

History of the Salem Witch Trials



The Salem Witch Trials were a series of witchcraft cases brought before local magistrates in a settlement called Salem which was a part of the Massachusetts Bay colony in the 17th century. Ever since those dark days ended, the trials have become synonymous with mass hysteria and scapegoating.

The Salem Witch Trials officially began in February of 1692, when the afflicted girls accused the first three victims, Tituba, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, of witchcraft and ended in May of 1693, when the remaining victims were released from jail.

The first of the girls to start experiencing symptoms was Betty Parris, followed by Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam Jr., Mary Walcott and Mercy Lewis. Shortly after, Elizabeth Hubbard, Susannah Sheldon, Mary Warren and Elizabeth Booth all started to experience the same symptoms, which consisted of suffering “fits,” hiding under furniture, contorting in pain and experiencing fever.

In February, Samuel Parris called for a doctor, who is believed to be Dr. William Griggs, to examine the girls. The doctor was unable to find anything physically wrong with them and suggested they may be bewitched. Shortly after, two of the girls named the women they believed were bewitching them. These women were Sarah Good, Sarah Osburn and a slave named Tituba who worked for Reverend Samuel Parris. These three women were social outcasts and easy targets for the accusation of witchcraft. It was not difficult for the people of Salem to believe they were involved in witchcraft.

On March 1st, Tituba, Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn were arrested and examined. During Tituba’s examination, she made a shocking confession that she had been approached by Satan, along with Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn, and they had all agreed to do his bidding as witches.

Tituba’s confession was the trigger that sparked the mass hysteria and the hunt for more witches in Salem. It also silenced any opposition to the idea that the Devil had infiltrated Salem. That same month, four more women were accused and arrested.

Although the afflicted girls were the main accusers during the trials, many historians believe the girl’s parents, particularly Thomas Putnam and Reverend Samuel Parris, were egging the girls on and encouraging them to accuse specific people in the community that they didn’t like in an act of revenge. In April, more women were accused, as well as a number of men.

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