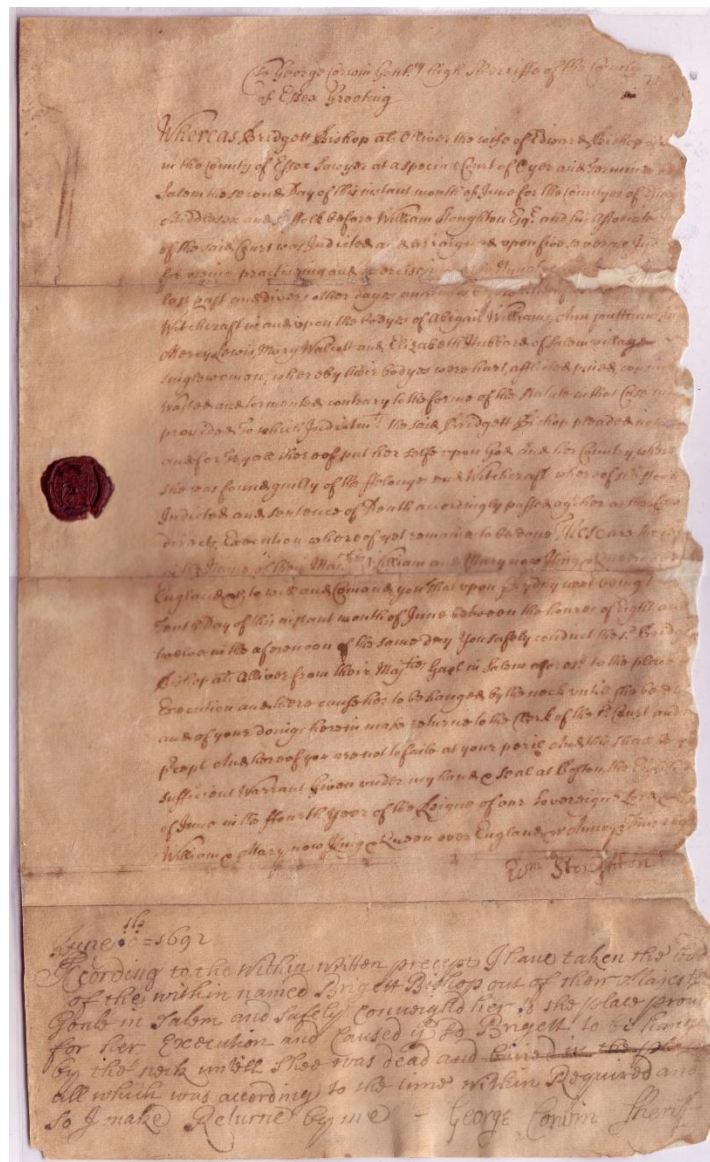
## 11 RESUMÉ

Bakalářská práce se zabývá čarodějnickými procesy, které se konaly v Severní Americe na počátku novověku. Práce nejprve popisuje terminologii spojenou s pronásledováním čarodějnic a pozadí vzniku procesů samotných, jež započaly v Evropě již ve středověku a byly tedy ovlivněny smýšlením středověké společnosti a postavením církve. Dále se práce zabývá procesy, které se odehrály na území britských kolonií a to konkrétně v Connecticutu, Massachusetts a Virginii. Závěrečná část práce se skládá z rozboru díla Čarodějky ze Salemu v závislosti na skutečném průběhu procesů, které se odehrály v městečku Salem.

## 12 APPENDICES

## Appendice 1

## Death Warrant v. Bridget Bishop



Available from:

[http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/texts/tei/BoySal1R?term=&div\\_id=BoySal1-n13.23&chapter\\_id=n13&name=bisbri](http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/texts/tei/BoySal1R?term=&div_id=BoySal1-n13.23&chapter_id=n13&name=bisbri)

**Appendice 2**

"Examination of a Witch" Thompkins H. Matteson, 1853

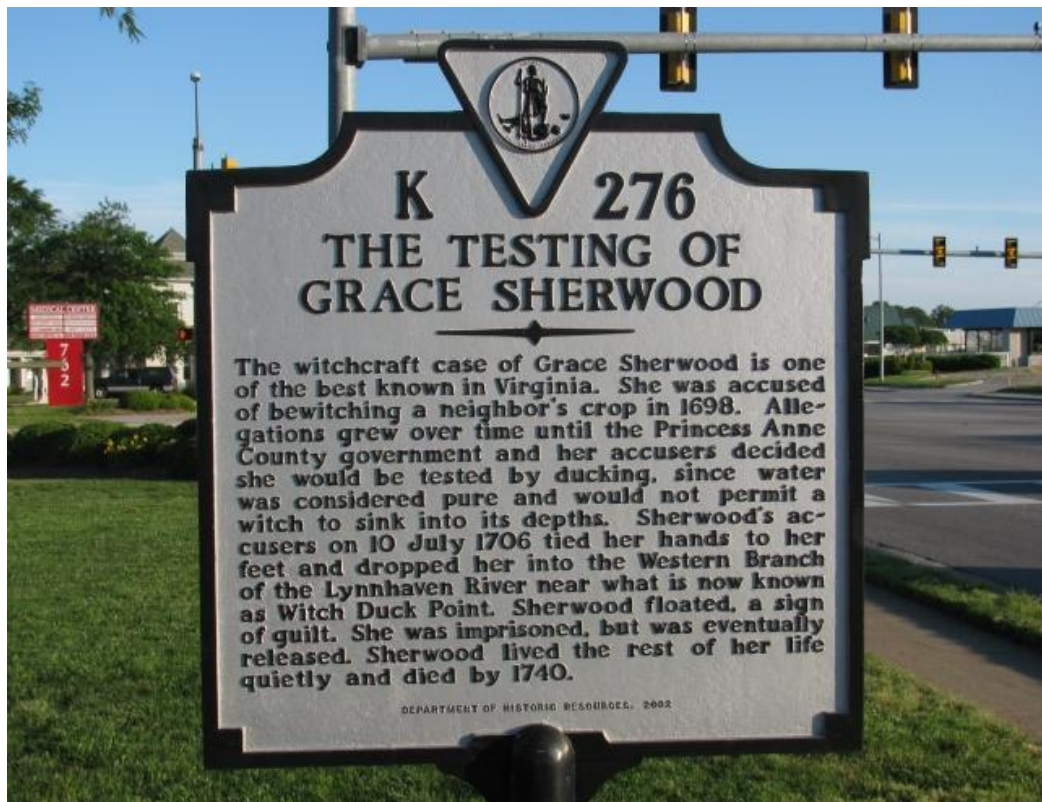


Available from:

<http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/salem/generic.html>

## Appendix 3

## The Testing of Grace Sherwood Marker



Available from:

<http://markers.appropriatelyrandom.net/tag/grace-sherwood/>

**Appendice 4**

Depiction of ducking the witch; Eberhard David Hauber, *Biblioteca sive acta et scripta magica*



Available from:

PAVLAC, Brian A. *Witch Hunts in the Western World: Persecution and Punishment from the Inquisition through the Salem Trials*