

Death Warrant for Bridget Bishop*The first of the Salem accused to be hanged as a witch*

To George Corwin, Gentleman, High Sheriff of the County of Essex. Greeting. Whereas Bridget Bishop (alias Oliver), the wife of Edward Bishop of Salem in the county of Essex, sawyer, at a special court of Oyer and Terminer held at Salem the second day of this instant month of June for the counties of Essex, Middlesex, and Suffolk, before William Stoughton, Esquire, and his Associate Justices of the said court, was indicted and arraigned upon five several indictments for using, practicing, and exercising on the 19th day of April last past and divers other days and times before and after, certain acts of witchcraft in and upon the bodies of Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam, junior, Mercy Lewis, Mary Walcott, and Elizabeth Hubbard, of Salem Village, single women, whereby their bodies were hurt, afflicted, pined, consumed, wasted, and tormented, contrary to the form of the statute in that case made and provided.

To which indictments the said Bridget Bishop pleaded Not Guilty, and for trial thereof put herself upon God and her country; whereupon she was found Guilty of the felonies and witchcrafts,

whereof she stood indicted, and sentence of death accordingly passed against her as the law directs. Execution whereof yet remains to lie done.

These are therefore in the name of their Majesties William and Mary, now King and Queen over England, &c., to will and command yon that upon Friday next, being the tenth day of this instant month of June, between the hours of eight and twelve in the afternoon of the same day, you safely conduct the said Bridget Bishop (alias Oliver I from their Majesties' jail in Salem aforesaid to the place of execution, and there cause her to be hanged by the neck until she be dead, and of your doings herein make return to the clerk of the said court and precept. And hereof you are not to fail at your peril.

And this shall be your sufficient warrant, Given under my hand and seal at Boston the eighth day of June in the fourth year of the reign of our sovereign lord and lady, William and Mary, now King and Queen over England &c. Annoque Domini 1692.

William Sloughton.

An Accused Witch Explains Her Confession

Goodwife Tyler did say that when she was first apprehended she had no fears upon her, and did think that nothing could have made her confess against herself. But since, she has found to her great grief that she had wronged the truth and falsely accused herself.

She said that when she was brought to Salem, her brother Bridges rode with her; and that all along the way from Andover to Salem, her brother kept telling her that she must needs be a witch, since the afflicted accused her and at her touch were raised out of their fits, and urging her to confess herself a witch.

She as constantly told him that she was no witch, that she knew nothing of witchcraft, and begged of him not to urge her to confess.

However, when she came to Salem, she was carried to a room, where her brother on one side and Mr. John Emerson (in the other side did tell her that she was certainly a witch, and that she saw the devil before her eyes at that time I and accordingly the said Emerson would attempt with his hand to beat him away from her eyes). And they so urged her to confess that she wished herself in any dungeon, rather than be so treated.

(Continued on next page)

us. How shall I get rid of this evil one? I desire God to break my rocky heart that I may get the victory this time."

After Mrs. Foster and Mrs. Lacy had been questioned and removed, young Mary Lacy was brought in, and immediately Mary Warren had a violent fit which lasted until Mary Lacy touched her. Then she berated her parent: "Where is my mother that made me a witch, and I knew it not." To accuse another was the best way of showing co-operation with the court and earning consideration.

Judge Hathorne still hankered after names:

Q. Your mother and your grandmother say there was a minister there. How many men did you see there?

A. I saw no one but Richard Carrier.

Q. Did you see none else?

A. There was a minister there, and I think he is now in prison.

Q. Were there not two ministers there?

A. Cannot tell.

Q. Was there not one Mr. Burroughs there?

A. Yes.

In Andover, after Justice Dudley Bradstreet had issued forty warrants, he refused to sign any more. Because of his lack of co-operation in hunting down enemies of chapel and state, which suggested sympathy for the witches and therefore made him a witch, he was indicted for committing nine murders. He fled with his wife. His brother John, though likewise the son of a former governor, was also indicted; his offense—inciting a dog to afflict. "The said dog was tried and hung for a witch."

After Andover, the girls moved into the Boston area.

Mrs. Nathaniel Carey of Charleslown visited Salem Village to clear herself of incriminating rumors. Mr. Carey reported:

Being brought before the justices, her chief accusers were two girls. My wife declared to the justices that she never had any knowledge of them before that day. She was forced to stand with her arms stretched out. I requested that I might

hold one of her hands, but it was denied me. Then she desired me to wipe the tears from her eyes and the sweat from her face, which I did. Then she desired she might lean herself on me, saying she should faint. Justice Hathorne replied she had strength enough to torment these persons, and she should have strength enough to stand. I speaking something against their cruel proceedings, they commanded me to be silent or else I should be turned out of the room. (Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*)

Captain John Alden of Boston was named. Then, of course, he did not have the romantic glamour which Longfellow's poem gave him. But he was known and respected as a sea captain and a fighter in the Indian wars, so much in esteem that Lieutenant Governor Stoughton himself signed the warrant. The girls went through their routines, and one of them pointed out a Captain Hill, but she was prompted by a bystander and then correctly identified Alden. "There stands Alden! A bold fellow with his hat on before the judges. He sells powder and shot to the Indians and French, and lies with Indian squaws and has Indian papooses."

Brought back into the courtroom, he was ordered to stand on a chair and face the girls: they all fell flat on their faces. Alden's hand was placed on them: at once they recovered. At this juncture, he asked the judges a question which, if answered, would have ended all the trials: "What's the reason *you* don't fall when I look at you? Can you give me one?" Alden's sword was taken away, and he was imprisoned in Boston jail. After fifteen weeks, he escaped.

In spite of the growing distrust of the girls everywhere else, in October Gloucester sent for them; but there they discovered only four witches. The panic caused by the French and Indian attacks in July was subsiding. Summoned again in November, the girls met a rather chilly reception, and no one was arrested. En route, at Ipswich, they went into their usual fits at an old woman, but the people of Ipswich ignored them.

During the hysteria, almost 150 people were arrested; a search of all the court

(Continued from previous page)

but the Lord to plead my cause for me; not being guilty in the least measure of the crime of witchcraft, nor any other sin that deserves death from man; and your poor and humble declarant shall forever pray, as she is bound in duty, for your honors' happiness in this life

and eternal felicity in the world to come. So prays your honors' declarant.

Margaret Jacobs.

—Governor Thomas Hutchinson, *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bny* (1761).

Confession of Error by the Jurors at the Salem Witch Trials Four Years Later
(January 11, 1696)

We whose names me under written, being in the year 1692 called to serve as jurors, in Court at Salem, on trial of many who were by some suspected guilty of doing acts of witchcraft upon the bodies of sundry persons:

We confess that we ourselves were not capable, to understand, nor able to withstand, the mysterious delusions of the Powers of Darkness and Prince, of the Air; but were, for want of knowledge in ourselves and better information from others, prevailed with to take up such evidence against the accused, as on further consideration and better information we justly fear was insufficient for the touching the lives of any (Deut. xvii.6).

Whereby we fear we have been instrumental with others, though ignorantly and unwillingly, to bring upon ourselves and this people of the Lord the guilt of innocent blood—which sin the Lord saith in Scripture, he would not pardon (II Kings xxiv.4), that is, we suppose in regard of his temporal judgments.

We do therefore hereby signify to all in general, and to the surviving sufferers in especial, our deep sense of, and sorrow for our errors, in acting on such evidence to the condemnation of any person. And we do hereby declare that we justly fear that we were sadly deluded and mistaken, for which we are much disquieted and distressed in our minds; and

do humbly beg forgiveness, first of God for Christ's sake for this error, and pray that God would not impute the guilt of it to ourselves nor others. And we also pray that we may be considered candidly and aright by the living sufferers as being then under the power of a strong and general delusion, utterly unacquainted with, and not experienced in matters of that nature.

We do heartily ask forgiveness of you all whom we have justly offended, and do declare according to our present minds we would none of us do such things again on such grounds for the whole world: praying you to accept of this in way of satisfaction for our offense: and that you would bless the inheritance of the Lord, that he may be entreated for the land. [Signed)

Thomas Fisk. *Foreman*
William Fisk John
Batcheler Thomas Fisk.
Junior John Dane Joseph
Evclith Thomas Perly,
Senior John Pebody
Thomas Perkins Samuel
Sayer Andrew Elliott
Henry Herrick, Senior

—Quoted in Robert Calef. *More Wonders of the In'isihlc. World* (1700).

EXPLANATORY NOTE
By Helen Bitner Wilcox

This part of our family history has some very interesting facets, so I thought I should include a few here. The fact that Bridget was having her house repaired suggests to me that she didn't know of the existence of the "poppets" in her basement walls. The testimonies of John Blye Senior, about 57, and William Bly, about 15, on 2 June 1692 states that Bridget employed them to take down a cellar wall of "The owld house she formerly Lived in." I don't think she would have had this work done if they had been placed there by her.

At her first examination, 19 April 1692, John Hawthorn and Jonath: Corwin Esqu'rs questioned her. (Hawthorn is said to be an ancestor of Nathaniel Hawthorne.) Some one said, "They say you bewicht your first husband to death." To this she answered, "If it please your worship I know nothing of it." Later testimonies indicate that she may have had disputes with her neighbors, among whom were the Shattocks. They claimed that in the year 1680 (12 years previously) they had a dispute with her over money. In this testimony they said, "Bridged Oliver formerly wife to old Goodman Oliver: now wife to Edward Bishop.....,"etc. According to our records, Thomas Oliver was born about 1601 and died in June of 1679. He is the father of her daughter Christian Oliver Mason, some of whose descendants are likely among those seeking exoneration at this present time. In 1957 there was a similar move. Apparently no one spoke up for Bridget at that time, although in a book about the trials from which I have some extracts, it says that the "Commonwealth of Massachusetts finally reversed the attainders of all those not covered by the earlier act" of 17 October 1711, which wasn't signed by the governor, but to which application of friends, relatives and the accused could be made.

Bridget's second husband, Edward, was apparently living at the time of his wife's ordeal. They were the same age, having both been born in about 1640. It appears that neither he nor her daughter testified on her behalf. Her daughter, Christian, died the next year, sometime in 1693. We have only a daughter listed for her, who married John Beckett, through whom both our Felt lines, Nathaniel's and Eliza Ann's reach back to Bridget.

The warrant to George Corwin "Gent'm high Sherriff of the County of Essex from Wm Stoughton, and his carrying it out on 10 June 1692 is as follows: According to the Within Written precept I have take the body of the within named Brigett Bishop of their Majes'ts Goale in Salem and Safely Conveighd her to the place proved for her Execution and Caused the s'd Brigett to be hanged by the nexk untill She was dead and buried in the place all which was according to the time within Required and So I make Returne by me. (Signed) George Corwin Sheriff

Descendants of Salem 'witches' are seeking exoneration

Massachusetts urged to clear names of victims

SALEM, Mass.—It was a time when trembling witnesses and "spectral evidence" could lead to the gallows.

But when Susannah Martin stood accused of "Sundry acts of Witchcraft" during the Salem witch trials of 1692, she defiantly laughed at her accusers, one of whom fell into a fit during the trial.

"Well I may (laugh) at such folly," Martin told her inquisitors, according to court records. "I have no hand in witchcraft."

Ten days later, Martin was hanged on Gallows Hill.

Now, more than 300 years after her execution, Martin's descendants are pressuring state lawmakers to exonerate her and four other women caught up in the spiral of fear, recrimination and blood that seized this town along the rocky New England coast

"She was a woman who spoke her mind. She seemed to be quite a hardy person," said Craig Martin, 54, a civil engineer who traces his ancestry back to Susannah Martin. "Anyone who has been wrongly accused of anything... I can have a lot of emotion for that"

Twenty men and women were hanged or crushed to death during the witch fever, fueled by the isolation of colonial Massachusetts, a deep belief in the supernatural and political feuds.

Almost as quickly as they began, the executions stopped, just four months after the first hanging.

But Massachusetts would spend the next three centuries trying to wrest a moral out of the tale.

In 1957, the Legislature approved a resolution exonerating some of the accused witches, including "one Ann Pudeator and certain other persons."

Descendants of some of those "certain other persons" want the names of Bridget Bishop, Alice Parker, Margaret Scott, Wilmot Redd and Susannah Martin added to the resolution.

"After 309 years, they deserve the ink," said Paula Keene, a Salem public school teacher and amateur historian. "If it were me, I'd want my name written into the law."

The witch hysteria began when four young girls, including the daughter of the town's minister, the Rev. Samuel Parris, began dabbling in fortune-telling games with Tituba, a female slave of Parris.

When the girls started showing mysterious physical symptoms, the town doctor concluded they were "bewitched." Then the girls began naming people they suspected of inflicting their symptoms.

Those who were named initially — including Tituba — lived on the edges of society. In time, however, the accusations spread to more prominent citizens, including Salem Village's former minister, George Burroughs, who was named by the girls as the master of all Massachusetts witches and leader of the Salem Coven.

By the end of May 1692, 200 people were jailed under charges of witchcraft.

The first to be tried was Bridget Bishop, who had successfully fended off witchcraft

accusations a dozen years earlier. When workmen repairing her home discovered "poppets" — dolls stuck with pins or missing heads — in the walls, Bishop's fate was sealed, and she was hanged in June 1692.

After Bishop, the pace of executions quickened. In July, five women, including Susannah Martin, were hanged. They were followed in August by five more.

A key to the trials was so-called spectral evidence, reports of ghostly presences inflicting torment under the command of the suspected witches.

As the executions mounted, spectral evidence came under increasing criticism Cotton Mather, minister of Boston's Old North Church and initially a believer in witchcraft, began to speak out against it

In September, the largest and last group of accused witches was hanged, including Ann Pudeator, Alice Parker, Margaret Scott and Wilmot Redd.

The thirst for prosecutions then waned and the use of spectral evidence was eventually rejected. The trials ended in May 1693, when Gov. William Phips pardoned all remaining witch suspects.

More likely, the trials were driven as much by political feuds as fear.

"It's absolutely obvious that those who were being hanged were the enemies of the grown-ups or the girls who were doing the naming," said Frances Hill, author of "A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials."

"The only people in all of this who were innocent were the people who were hanged," she said.