

Witches and Their Accusers in Seventeenth-Century New England



The study of witchcraft has fascinated historians of early modern women in both Europe and America. Indeed, in recent years a great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to the era of the witch-hunts, from the sixteenth century through the late seventeenth century. What sorts of women were accused as witches? Why were they accused? Who were their accusers? Many books and articles have examined such questions, without reaching consensus except on some very basic points, such as the fact that most of the accused were women rather than men, and that they tended to be middle-aged or older.

In early America, most of the known witchcraft prosecutions occurred in New England, but historians disagree about why that was so. Some contend that New England's Puritan beliefs led the settlers to fear women's sinfulness and potential alliance with the devil, whereas others argue that witchcraft accusations were primarily generated in small, close-knit, rural communities, like those that dotted the New England landscape. Another disagreement, which is reflected in the essays selected for this chapter, represents a difference of opinion about the appropriate emphasis in studies of witchcraft: should historians of women focus on the female accused (as has been the most common approach) or on female accusers?



D O C U M E N T S

In seventeenth-century America, witchcraft prosecutions often began with gossip, and sometimes accused people could prevent formal charges from being filed against them by first suing the gossipers for slander. Under then-prevailing law, all that plaintiffs in such cases had to prove was that the defendants had uttered the words in question. Yet, as Document 1 shows, if the gossip was widely believed, that tactic did not always work. Elizabeth Godman, a reputed witch in the New Haven colony, sued those slandering her as a witch in 1653, but, as Document 2 reveals, she still faced trial for witchcraft two

years later. Document 3, an excerpt from Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), details the 1692 trial of Bridget Bishop of Salem Town, who fit all the stereotypes of witch beliefs in the period. Document 4, by contrast, presents the accusations of a group of girls and young women (also in 1692) against the Reverend George Burroughs, the only New England minister ever charged with, and convicted of, witchcraft.

1. Elizabeth Godman Sues Her Neighbors for Accusing Her of Being a Witch, 1653

The Examination of Elizabeth Godman, May 21th, 1653

Elizabeth Godman made complainte of M^r. Goodyeare, M^{ris}. Goodyeare, M^r. Hooke, M^{ris}. Hooke, M^{ris}. Bishop, M^{ris}. Atwater, Hanah & Elizabeth Lamberton, and Mary Miles, M^{ris}. Atwaters maide, that they have suspected her for a witch; she was now asked what she had against M^r. Hooke and M^{ris}. Hooke; she said she heard they had something against her aboute their soone. M^r. Hooke said hee was not w^hout feares, and hee had reasons for it; first he said it wrought suspition in his minde because shee was shut out at M^r. Atwaters upon suspition, and hee was troubled in his sleepe aboute witches when his boye, was sicke, w^{ch} was in a verrey strang manner, and hee looked upon her as a mallitious one, and prepared to that mischiefe, and she would be often speaking aboute witches and rather justifie them then condemne them; she said why doe they provoake them, why doe they not let them come into the church. Another time she was speaking of witches w^hout any occasion given her, and said if they accused her for a witch she would have them to the governor, she would trounce them. . . .

M^r. Hooke further said, that he hath heard that they that are adicted that way would hardly be kept away from y^e houses where they doe mischeife, and so it was w^h her when his boy was sicke, she would not be kept away from him, nor gott away when she was there, and one time M^{ris}. Hooke bid her goe away, and thrust her from y^e boye, but she turned againe and said she would looke on him. M^{ris}. Goodyeare said that one time she questioned w^h Elizabeth Godman aboute y^e boyes sickness, and said what thinke you of him, is he not strangly handled, she replied, what, doe you thinke hee is bewitched; M^{ris}. Goodyeare said nay I will keepe my thoughts to myselfe, but in time God will discover. . . .

M^r. Hooke further said, that when M^r. Bishop was married, M^{ris}. Godman came to his house much troubled, so as he thought it might be from some affection to him, and he asked her, she said yes; now it is suspicious that so soone as they were contracted M^{ris}. Byshop fell into verrey strang fitts w^{ch} hath continewed at times ever since, and much suspition there is that she hath bine the cause of the loss of M^{ris}. Byshops children, for she could tell when M^{ris}. Bishop was to be brought to bedd, and hath given out that she kills her children w^h longing, because she longs for every thing she sees, w^{ch} M^{ris}. Bishop denies. . . .

June 16, 1653

Goodwife Thorp complained that M^{rs}. Godman came to her house and asked to buy some chickens, she said she had none to sell, M^{rs}. Godman said will you give them all, so she went away, and she thought then that if this woman was naught as folkes suspect, may be she will smite my chickens, and quickly after one chicken dyed, and she remembred she had heard if they were bewitched they would consume wthin, and she opened it and it was consumed in y^e gisard to water & wormes. . . .

Court of Magistrates, New Haven, August 4, 1653

M^{rs}. Elizabeth Godman accused goodwife Larremore that one time when she saw her come in at goodman Whitnells she said so soone as she saw her she thought of a witch. Goodwife Larremore said that one time she had spoken to that purpose at M^r. Hookes, and her ground was because M^r. Davenport aboute that time had occasion in his ministry to speake of witches, and showed that a froward discontented frame of spirit was a subject fitt for y^e Devill to worke upon in that way, and she looked upon M^{rs}. Godman to be of such a frame of spirit, but for saying so at goodman Whitnells she denyes it. M^{rs}. Godman said, goodman Whitnells maid can testify it. The maid was send, and when she came she said she heard M^{rs}. Godman and goodwife Larremore a talking, and she thinks she heard goodwife Larremore say she thought of a witch in y^e Bay when she see M^{rs}. Godman. . . .

M^{rs}. Godman was told she hath warned to the court divers psons, viz^d: M^r. Goodyear, M^{rs}. Goodyear, M^r. Hooke, M^{rs}. Hooke, M^{rs}. Atwater, Hanah & Elizabeth Lamberton, goodwife Larremore, goodwife Thorpe, &c., and was asked what she hath to charge them wth, she said they had given our speeches that made folkes thinke she was a witch, and first she charged M^{rs}. Atwater to be y^e cause of all . . . and she further said that M^{rs}. Atwater had said that she thought she was a witch and that Hobbamocke [the devil] was her husband, but could prove nothing. . . . After sundrie of the passages in y^e wrighting [the record of her examination] were read, she was asked if these things did not give just ground of suspition to all that heard them that she was a witch. She confessed they did, but said if she spake such things as is in M^r. Hookes relation she was not herselfe. . . . Beside what is in the paper, M^{rs}. Godman was remembred of a passage spoken of at the governo^rs aboute M^r. Goodyear falling into a swonding fitt after hee had spoken something one night in the exposition of a chapter, w^{ch} she (being present) liked not but said it was against her, and as soone as M^r. Goodyear had done duties she flung out of the roome in a discontented way and cast a fierce looke upon M^r. Goodyear as she went out, and imediately M^r. Goodyear (thought well before) fell into a swond, and beside her notorious lying in this buisnes, for being asked how she came to know this, she said she was present, yet M^r. Goodyear, M^{rs}. Goodyear, Hanah and Elizabeth Lamberton all affirme she was not in y^e roome but gone up into the chamber.

After the agitation of these things the court declared to M^{rs}. Godman, as their judgment and sentence in this case, that she hath unjustly called heither the severall persons before named, being she can prove nothing against them, and that her cariage doth justly render her suspicious of witchcraft, w^{ch} she herselfe in so many words confesseth, therefore the court wisheth her to looke to her carriage hereafter,

for it further prooffe come, these passages will not be forgotten, and therefore gave her charge not to goe in an offensive way to folkes houses in a rayling manner as it seemes she hath done, but that she keepe her place and medle w^h her owne buisnes.

2. Elizabeth Godman Is Tried for Witchcraft, 1655

New Haven Town Court, August 7, 1655

Elizabeth Godman was called before the Court, and told that she lies under suspition for witchcraft, as she knowes, the grounds of which were examined in a former Court, and by herselfe confessed to be just grounds of suspition, w^{ch} passages were now read, and to these some more are since added, w^{ch} are now to be declared: . . .

Goodwife Thorpe informed the Court that concerning something aboute chickens she had formerly declared, w^{ch} was now read, after w^{ch} she one time had some speech wth M^{rs}. Evance aboute this woman, and through the weakness of her faith she began to doubt that may be she would hurt her coves, and that day one of her coves fell sick in the herd, so as the keeper said he thought she would have dyed, but at night when she came into the yard was well and continewd so, but would never give milk nor bring calfe after that; therefore they bought another cow, that they might have some breed, but that cast calfe also; . . . then she thought ther was some thing more then ordinary in it, and could not but thinke that she was bewitched. . . . Aboute a weeke after, she went by M^r. Goodyeaes, and there was Eliza: Godman pulling cherries in y^e streete; she said, how doth Goody Thorpe? I am behoulden to Goody Thorpe above all the weomen in the Towne: she would have had me to the gallows for a few chickens; and gnashed and grinned wth her teeth in a strang manner, w^{ch} she confessest was true, but owned nothing about y^e coves. . . .

Allen Ball informed the Court that one time Eliza Godman came to his house and asked his wife for some butter-milke; she refused, and bid her be gone, she cared not for her company: she replied, what, you will save it for your piggs, but it will doe them no good; and after this his piggs all but one dyed, one after another, but the cause he knowes not. . . .

These things being declared, the Court told Elizabeth Godman that they have considered them wth her former miscariages, and see cause to Order that she be committed to prison, ther to abide the Courts pleasure, but because the matter is of weight, and the crime whereof she is suspected capitall, therefore she is to answer it at the Court of Magistrats in October next.

Court of Magistrates, New Haven, October 17, 1655

Elizabeth Godman was called before the court and told that upon grounds formerly declared, w^{ch} stand upon record, she by her owne confession remains under suspition for witchcraft, and one more is now added, and that is, that one time this last summer, cōmeing to M^r. Hookes to beg some beare, was at first denyed, but after,

From Charles J. Hoadley, ed., *Records of the Colony or Jurisdiction of New Haven, 1653 to the Union* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, 1858) 2:29–36, 151–152.

she was offered some by his daughter which stood ready drawne, but she refused it and would have some newly drawne, w^{ch} she had, yet went away in a muttering discontented manner, and after this, that night, though the beare was good and fresh, yet the next morning was hott, soure and ill tasted, yea so hott as the barrell was warme w^hout side, and when they opened the bung it steemed forth; they brewed againe and it was so also, and so continewed foure or five times, one after another. . . .

[T]he court declared unto her that though the evidenc is not sufficient as yet to take away her life, yet the suspitions are cleere and many, w^{ch} she cannot by all the meanes she hath used, free herselfe from, therefore she must forbear from goeing from house to house to give offenc, and cary it orderly in the family where she is, w^{ch} if she doe not, she will cause the court to comitt her to prison againe, & that she doe now presently upon her freedom give securitie for her good behaviour; and she did now before the court ingage fifty pound of her estate that is in M^r. Goodyeares hand, for her good behaviour, w^{ch} is further to be cleered next court, when M^r. Goodyeare is at home.

3. Bridget Bishop Is Convicted of Witchcraft, 1692

II. The trial of Bridget Bishop: alias, Oliver, at the Court of Oyer and Terminer held at Salem, June 2, 1692.

I. She was indicted for bewitching of several persons in the neighborhood, the indictment being drawn up, according to the form in such cases usual. And pleading, not guilty, there were brought in several persons, who had long undergone many kinds of miseries, which were preternaturally inflicted, and generally ascribed unto a horrible witchcraft. There was little occasion to prove the witchcraft; it being evident and notorious to all beholders. Now to fix the witchcraft on the prisoner at the bar, the first thing used was, the testimony of the bewitched; whereof, several testified, that the shape of the prisoner did oftentimes very grievously pinch them, choke them, bite them, and afflict them; urging them to write their names in a book, which the said specter called, ours. . . . Others of them did also testify, that the said shape, did in her threats, brag to them, that she had been the death of sundry persons then by her named; that she had ridden a man, then likewise named. Another testified, the apparition of ghosts unto the specter of Bishop crying out, you murdered us! About the truth whereof, there was in the matter of fact, but too much suspicion. ¶

II. It was testified, that at the examination of the prisoner, before the magistrates, the bewitched were extremely tortured. If she did but cast her eyes on them, they were presently struck down; and this in such a manner as there could be no collusion in the business. But upon the touch of her hand upon them, when they lay in their swoons, they would immediately revive; and not upon the touch of anyone's else. Moreover, upon some special actions of her body, as the shaking of her head, or the turning of her eyes, they presently and painfully fell into the like postures: And many of the like accidents now fell out, while she was at the bar. . . .

IV. One Deliverance Hobbs, who had confessed her being a witch, was now tormented by the specters, for her confession. And she now testified, that this Bishop, tempted her to sign the book again, and to deny what she had confessed. She affirmed, that it was the shape of this prisoner, which whipped her with iron rods, to compel her thereunto. And she affirmed, that this Bishop was at a general meeting of the witches, in a field at Salem Village and there partook of a diabolical sacrament, in bread and wine then administered!

V. To render it further unquestionable, that the prisoner at the bar, was the person truly charged in *this* witchcraft, there were produced many evidences of *other* witchcrafts, by her perpetrated. . . .

VI. Samuel Gray, testified, that about fourteen years ago, he waked in a night, and saw the room where he lay, full of light; and that he then saw plainly a woman between the cradle, and the bedside, which looked upon him. He rose, and it vanished; though he found the doors all fast. Looking out at the entry door, he saw the same woman, in the same garb again; and said, *In God's name, what do you come for?* He went to bed, and had the same woman again assaulting him. The child in the cradle gave a great screech, and the woman disappeared. It was long before the child could be quieted; and though it were a very likely thriving child, yet from this time it pined away, and after divers months died in a sad condition. He knew not Bishop, nor her name; but when he saw her after this, he knew by her countenance, and apparel, and all circumstances, that it was the apparition of this Bishop, which had thus troubled him. . . .

IX. Samuel Shattuck testified, that in the year 1680, this Bridget Bishop, often came to his house upon such frivolous and foolish errands, that they suspected she came indeed with a purpose of mischief. Presently whereupon his eldest child, which was of as promising health and sense, as any child of its age, began to droop exceedingly; and the oftener that Bishop came to the house, the worse grew the child. . . . [W]hen she paid him a piece of money, the purse and money were unaccountably conveyed out of a locked box, and never seen more. The child was immediately hereupon taken with terrible fits, whereof his friends thought he would have died: indeed he did almost nothing but cry and sleep for several months together: and at length his understanding was utterly taken away. . . . About seventeen or eighteen years after, there came a stranger to Shattuck's house, who seeing the child, said, *This poor child is bewitched; and you have a neighbor living not far off, who is a witch.* He added, *Your neighbor has had a falling out with your wife; and she said in her heart, your wife is a proud woman, and she would bring down her pride in this child:* He then remembered, that Bishop had parted from his wife in muttering and menacing terms, a little before the child was taken ill. . . .

X. John Louder testified, that upon some little controversy with Bishop about her fowls, going well to bed, he did awake in the night by moonlight, and did see clearly the likeness of this woman grievously oppressing him; in which miserable condition she held him unable to help himself, till near day. He told Bishop of this; but she denied it, and threatened him, very much. Quickly after this, being at home on a Lord's day, with the doors shut about him, he saw a black pig approach him; at which he going to kick, it vanished away. . . .

XII. To crown all, John Bly, and William Bly, testified, that being employed by Bridget Bishop, to help take down the cellar wall, of the old house, wherein she

formerly lived, they did in holes of the said old wall, find several poppets, made up of rags, and hog's bristles, with headless pins in them, the points being outward. Whereof she could now give no account unto the court, that was reasonable or tolerable.

XIII. One thing that made against the prisoner was, her being evidently convicted of gross lying, in the court, several times, while she was making her plea. But besides this, a jury of women, found a preternatural teat upon her body; but upon a second search, within three or four hours, there was no such thing to be seen. There was also an account of other people whom this woman had afflicted. And there might have been many more, if they had been, inquired for. But there was no need of them.

XIV. There was one very strange thing more, with which the court was newly entertained. As this woman was under a guard, passing by the great and spacious meetinghouse of Salem, she gave a look towards the house. And immediately a demon invisibly entering the meetinghouse, tore down a part of it; so that though there were no person to be seen there, yet the people at the noise running in, found a board, which was strongly fastened with several nails, transported unto another quarter of the house.

4. The "Casco Girls" (Susannah Sheldon, Mercy Lewis, and Abigail Hobbs) Accuse George Burroughs, 1692

[May 9, 1692]

The Complaint of Susannah Shelden against mr burroos which brought a book to mee and told mee if i would not set my hand too if hee would tear mee to peesses i told him i would not then hee told mee hee would starve me to death then the next morning he told mee hee could not starve mee. to death, but hee would choake me that my vittals should doe me but litl good then he told mee his name was borros which had preached at the vliage the last night hee Came to mee and asked mee whether i would goe to the village to morrow to witnes against him i asked him if hee was exsamened then hee told hee was then i told him i would goe then hee told mee hee would kil mee befoar morning then hee apeared to mee at the hous of nathaniel ingolson and told mee hee had been the death of three children at the eastward and had kiled two of his wifes the first hee smothered and the second he choaked and killed tow of his own children

Abigail Hobbs Examination att Salem Prison May. 12. 1692—

Q. Did Mr Burroughs bring you any of the poppets of his wives to stick pinns into?

An. I do not Remember that he did.

Q. Did he of any of his Children, or of the Eastward Souldres[?]

A. No.

Q. Have you known of any that have been killed by witchcraft[?]

A. No. No-Body. . . .

Q. [W]ere they Strangers to you, that Burrougs would have you afflict?

A. Yes[.]

Q. [A]nd were they afflicted accordingly?

A. Yes.

Q. [C]ant you name Some of them?

A. No I cannot Remember them[.]

Q. [W]here did they Live?

A. [A]tt the Eastward [in Maine]. . . .

Q. [W]as their any thing brought to you like them?

An. [Y]es.

Q. [W]hat did you stick into them?

A. Thorns.

Q. [D]id some of them dy?

A. Yes. one of them was Mary Laurence [that dyed.]

[Q. Where] did you stick the thorns?

A. I do not know[.]

Q. [W]as it about the middle of her body?

A. Yes and I stuck it right in.

Q. [W]hat provoked you, had she displeased you?

A. Yes by some words she spoke of mee.

Q. [W]ho brought the image to you?

A. It was Mr Burroughs.

Q. How did he bring itt to you?

A. In his own person Bodily.

Q. [W]here did he bring it to you?

A. Abroad a little way of from o'r house.

Q. [A]nd what did he say to you then?

A. He told me He was angry with that family.

Q. How many years Since was it?

A. Before this Indian Warr.

Q. How did you know mr. Burroughs was a Witch?

A. I dont know. She owned againe She had made two Covenants with the Devil, first for two years, and after that for four years, and She Confesseth herslef to have been a Witch these Six years. . . .

Q. And who brought those Poppets to you?

A. Mr Burroughs.

Q. [W]hat did you stick into them?

A. Pinns, and he gave them to mee.

Q. Did you keep those Poppets?

A. No, he carryed them away with him.

Q. [W]as he there himselfe with you in Bodily person?

A. [Y]es, and So he was, when he appeared to tempt mee to set my hand to the Book, he then appeared in person, and I felt his hand att the Same time[.]

Q. [W]ere they men, Women or Children you killed?

A. They were both Boys and Girls.

Q. Was you angry with them yourself?

- A. Yes, tho I dont know why now.
Q. Did you know mr Burroughs's Wife?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you know of any poppits prickd to kill her?
A. No I dont[.]
Q. Have you seen several Witches at the Eastward[?]
A. Yes, But I dont know who they were.

1st June 1692

Abigaile Hobbs then confessed before John Hathorn & Jonathan corwin Esq's That at the generall meeting of the Witches in the feild near Mr Parrisse's house she saw Mr George Burroughs, Sarah Good Sara Osborne Bridgett Bishop als. Olliver & Giles Cory, two or three nights agoe, Mr Burrough came & sat at the window & told her he would terribly afflict her for saying so much ag't him & then pinched her, deliverance Hobbs then saw s'd Burroughs & he would have tempted her to sett her hand to the book & almost shooke her to pieces because she would not doe it,

Mary Warren Testifyeth that when she was in prison in Salem about a fortnight agoe Mr George Burroughs . . . came to this depon't & Mr Burroughs had a trumpet & sounded it, & they would have had this depon't to have gone up with them to a feast at Mr parrisses. . . .

[August 3, 1692]

the deposition of Mircy Lewes who testifieth and saith that one the 7'th of may, 1692 att evening I saw the apperishition of Mr. George Burroughs whom i very well knew which did greivously tortor me and urged me to writ in his Book and then he brought to me a new fashon book which he did not use to bring and tould me I might writ in that book: for that was a book that was in his studdy when I lived with them: but I tould him I did not beleve him for I had been often in his studdy but I never saw that book their: but he tould me that he had severall books in his studdy which I never saw in his studdy and he could raise the divell: and now had bewitched Mr. Sheppards daughter and I asked him how he could goe to be wicth hir now he was keptt at Salem: and he tould me that the divell was his sarvant and he sent him in his shapp to doe it then he againe tortored me most dreadfully and threatened to kill me for he said I should not witnes against him also he tould me that he had made Abigaill Hoobs: a wicth and severall more then againe he did most dreadfully tortor me as if he would have racked me all to peaces and urged me to writ in his book or elce he would kill me but I tould him I hoped my life was not in the power of his hand and that I would not writ tho he did kill me: the next night he tould me I should not see his Two wives if he could help it because I should not witnes agast him this 9'th may mr Burroughs caried me up to an exceeding high mountain and shewed me all the kingdoms of the earth and tould me that he would give them all to me if I would writ in his book and if I would not he would thro me down and brake my neck: but I tould him they ware non of his to give and I would not writ if he throde me down on 100 pichforks: also on the 9'th may being the time of his examination mr. George Burroughs did most dreadfully torment me: and also several times sence

In 1982, John Putnam Demos, a professor at Yale University, examined all the witchcraft cases in New England other than the prosecutions in Salem in 1692 in order to learn the characteristics of accused witches. He summarized his findings and reveals what he regards as the crucial aspects of women's lives that could lead them to be suspected of dealings with the devil. More than two decades later, Mary Beth Norton, who teaches at Cornell University, took a different approach in her study of the Salem crisis. Instead of focusing on the accused (in her case, a prominent man, not a woman), she asked: Who were the accusers? Why did they choose to charge *this* man with witchcraft? She argues implicitly that witchcraft accusations cannot be understood without knowing the motivations of accusers. On which group—accusers or accused—should historians place their emphasis?

The Characteristics of Accused Witches

JOHN PUTNAM DEMOS

To investigate the witches as a biographical type is no easy task. With rare exceptions the record of their experience is scattered and fragmentary. Much of the surviving evidence derives from their various trial proceedings; in short, we can visualize them quite fully as *suspects*, but only here and there in other aspects of their lives. We lack, most especially, a chance to approach them directly, to hear their side of their own story. Most of what we do hear comes to us second- or third-hand, and from obviously hostile sources.

It is hard enough simply to count their number. Indeed, it is impossible to compile a complete roster of all those involved. We shall be dealing in what follows with 114 individual suspects. Of these people 81 were subject to some form of legal action for their supposed witchcraft, i.e., "examination" by magistrates and/or full-fledged prosecution. Another 15 were not, so far as we know, formally accused in court; however, their status as suspects is apparent from actions—for slander—which they themselves initiated. A final group of 18 (some not identified by name) are mentioned elsewhere in writings from the period.

Yet these figures certainly *under-represent* the total of witchcraft suspects in seventeenth-century New England. The court records are riddled with gaps and defects; it is possible, even probable, that important cases have been entirely lost from sight. . . .

But if our list of 114 is only the tip, its substantive and structural features still merit investigation. There is no reason to imagine any considerable difference between the known witches and their unknown counterparts. The former are presented here, as a group, in their leading biographical characteristics. . . .

Sex

There was no intrinsic reason why one sex should have been more heavily represented among New England witches than the other. The prevailing definitions of witchcraft—the performance of *maleficium* and “familiarity with the Devil”—made no apparent distinctions as to gender. Yet the predominance of women among those actually accused is a historical commonplace—and is confirmed by the present findings.

Females outnumbered males by a ratio of roughly 4:1. These proportions obtained, with some minor variations, across both time and space. Furthermore, they likely *understate* the association of women and witchcraft, as can be seen from a closer look at the males accused. Of the twenty-two men on the list, eleven were accused together with a woman. Nine of these were husbands of female witches, the other two were religious associates (*protégés* of the notorious Anne Hutchinson). There is good reason to think that in most, if not all, such cases the woman was the primary suspect, with the man becoming implicated through a literal process of guilt by association. Indeed this pattern conformed to a widely prevalent assumption that the transmission of witchcraft would follow the lines of family or close friendship. (There were at least two instances when a woman-witch joined in the charges against her own husband.) . . .

An easy hypothesis—perhaps too easy—would make of witchcraft a single plank in a platform of “sexist” oppression. Presumably, the threat of being charged as a witch might serve to constrain the behavior of women. Those who asserted themselves too openly or forcibly could expect a summons to court, and risked incurring the ultimate sanction of death itself. Hence the dominance of *men* would be underscored in both symbolic and practical terms. Male dominance was, of course, an assumed principle in traditional society—including the society of early New England. Men controlled political life; they alone could vote and hold public office. Men were also leaders in religion, as pastors and elders of local congregations. Men owned the bulk of personal property (though women had some rights and protections). Furthermore, the values of the culture affirmed the “headship” of men in marital and family relations and their greater “wisdom” in everyday affairs. Certainly, then, the uneven distribution of witchcraft accusations and their special bearing on the lives of women were consistent with sex-roles generally.

But was there *more* to this than simple consistency? Did the larger matrix of social relations enclose some dynamic principle that would energize actual “witch-hunting” so as to hold women down? On this the evidence—at least from early New England—seems doubtful. There is little sign of generalized (or “structural”) conflict between the sexes. Male dominance of public affairs was scarcely an issue, and in private life there was considerable scope for female initiative. Considered overall, the relations of men and women were less constrained by differences of role and status than would be the case for most later generations of Americans. It is true that many of the suspects displayed qualities of assertiveness and aggressiveness beyond what the culture deemed proper. But these displays were not directed at men as such; often enough the targets were other women. Moreover, no single line in the extant materials raises the issue of sex-defined patterns of authority. Thus, if witches were at some level protesters against male oppression, they themselves seem to have

been unconscious of the fact. As much could be said of the accusers, in the (putative) impulse to dominate. . . .

And one final point in this connection: a large portion of witchcraft charges were brought against women *by* other women. Thus, if the fear of witchcraft expressed a deep strain of misogyny, it was something in which both sexes shared. It was also something in which other cultures have quite generally shared. . . .

Age

How old were the accused? At what age did their careers as suspected witches begin? These questions are difficult to answer with precision, in many individual cases; but it is possible to create an aggregate picture by analyzing a broad sample of age-estimates. . . .

The results converge on one time of life in particular: what we would call "midlife," or simply "middle age." The years of the forties and fifties account for the great mass of accused witches, whether considered at the time of prosecution (67 percent) or of earliest known suspicion (82 percent). It seems necessary to emphasize these figures in order to counteract the now familiar stereotype which makes witches out to be old. In fact, they were not old, either by their standards or by ours. (One victim, in her fits, was asked pointedly about the age of her spectral tormentors, and "she answered neither old nor young.") Contrary (once again) to currently prevalent understandings, the New Englanders construed the chronology of aging in terms not very different from our own. Their laws, their prescriptive writings, and their personal behavior expressed a common belief that old age begins at sixty. All but a handful of the witches were younger than this. Indeed, substantial majorities of both the groups considered above were age fifty or less (72 percent of the general sample, and 78 percent of the "major suspects"). . . .

One can scarcely avoid asking *why* this should have been so. What, for a start, was the meaning of midlife in that time and that cultural context? One point seems immediately apparent: midlife was *not* seen as one of several stages in a fully rounded "life-cycle." Early Americans spoke easily and frequently of "childhood," "youth," and "old age"—but not of "middle age." The term and (presumably) the concept, so familiar to us today, had little place in the lives of our forebears centuries ago. Instead of constituting a stage, midlife meant simply manhood (or womanhood) itself. Here was a *general* standard, against which childhood and youth, on the one side, and old age, on the other, were measured as deviations. Early life was preparatory; later life brought decline. The key element in midlife—as defined, for example, by the Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet—was the exercise of power, the use of fully developed capacity. The danger was *misuse* of power, the besetting sin an excess of "vaulting ambition." In fact, these conventions gave an accurate reflection of experience and behavior. In the average life the years from forty to sixty enclosed a high point of wealth, of prestige, of responsibility for self and others. This pattern can be demonstrated most clearly for *men* in midlife (from tax-lists, inventories, records of office-holding, and the like); but it must have obtained for women as well. A middle-aged woman was likely, for one thing, to have a full complement of children in her care and under her personal authority. The numbers involved could well reach eight

or ten, and in some families there would be additional dependents—servants, apprentices, other children “bound out” in conditions of fosterage. With female dependents the authority of the “mistress” was particularly extensive; significantly, it appeared as an issue in at least one of the witchcraft cases. Listen to the words of Mercy Short, “in her fits” and addressing her spectral tormentors:

What’s that? Must the younger women, do ye say, hearken to the elder? They must be another sort of elder women than you then! They must not be elder witches, I am sure. Pray, do you for once hearken to me!

Beyond the cultural insistence that others “hearken” to her, a woman in midlife would enjoy considerable prestige in her village or neighborhood. She was likely by this time to be a church member—and, if her husband was well to do, to have a front-row seat in the meeting-house. Indeed, her status reflected her husband’s quite generally, and his was probably higher than at any time previous. The point, in sum, is this. Midlife was associated, in theory and in fact, with power over others. Witchcraft was a special (albeit malign) instance of power over others. Ergo: most accused witches were themselves persons in midlife.

If this seems a bit too simple, there are indeed some additional—and complicating—factors. The accused were not, on the whole, well positioned socially. Their personal access to power and authority was, if anything, below the average for their age-group. They can therefore be viewed as representative of midlife status only in a very generalized sense. Perhaps it was the discrepancy between midlife norms and their own individual circumstances that made them seem plausible as suspects. Perhaps a middle-aged person who was poorly situated (relative to peers) could be presumed to want “power”—and, in some cases, to seek it by any means that came to hand.

To suggest this is to acknowledge elements of *disadvantage*—of deficit and loss—in generating suspicions of witchcraft. And one more such element must be mentioned, at least speculatively. Most of the accused were middle-aged women; as such they were subject to the menopausal “change of life.” The old phrase sounds quaint and slightly off-key to modern ears, but in traditional society menopause brought more—at least more tangible—change than is the usual case nowadays. Its effects embraced biology, psychology, and social position, in roughly equal measure. This process will need further, and fuller, consideration in relation to the putative victims of witchcraft; for the moment we simply underscore its meaning as loss of function. The generative “power” of most women was by midlife visibly manifest in a houseful of children; yet, that same power came suddenly to an end. There was a gap here between one mode of experience and another—past versus present—an additional kind of unsettling discrepancy. Was it, then, coincidental that witches appeared to direct their malice especially toward infants and very young children? . . .

Background

The most severe of all the deficiencies in the source materials relate to the early life of the witches. In what circumstances did they grow up? Was there something distinctive about their various families of origin? Were they orphaned, sent out into

servitude, subject to illness, raised by disabled or insensitive parents, to any extent beyond the average for their cultural peers? Unfortunately, the material to answer such questions is not extant. . . .

Other elements of "background" deserve investigation. Were the witches anomalous in their ethnic and/or religious heritage? On this the evidence is clearer, and it supports a negative answer overall. . . . [T]he witches seem to have been of solidly English stock and mostly "Puritan" religion. . . .

Marriage and Child-Bearing

But what of the families in which witches lived as adults, the families they helped to create as spouses and parents? The results on this point seem generally unremarkable: there are no clear departures from the pattern of the culture at large. The portion of widows (10 percent) looks normal for the age-group most centrally involved, given the prevailing demographic regime. The never-married (another 10 percent) include those few young men who virtually courted suspicion and also the several children of witches accused by "association." . . .

In sum, most witches were married persons (with spouses still living) when brought under suspicion. Most, indeed, had been married only once. Four were definitely, and two probably, in a second marriage; one had been married (also widowed) twice previously. Perhaps a few others belong in the previously married group, assuming some lost evidence; however, this would not alter the total picture. Again, the witches seem little different in their marital situation from their cultural peers.

As part of their marriages the accused would, of course, expect to bear and rear children. But in this their actual experience may have differed somewhat from the norm. The pertinent data (vital records, genealogies, and the like) are flawed at many points, and conclusions must be qualified accordingly. Still, with that understood, we may ponder the following. It appears that nearly one in six of the witches was childless—twice the rate that obtained in the population at large. Moreover, those who *did* bear children may have experienced lower-than-normal fecundity (and/or success in raising children to adulthood). In numerous cases (23 out of 62) the procedure of family reconstitution yields but one or two clearly identifiable offspring. Meanwhile, relatively few cases (7 of 62) can be associated with large complements of children, i.e., six or more per family. Fuller evidence would surely change these figures, reducing the former and raising the latter; but it would take a quite massive shift to bring the witches into line with the child-bearing and child-rearing norms of the time.

Connections between witchcraft and children emerge at many points in the extant record: children thought to have been made ill, or murdered, by witchcraft; mothers apparently bewitched while bearing or nursing children; witches alleged to suckle "imps" (in implicit parody of normal maternal function); witches observed to take a special (and suspicious) interest in other people's children; witches found to be predominantly of menopausal age and status; and so on. Thus the witches' own child-bearing (and child-rearing) is a matter of considerable interest. And if they were indeed relatively ill-favored and unsuccessful in this respect, their liability to witch-charges becomes, by so much, easier to understand.

Family Relationships

There is another, quite different way in which the witches may have been atypical. Briefly summarized, their domestic experience was often marred by trouble and conflict. Sometimes the witch and her (his) spouse squared off as antagonists. Jane Collins was brought to court not only for witchcraft but also for "railing" at her husband and calling him "gurley-gutted Devil." Bridget Oliver and her husband Thomas were tried, convicted, and punished for "fighting with each other," a decade before Bridget's first trial for witchcraft. (A neighbor deposed that he had "several times been called . . . to hear their complaints one of the other, and . . . further [that] she saw Goodwife Oliver's face at one time bloody and at other times black and blue, . . . and [Goodman] Oliver complained that his wife had given him several blows.") The witchcraft trials of Mary and Hugh Parsons called forth much testimony as to their marital difficulties. . . .

This material cannot meaningfully be quantified; in too many cases the surviving evidence does not extend to any part of the suspect's domestic experience. But what does survive seems striking, if only by way of "impressionism." Harmony in human relations was a touchstone of value for early New Englanders, and nowhere more so than in families. A "peaceable" household was seen as the foundation of all social order. Hence domestic disharmony would invite unfavorable notice from neighbors and peers. A woman from Dorchester, Massachusetts, called to court in a lawsuit filed by her son, expressed the underlying issue with candor and clarity: "it is no small trouble of mind to me that there should be such recording up [of] family weaknesses, to the dishonor of God and grief of one another, and I had rather go many paces backward to cover shame than one inch forward to discover any." Yet the lives of witches—we are speculating—were often crossed with "family weaknesses." And perhaps these belonged to the matrix of factors in which particular suspicions originated.

Such weaknesses may have held other significance as well. . . . Conflict with spouse, siblings, children had the effect of neutralizing one's natural allies and defenders, if not of turning them outright into adversaries. The *absence* of family was also a form of weakness. Widowhood may not by itself have invited suspicions of witchcraft; yet where suspicions formed on other grounds, it could become a serious disadvantage. Case materials from the trials of the widows Godman (New Haven), Holman (Cambridge), Hale (Boston), and Glover (Boston) implicitly underscore their vulnerable position.

The experience of Anne Hibbens (Boston) is particularly suggestive this way. Mrs. Hibbens had arrived in New England with her husband William in the early 1630s. Almost at once William established himself as an important and exemplary member of the community: a merchant, a magistrate, a member of the Court of Assistants. But Anne made a different impression. In 1640 she suffered admonition, then excommunication, from the Boston church; a still-extant transcript of the proceedings reveals most vividly her troubled relations with neighbors and peers. In 1656 she was tried in criminal court—and convicted—and executed—for witchcraft. The long interval between these two dates invites attention; and there is a third date to notice as well, 1654, when William Hibbens died. It seems likely, in short, that William's influence served for many years to shield her from the full force of her neighbor's animosity. But with his passing she was finally, and mortally, exposed.

Crime

Witchcraft was itself a crime, and witches were criminals of a special sort. Were they also criminals of other—more ordinary—sorts? Were they as a group disproportionately represented within the ranks of all defendants in court proceedings? Was there possibly some implicit affinity between witchcraft and other categories of crime?

Again the extant records do not yield fully adequate information. Some 41 of the accused can be definitely associated with other (and prior) criminal proceedings; the remaining 73 *cannot* be so associated. The difficulty is that many in the latter group can scarcely be traced at all beyond their alleged involvement with witchcraft. Still the total of 41 offenders is a considerable number, which serves to establish a minimum "crime rate"—of 36 percent—for the witches as a whole. Clearly, moreover, this is only a minimum. To concentrate on witches for whom there is some evidence of *ongoing* experience is to reduce the "at risk" population to no more than 65. (The latter, in short, for a sub-sample among the accused whose offences might plausibly have left some trace in the records; the rest are biographical phantoms in a more complete sense.) This adjustment yields an alternative rate (of offenders/witches) of some 63 percent.

The two figures, 36 and 63 percent, may be viewed as lower and upper bounds for the actual rate, and their midpoint as a "best guess" response to the central question. In short approximately one half of the people accused of practicing witchcraft were also charged with the commission of other crimes. But was this a notably large fraction, in relation to the community at large? Unfortunately, there are no fully developed studies of criminal behavior in early America to provide firm standards of comparison, only scattershot impressions and partial analyses of two specific communities included in the current investigation. The latter may be summarized in a sentence. The overall "crime rate"—defined as a percentage of the total population charged with committing crimes at some point in a lifetime—was on the order of 10 to 20 percent.* Thus, even allowing for the possibility of substantial error, the link between witchcraft and other crime does look strong.

There is more to ask about the other crime, particularly about its substantive range and distribution. Taken altogether, the witches accounted for fifty-two separate actions at court (apart from the witchcraft itself). . . . Crimes of assaultive speech and theft are dramatically highlighted here. Together they account for 61 percent of all charges pressed against the witches, as opposed to 35 percent for the larger sample. Moreover, the fact that accused witches were predominantly female suggests a refinement in the sample population. If men were excluded—if, in short, the comparison involves witches versus *women* offenders generally—then the disparity becomes even larger, 61 percent and 27 percent.

Are there reasons why persons previously charged with theft and/or assaultive speech might be found, to a disproportionate extent, in the ranks of accused witches? Was there something which these two categories of offense shared (so to say) with

*The rate for *women only* was much lower, perhaps in the vicinity of 5 percent. And this may be a better "control group" for present purposes, since most witches were female. If so, the disparity between witch-behavior and prevailing norms appears even more pronounced.

witchcraft? Such questions point to the meaning of witchcraft in the minds of its supposed (or potential) victims. But consider what is common to crimes of theft and assaultive speech themselves. The element of loss, of undue and unfair taking away, seems patent in the former case, but it is—or was for early New Englanders—equally central to the latter one as well. Slander, for example, meant the loss of good name, of “face,” of reputation, and thus was a matter of utmost importance. (The evidence against one alleged slanderer, who would later be charged as a witch, was summarized as follows: “She hath *taken away* their [i.e., the plaintiffs’] names and credits . . . which is *as precious as life itself*.” [Emphasis added.]) “Filthy speeches” was a somewhat looser designation, but in most specific instances it described a similar threat. Even “lying”—a third category of crime, notably salient for witches—can be joined to this line of interpretation. A lie was, in a sense, a theft of truth, and seemed especially dangerous when directed toward other persons.

In sum, each of these crimes carried the inner meaning of theft. And so did witchcraft. Theft of property, theft of health (and sometimes of life), theft of competence, theft of will, theft of self: such was *maleficium*, the habitual activity of witches.

Occupations

“Jane Hawkins, of Boston, midwife . . .” “Isabel Babson, of Gloucester, midwife . . .” “Wayborough Gatchell, of Marblehead, midwife . . .”; here was a special *woman’s* occupation. That midwife and witch were sometimes (often?) the same person has long been supposed by historians; hence the evidence, for individual cases, deserves a most careful review. In fact, only two people in the entire suspect-group can be plausibly associated with the regular practice of midwifery. Otherwise the witches were not midwives, at least in a formal sense. It is clear, moreover, that scores of midwives carried out their duties, in many towns and through many years, without ever being touched by imputations of witchcraft.

However, this does not entirely dispose of the issue at hand. Witchcraft charges often did revolve in a special way around episodes of childbirth, and some of the accused were thought to have shown inordinate (and sinister) interest in the fate of the very young. Thus, for example, Eunice Cole of Hampton aroused suspicion by trying to intrude at the childbed (later deathbed) of her alleged victims. Others among the accused pressed medicines and advice on expectant or newly delivered mothers, or, alternatively, sought to take from the same quarter. Some may have displayed special skills in attending at childbirth, even without being recognized officially as midwives. . . . Perhaps, at bottom, there was a link of antipathy: the midwife *versus* the witch, life-giving and life-taking, opposite faces of the same coin.

Recent scholarship of English witchcraft has spotlighted the activities of so-called “cunning folk.” These were local practitioners of magic who specialized in finding lost property, foretelling the future, and (most especially) treating illness. Usually they sided with moral order and justice; often enough their diagnoses served to “discover” witchcraft as the cause of particular sufferings. Yet their powers were mysterious and frightening: charms, incantations, herbal potions, a kind of second sight—all in exotic combination. Inevitably, it seemed, some of them would be tempted to apply such powers in the cause of evil. Thus they might move from the role of “discoverer” to that of suspect—in short, from witch-doctor to witch.

Were there also "cunning folk" among the transplanted Englishmen of North America? The extant evidence seems, at first sight, to yield a negative answer. There is little sign that individual persons achieved (or wanted) a public reputation of this sort, as was plainly the case in the mother country. . . .

And yet, while "cunning folk" did not present themselves as such, some of their ways (and character) may have survived in at least attenuated forms. For within the ranks of witches were several—perhaps many—women of singular aptitude for "healing." Not "physicians," not midwives, and not (publicly) identified by the pejorative term "cunning," they nonetheless proffered their services in the treatment of personal illness. For example: the widow Hale of Boston (twice a target of witchcraft proceedings) ran a kind of lodging-house where sick persons came for rest and "nursing." Anna Edmunds of Lynn (presented for witchcraft in 1673) was known locally as a "doctor woman"; references to her practice span at least two decades. . . . A woman of Boston, not identified but suspected in the "affliction" of Margaret Rule, "had frequently cured very painful hurts by muttering over them certain charms." . . .

What this and other evidence does make clear is a key association: between efforts of curing, on the one hand, and the "black arts" of witchcraft, on the other. Opposite though they seemed in formal terms, in practice they were (sometimes) tightly linked. "Power" in either direction could be suddenly reversed. We cannot discover how many New England women may have tried their hand at doctoring, but we know that some who did so brought down on themselves a terrible suspicion. Among the various occupations of premodern society this one was particularly full of hope—and of peril.

Social Position

There is a long-standing, and reasonably well attested, view of early America that makes the settlers solidly middle-class. To be sure, the notion of "class" is somewhat misleading when applied to the seventeenth century; "status" would be a better term in context. But "middle" does seem the right sort of qualifier. The movement of people from England to America included few from either the lowest or the highest ranks of traditional society—few, that is, from among the laboring poor (or the truly destitute) and fewer still from the nobility and upper gentry. Yet, with that understood, one cannot fail to notice how the middle range became itself divided and graded by lines of preference. The "planting" of New England yielded its own array of leaders and followers, of more and less fortunate citizens. Social distinction remained important, vitally so, to the orderly life of communities. . . .

The sorting attempted here posits three broad social groups—"high" (I), "middle" (II), and "low" (III)—of roughly equal size. Of course, all such categories are a matter of contrivance, conforming to no specific historical reality; but they do help to arrange the material for analysis.

Within our working roster of accused witches, some eighty-six can be classified according to this scheme. (For the other twenty-eight there is too little evidence to permit a judgement.) A substantial majority can be assigned directly to one or another of the basic rank-groups. Eighteen more occupy marginal positions (i.e., *between* groups), while seven seem distinctive in their mobility (up or down) and are on that account held for a separate category. . . . Witches were recruited, to a greatly disproportionate extent, among the most humble, least powerful of New

England's citizens. As a matter of statistical probabilities, persons at the bottom of the sorting-scale were many times more likely to be accused and prosecuted than their counterparts at the top. Moreover, when the results of such accusation are figured in, the difference looks stronger still. Among all the suspects in categories I, I/II, and II, only one was a *convicted* witch. (And of the remainder, few, if any, were seriously threatened by the actions taken against them.) The accused in categories II/II and III present quite another picture. Indeed they account for all convictions save the one above noted, and for the great bulk of completed trials.

Finally, the "mobile" group deserves special consideration. Five of them started life in a top-category position and ended near the bottom (e.g., Rachel Clinton). Two experienced equivalent change but in the opposite direction. None was convicted; all but one, however, were subject to full-scale prosecution. (Moreover, five were tried more than once.) In short, the mobile group, while not numerous, included people whose "witchcraft" was taken very seriously. To interpret this finding is difficult, without comparable information about the population at large. But there is the suggestion here of a significant relationship: between life-change and witchcraft, between mobility and lurking danger. Perhaps mobility seemed a threat to traditional values and order. And if so, it may well have been personally threatening to the individuals involved. As they rose or fell, moving en route past their more stable peers, they must at the least have seemed conspicuous. But perhaps they seemed *suspect* as well. To mark them as witches would, then, be a way of defending society itself.

Character

With the witches' sex, age, personal background, family life, propensity to crime, occupations, and social position all accounted for (as best we can manage), there yet remains one category which may be the most important of all. What were these people like—as people? What range of motive, of style, and of behavior would they typically exhibit? Can the scattered artifacts of their separate careers be made to yield a composite portrait, a model, so to speak, of witch-character? . . .

Witchcraft was *defined* in reference to conflict; and most charges of witchcraft grew out of specific episodes of conflict. Hence it should not be surprising that the suspects, as individuals, were notably active that way. . . .

What follows is a motley assemblage of taunts, threats, and curses attributed to one or another suspect: . . .

She [Goodwife Jane Walford] said I had better have done it; that my sorrow was great already, and it should be greater—for I was going a great journey, but should never come there.

She [Elizabeth Godman] said, "How doth Goody Thorp? I am beholden to Goody Thorp above all the women in the town; she would have had me to the gallows for a few chickens."

Mercy Disborough told him that she would make him as bare as a bird's tail.

Then said he [Hugh Parsons], "If you will not abate it [i.e., a certain debt in corn] it shall be but as lent. It shall do you no good. It shall be but as wild fire in your house, and as a moth in your clothes." And these threatening speeches he uttered with much anger.

Goodwife Cole said that if this deponent's calves did eat any of her grass, she wished it might poison or choke them. . . .

Some suspects appeared to favor witchcraft and its alleged practitioners. Elizabeth Godman "would be often speaking about witches . . . without any occasion . . . and [would] rather justify them than condemn them"; indeed, "she said, 'why do they provoke them? why do they not let them come into the church?'" When her neighbor, Mrs. Goodyear, expressed confidence that God would ultimately "discover" and punish witches, "for I never knew a witch to die in their bed," Mrs. Godman disagreed. "You mistake," she said, "for a great many die and go to the grave in an orderly way." Hugh Parsons was suspected of holding similar views. According to his wife he could "not abide that anything should be spoken against witches." . . .

Some of these statements and postures serve to raise a further question. Was the impulse to provoke others through leading references to witchcraft a manifestation of some larger characterological disturbance? Here, indeed, is the germ of an odd supposition, that witches have usually been deranged persons, insane or at least deeply eccentric. For New England the situation was largely otherwise. . . .

Conclusion

From this long and somewhat tortuous exercise in prosopography a rough composite finally emerges. To recapitulate, the typical witch:

1. was female.
2. was of middle age (i.e., between forty and sixty years old).
3. was of English (and "Puritan") background.
4. was married, but was more likely (than the general population) to have few children—or none at all.
5. was frequently involved in trouble and conflict with other family members.
6. had been accused, on some previous occasion, of committing crimes—most especially theft, slander, or other forms of assaultive speech.
7. was more likely (than the general population) to have professed and practiced a medical vocation, i.e., "doctoring" on a local, quite informal basis.
8. was of relatively low social position.
9. was abrasive in style, contentious in character—and stubbornly resilient in the face of adversity.

The Accusers of George Burroughs

MARY BETH NORTON

On April 19, 1692, Abigail Hobbs, a fourteen-year-old girl from Topsfield, Massachusetts, became the third person that spring to confess to being a witch. Questioned in the Salem Village meetinghouse by John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin, the Salem Town magistrates, she declared that the devil had recruited her into his ranks in Maine about four years earlier, after meeting her in the woods near her house at Falmouth on Casco Bay. In return for Satan's promise of "fine things," she had

signed a covenant to serve him for several years. The devil had then ordered her to afflict people, and she had done so, attacking a little Salem Village girl, Ann Putnam, and Mercy Lewis, a servant in the Putnam household.

The following evening, Ann Putnam, probably the most active of the so-called "afflicted girls" of Salem Village, had a remarkable vision of "the Apperishtion of a Minister," at which, she said, "she was greviously affrighted and cried out oh dreadfull: dreadfull here is a minister com: what are Ministers wicthes to"? The specter tortured the twelve-year-old Ann while she carried on a dialogue with him. "It was a dreadfull thing," she told the apparition, "that he which was a Minister that should teach children to feare God should com to perswad poor creatures to give their souls to the divill." After repeatedly refusing to tell her who he was, the specter finally revealed his identity:

presently he tould me that his name was George Burroughs and that he had had three wives: and that he had bewitched the Two first of them of death: and that he kiled . . . Mr Lawsons child because he went to the eastward with Sir Edmon and preached soe: to the souldiers and that he had bewitched a grate many souldiers to death at the eastword, when Sir Edmon was their. and that he had made Abigail Hobbs a wicth and: severall wicthes more.

The roots of Ann Putnam's 1692 vision of a spectral George Burroughs lay not in Salem Village, the small community which has been the primary (or in some cases the only) focus of scholarship on the witchcraft crisis of 1692. Rather, the apparition had its origins in events that had taken place more than one hundred miles to the north, in the much-fought-over soil of Casco Bay, Maine—once home to George Burroughs and Abigail Hobbs, and birthplace and long-time residence of the Putnams' afflicted servant, Mercy Lewis. Moreover, a settlement just a few miles south of Falmouth, Black Point (Scarborough), where Burroughs had also ministered, produced another accuser who chimed in later that spring, Susannah Sheldon. Although their centrality has not previously been recognized, the three young women I have herein dubbed "the girls from Casco"—Abigail Hobbs, Mercy Lewis, and Susannah Sheldon—and George Burroughs, their former pastor and the man they accused of being a witch, played crucial roles in the 1692 crisis.

Only after April 20 did what had been an unusual though not wholly unprecedented witchcraft episode (with fourteen accused prior to that date) explode into the burgeoning crisis that it quickly became. Within a week after the accusation of George Burroughs, fifteen more suspects had been accused; within a month, another forty had been named and jailed. By early November, over 140 New Englanders [had] been formally charged, and many more had been identified as witches, at least in popular gossip. What had happened to cause this incredible outburst of accusations of witchcraft, and what was its connection to Maine and specifically to the Casco Bay region?

To understand the origins of Salem witchcraft, it is first necessary to review the history of New England's early northeastern frontier, where all four of the subjects of this article had lived for much of their lives, and where they had known each other long before their encounters in Salem courtrooms.

By the late 1660s, English settlers had established fur-trading posts, fishing stations, and farming communities of varying sizes from Pemaquid in the north to the Piscataqua River in the south. . . .

Although the region was inhabited only by about 3,600 English people, its scattered settlements flourished before the mid-1670s. Exports of peltry, fish, and timber from the "eastward"—that is, Maine and New Hampshire—fueled the Massachusetts economy, providing the colony's major source of income. . . .

The Wabanaki who also inhabited the region were most commonly identified by the name of the river valleys in which their villages were located: Sacos, Androscoggins, Kennebecs, Penobscots, and so forth. Such villages consisted of multiple groups of family bands organized around older men and their wives, children, and other relatives. The villages were simultaneously intertwined and autonomous; no single Wabanaki chief sachem ruled the whole, but sachems of the different villages were related to one another by blood or marriage, and they often cooperated in both peace and war. By the final quarter of the seventeenth century, the Wabanaki had become heavily reliant on the manufactured items they obtained by trading furs to the Europeans (French as well as English) who had moved into their territory. Vital as that commerce was to both peoples—for the settlers in the region needed the income they earned by selling furs in Europe as much as the Indians needed guns and knives—the fur trade nevertheless was a source of constant friction, for each side regularly suspected the other of cheating.

The presence of French settlers and Catholic priests in the region northeast of Penobscot Bay complicated such commercial relationships, for English and French traders competed for the same pelts and moose hides. From the mid-1620s on, l'Acadie (as the French called the area) or Nova Scotia (as the English referred to it) changed hands repeatedly as the two nations struggled for preeminence along the northeast coast. . . .

Yet in all likelihood war would not have erupted in the region had it not been for the armed struggle between Indians and Anglo-Americans that broke out in southern New England in June 1675, when the Wampanoag King Philip (Metacom) led his forces in a series of attacks on settlements in Plymouth Colony, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts Bay. The Wabanaki, who would have preferred to remain neutral in King Philip's War, found themselves pulled inexorably into the conflict by the demands of the opposing forces. . . .

King Philip's War (or, as it was known in the region, the First Indian War) began in Maine in September 1675; through that fall, Indian assaults on Anglo farms and towns intensified, with the fort at Black Point a particular focal point for conflict. A tentative truce negotiated in December did not hold, and the Indians once again launched attacks on settlements in the area starting in August 1676. In October, the Wabanaki successfully captured Black Point fort. Anglo settlers fled the region en masse, abandoning Maine north of Wells to the Wabanaki. Even when the Indians abandoned their Black Point prize and the English subsequently reoccupied it, they did not return to their homes. The Casco Bay area continued to be contested throughout 1677. Finally, in April 1678 the Treaty of Casco nominally ended the war.

Over the next decade and especially in 1680 and thereafter, Maine was slowly resettled. By 1688, old timber mills had been rebuilt and new ones constructed on rivers up and down the coast, especially near Casco Bay; farms had been restocked with cattle; and the major settlements—Falmouth, Black Point, Saco, and Pemaquid—had been reoccupied. Yet everyone was nervous, for some new settlements were encroaching on Wabanaki land. Consequently, militia leaders in Maine overreacted

when reports reached them in mid-August 1688 that several settlers had been killed in western Massachusetts. They seized twenty Wabanaki, many of them women and children, evidently planning to use them as hostages. But instead of preventing a war, they started one, for the Wabanaki engaged in retaliatory kidnappings, eventually killing several of their captives. That winter, Sir Edmund Andros, governor of the Dominion of New England (into which Massachusetts had been administratively incorporated), led an ineffective expedition to Pemaquid against the Indians.

But Andros was overthrown in the Glorious Revolution in April 1689 soon after his return to Boston, and the result was catastrophic for the frontier communities. The local men who thereafter took charge of the colony did not want to expend scarce resources defending the northern settlements, instructing frontier dwellers to defend themselves. Seizing the initiative, the Wabanaki launched a series of attacks on communities in both Maine and New Hampshire. . . .

Four moments during the two destructive Indian wars were of particular significance for George Burroughs and his eventual accusers, the three girls from Casco: October 10–11, 1675; August 11, 1676; September 21, 1689; and May 16–20, 1690. On the first of these, the Wabanaki attacked outposts near Black Point, the home of Susannah Sheldon; on the other three, they assaulted the town of Falmouth, the home of Mercy Lewis and George Burroughs and sometime residence of Abigail Hobbs.

October 10–11, 1675. "When the Indeans came first it was on a Lords day in the morning," Eleanor Barge recalled. . . . [T]he Indians "went to dunstone & fell upon Left. Alger, & the Dunston people." . . . [S]he personally asked Captain Joshua Scottow, commander of the Black Point garrison, to send some men to help the people at Dunstan, including Lt. Arthur Alger and his brother Andrew. But Captain Scottow replied, "there should not a man goe of[f] the Necke, for sayd Mr Scottow, they had warening enough & lyberty Enough [to have escaped] they & Arther Alger too . . . if they perish they perish." . . .

Among the alarmed people in the Black Point garrison that day were William Sheldon, his wife Rebecca, and their little daughter Susannah, who would then have been under two years old. Rebecca Scadlock Sheldon must have been particularly terrified by the news of the attack on Dunstan, for her sister Anne was married to Arthur Alger. Rebecca and her husband were surely dissatisfied with Captain Scottow's refusal to aid the outlying settlement and with his decision instead merely to dispatch a messenger to Saco to ask for assistance from that larger town. In the event, help arrived too late. Andrew Alger died in the assault on Dunstan on October 11, and Arthur Alger was fatally wounded at the same time. Brought with other injured men to Black Point after the battle, Arthur died at William Sheldon's garrison on October 14. The young Susannah must have witnessed both her uncle Arthur's death agonies and her aunt's and mother's consequent grief. In the 1680s, when her family returned to Black Point after having lived elsewhere between 1676 and 1681, she must also have heard her parents frequently denigrate their nemesis Joshua Scottow. Because Scottow seems to have been the prime mover in an attempt to persuade George Burroughs to leave his pastorate at Falmouth and relocate permanently to Black Point during the mid-to-late 1680s, the Sheldon family would have regarded the clergyman as Scottow's ally.

August 11, 1676. When the Indians assaulted Falmouth for the first time, Mercy Lewis was a three-year-old toddler, living with her parents and surrounded by her

father's extended family. Her grandfather George Lewis had brought his wife and three children to Maine from England by 1640; four more children—including her father Philip—were born in America. All her father's siblings had land, spouses, and children on Casco Bay. But early in the morning of August 11, the Wabanaki attacked. . . .

Mercy's parents managed to escape with her to an island in the bay, along with their minister George Burroughs and others, but her father's siblings were hard hit. . . . Her paternal grandparents also numbered among the slain. Many of her cousins were killed or captured. . . . Mercy and her parents probably moved temporarily to Salem Town. . . . By 1683, though, they had returned to Maine [to] rebuild their lives in Casco Bay. She was then ten years old.

The Reverend George Burroughs, who also survived that attack on Falmouth, was twenty-three in 1676. Born in Virginia but raised in Roxbury, Massachusetts, he attended Harvard as a member of the class of 1670. In 1674 he moved his new wife and baby from Roxbury to Casco. In the wake of the August 11, 1676 assault, the Burroughs family retreated to Essex County, specifically to Salisbury, where the young clergyman assisted the aged local pastor, the Reverend John Wheelwright, and possibly hoped to be able to take over the congregation upon Wheelwright's death. Conflict in the church rendered that outcome impossible, and so he began to look elsewhere. At about the same time, Salem Village ousted its first minister, and in late 1680 the community recruited Burroughs to fill the vacancy. but the clergyman's tenure in Essex County was both brief and unpleasant. By the summer of 1682, dissatisfied Villagers were refusing to pay his salary. In early March 1683, Burroughs moved his family back to the recently reoccupied Falmouth, which was protected by Fort Loyal, newly constructed to help defend the region.

September 21, 1689. Before the Wabanaki attacked Falmouth in the Second Indian War, the colonists received a timely warning of the impending assault. Boston authorities thus had time to reinforce Ft. Loyal with a sizable contingent of militiamen under the command of Colonel Benjamin Church. Sylvanus Davis, the fort's commander, later reported "a fierce fight" lasting about six hours on September 21, in which the New Englanders "forced them to Retreat & Judge many of them to bee slaine . . . there was Grate firings on Both sides." The English lost eleven soldiers killed and ten wounded, some of whom died later. How many townspeople were among the casualties went unrecorded; they might have included Mercy Lewis's parents (her father is last known to have been alive in April 1689). But the Reverend George Burroughs again survived the attack; on September 22 Church declared himself "well Satisfied with" Burroughs, who had been "present with us yesterday in the fight."

In the aftermath of the battle, the by-then orphaned Mercy Lewis seems to have moved in with George Burroughs as his servant. How long she lived with her minister's family is unknown, but it was probably no more than a few months. When Burroughs, seeking a safer place to live, moved south to Wells some time during the winter of 1689–1690, Mercy appears to have gone to Beverly, Massachusetts, again as a servant. After about nine months there, she moved on to Salem Village, where her recently married sister lived, and where she was hired out to the Putnams. Even before Mercy arrived in Salem Village, William Sheldon had moved his family there from Black Point. They left Maine soon after the Second War began and had settled in the Village by November 1688.

May 16–20, 1690. Thus none of these former residents of the Casco region was present when the Wabanaki launched their third and most devastating attack on Falmouth in mid-May 1690. After a siege of five days, with almost all of its male defenders dead or wounded, Ft. Loyal surrendered to a combined force of French and Indians. Promises of quarter were not fulfilled, and most of the 200 or so survivors were slaughtered on the spot, with a few being carried off into captivity by the Wabanaki. Among the dead and captured were three more of Mercy Lewis's relatives. Black Point and all other settlements north of Wells were quickly abandoned once more.

What of Abigail Hobbs, the third "Casco girl"? Her family seems to have been present in Falmouth during only the third of these attacks, that of September 1689. The Hobbs clan did not move to Maine until after 1682; probably Abigail's father, William (who was perhaps born in New Hampshire) was one of a number of settlers lured to the reoccupied town by dreams of new prosperity on the frontier. Abigail's statements to the judges in 1692 indicated that she almost certainly lived in the town center, close to Mercy Lewis's home and not far from Burroughs's household. Surely the three eventual participants in the witch trials saw each other frequently, perhaps even on a daily basis, in the tiny community. In Falmouth in 1688, when Abigail said she first became a witch, her pastor Burroughs was in his mid thirties, while she herself was about 11 and Mercy about 16. Just to the south, in Black Point, where Burroughs occasionally preached, Susannah Sheldon was then approximately 14 years old.

It is now appropriate to return to Ann Putnam's vision of April 20, 1692. Other than its accusation that Burroughs had killed his first two wives (he wed his third in Wells in 1691), which is a charge beyond the scope of this article, its three major (interrelated) themes revolved around his conduct in Maine. The first accused him of killing "Mr Lawsons child because he went to the eastward with Sir Edmon and preached soe: to the souldiers," the second, of bewitching "a grate many souldiers to death at the eastword, when Sir Edmon was their"; the third, of recruiting Abigail Hobbs as a witch. That last should need no further explication beyond noting that Ann's charge, offered a day after Abigail had confessed to malefic activity, created the logical link between the Maine minister and the Maine witch. Abigail Hobbs had not yet accused Burroughs of enlisting her in the devil's ranks, but instead had described a direct encounter with Satan himself. In another confession offered about three weeks later, though, she joined Ann Putnam in indicating that Burroughs had approached her in Falmouth to ask her to practice witchcraft.

Ann's first two charges underscored Mercy Lewis's influence on the impressionable young girl, for Mercy was the only person in Ann's life who had lived "at the eastward" while Sir Edmund Andros was the governor of the Dominion of New England. (I can easily imagine the two sharing a bed in the Putnam household, and Mercy after dark filling Ann's head full of tales of the frontier and the war.) As was already noted briefly in the summary above, the events specifically referred to in the vision took place during the winter of 1688–1689, when Andros personally led a troop of militiamen into Wabanaki territory, attempting to quell the violence that had erupted in late August 1688. Andros later proclaimed his expedition a success, but colonists generally regarded it as a failure because Andros's men failed ever to engage the enemy directly. The "Mr. Lawson" of Ann's vision was the Reverend Deodat

Lawson, Burroughs's immediate successor as minister in Salem Village, who had served as the chaplain to Andros's troops that winter after he left the Village. Lawson's first wife and child both died at about that time (evidently during his absence), and others too later repeated Ann's charge that Burroughs had bewitched them.

But why would Ann Putnam—that is, Mercy Lewis—think to charge Burroughs with killing his successor's child because Lawson had been hired as chaplain to Andros's men? In September 1689 Benjamin Church alluded to a possible reason for Burroughs's purported malefic act. In his remarks on the minister, he commented that Burroughs "had thoughts of removeing" from Falmouth because "his present maintainance from this Town by reason of thier poverty, is not enough for his livelihood." So, Church declared, "I shall Encourage him to Stay promising him an allowance from the publique Treasury, for what Servis he shall do for the Army."

That observation suggests a motive for Burroughs's possible anger about Lawson's employment with Andros: perhaps, he had wanted the job himself. It is easy to speculate that Burroughs expressed his jealousy or frustration about Lawson's chaplaincy in the hearing of Mercy Lewis when she lived in his household. She then later passed that on to Ann Putnam, who consciously or unconsciously (more likely the latter) incorporated the information into her spectral vision of the minister.

Burroughs's specter also told Ann that "he had bewitched a grate many souldiers to death at the eastward, when Sir Edmon was their." The malevolent killing of soldiers in Maine during Andros's campaign could have had only one purpose: assisting the Wabanaki in their war against God's people. But why would Burroughs do that? And why would that treachery help to reveal his identity as a witch?

New Englanders had long thought of Native Americans as devil-worshippers. North America had been "the *Devil's* territories," Cotton Mather later wrote, before the Christian English settlers had arrived. That George Burroughs had indeed spectrally allied himself to Satan and the Wabanaki could well have appeared likely to anyone who contemplated his uncanny ability to survive the attacks on Casco in August 1676 and September 1689, followed by his remarkably prescient decision to leave Falmouth sometime in the winter of 1689–90, mere months before the town fell to the Wabanaki in May 1690. And the "anyone" in that sentence was not, of course, just *anyone*—it was a very specific *someone*, Mercy Lewis, whose large extended family had essentially been wiped out in the same devastating attacks from which Burroughs had so stunningly escaped unscathed.

He was, therefore, a witch. Mercy Lewis knew it because of her experiences on the northeastern frontier, and she, Ann Putnam, Abigail Hobbs, Susannah Sheldon, and others said it. At the clergyman's formal examination by the two Salem magistrates and two members of the colony's council on May 9, 1692, Mercy and Susannah took an active role in the proceedings, with Susannah describing how Burroughs's specter had appeared to her the day before to confess killing not only his wives but also two of his own children and "three children at the eastward." Susannah also mentioned "the soldiers," but what she said has unfortunately been lost. For her part, Mercy described an encounter with the minister's apparition two days earlier. Burroughs's specter "did grievously tortor me and urged me to writ in his Book," Mercy reported, and continued:

Then he brought to me a new fashion book which he did not use to bring and tould me I might writ in that book: for that was a book that was in his studdy

when I lived with them: but I tould him I did not beleve him for I had been often in his studdy but I never saw that book their: but he tould me that he had severall books in his studdy which I never saw in his studdy and he could raise the divell: . . . also he tould me that he had made Abigaill Hoobs: a wicth and severall more.

When George Burroughs was tried in August, Mercy and probably Susannah joined other witnesses in accusing the clergyman of witchcraft. Before the grand jury on August 3, Mercy repeated under oath what she had said informally in May. Moreover, after Elizar Keyser, a resident of Salem Town, testified that Burroughs had bewitched his house after he had had an unsettling encounter with the imprisoned suspect in early May, Mercy eagerly interjected a confirmation: "Mr. Borroughs: told her: that he made lights: in Mr Keyzers chumny." At the trial two days later Abigail Hobbs surely added her accusing voice to those of the other Casco girls. Because she had confessed to being a witch, Abigail was not allowed to swear to the truth of her testimony, and so no written record of her words survives. But she must have been one of the eight confessors Cotton Mather noted as having appeared against Burroughs. And in that capacity she in all likelihood formally repeated to the court what she had revealed in a confession on May 12. Although she said she did not know whether the malefic clergyman had bewitched "the Eastward Souldres," Abigail indicated that Burroughs had brought her the devil's book to sign and that he had ordered her to afflict a number of residents of Falmouth, especially young people and members of families with which he had quarreled. In one case, "Before this Indian Warr," he had used her as an intermediary to bewitch the daughter of one of his enemies.

Although other witnesses also testified against Burroughs at his trial (including many who had known him in Maine), it was the Casco girls—Abigail Hobbs, then Mercy Lewis (initially through her surrogate Ann Putnam) and Susannah Sheldon—who had first pointed the authorities' attention toward the former minister of Salem Village and, more significantly, of Falmouth. A witch conspiracy of the extent that seemed to be operating in Essex County in 1692 needed a leader, and Burroughs fit the bill perfectly. Stereotypical female witches could hardly serve that function; why would the devil turn to an elderly, querulous widow to direct his forces? But a frontier clergyman who had briefly served the parish in Salem Village could easily link the malevolent forces of the visible and the invisible worlds, doing the devil's bidding in both. He would bewitch the soldiers sent against Satan's Wabanaki allies while simultaneously "encouraging" his English followers, whom he summoned to devilish sacraments "with the sound of a diabolical trumpet." At those satanic communions he predicted (recalled Deodat Lawson, who attended his predecessor's trial and recorded the content of the confessions repeated there) that "they should certainly prevail."

In the end, what prevailed was not the witches but rather the Casco girls' accusations of their former minister. They made him—a man who had, evidently through diabolical means, escaped unscathed from the war that had destroyed the lives and properties of so many members of their families—what his descendants later termed "the Head & Ringleader of all the Supposed Witches in the Land." And in doing so they also were the chief instigators of the widespread crisis referred to today by just one word: *Salem*.