

# Primary Sources: The Salem Witch Trials

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<http://www.17thc.us/primarysources/>

Before being able to figure out **why** things happened as they did in Salem in 1692, it is important to learn **what** actually happened. The legal records of the cases against people charged with witchcraft contain the best evidence of what happened, described & sworn as the truth by the people who were there.

Select a single case from the **List of Accused People** at the URL above. Look through the documents linked to that person's case, then browse and search through the rest of the Guide to locate primary sources available about this person's case. Using the questions below as a guide, **1) write your own summary of what happened to this person.** Depending on the case you are working with – what happened to the person and what documents survive – you may or may not be able to answer each question. **2) Put the dates you find on a timeline**, if applicable & available, for the A) complaint & arrest, B) examination(s), C) imprisonment & release, D) evidence presented, E) grand jury inquest, F) jury trial & verdict, G) execution or release, and H) restitution. Keep track of which documents contain what information & cite them in your work.

## Personal Information

As you go through various documents, watch for the following information. Keep track of which documents contain this information.

1. What was this person's name?
2. How many different ways – including spelling variations – have you found that this person was called?
3. Was this person married? If so, what was his/her spouse's name?
4. How old was this person in 1692?
5. Where did this person live?
6. If this person was a man, what was his profession? If this person was a married woman, what was her husband's profession?
7. Was anyone else in this person's family also accused?

## A. Complaint and Arrest

- Complaint
- Arrest Warrant

1. Who complained against this person?
2. How is the accused person identified?
3. What were the grounds for the complaint? What had the accused supposedly done?
4. Was a bond/recognizance taken by the authorities to pursue the charges? If so, how much was it?
5. Who signed the warrant? When?
6. Who served the warrant? Was the person apprehended or not?
7. When and where was the person to be brought in?

## B. Examination(s)

- Examination
- Published accounts in Mather, Calef, Lawson

1. How many different times or dates does it appear this person was interrogated? When? Where?
2. Who conducted the examination?
3. Did this person confess or maintain their innocence?
4. Does this account of the examination indicate who else was present? If so, who else was present?
5. Did anything remarkable happen during the examination?

## C. Imprisonment and Release

- Mittimus
- Jailer's Bill
- Blacksmith's Bill
- Recognizance / Bond for Release
- Restitution Request

1. Where was this person held in jail?
2. How long was this person in jail?
3. What was the jailer's name?
4. How much did the imprisonment cost?
5. Were any shackles or handcuffs made for this person?
6. Was this person ever released on bail?
7. Did this person break out of jail?

#### D. Evidence Presented

- Testimony
- Deposition
- Statement
- Physical Examination

1. The so-called “afflicted girls” included Elizabeth (“Betty”) Parris Jr., Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam Jr., Mercy Lewis, Elizabeth Hubbard, Mary Walcott, Mary Warren and Susannah Sheldon. Which, if any, of these claimed affliction by this person? When did they allege they were afflicted by this person?
2. Who else claimed to be afflicted or to have evidence against this person? When did the alleged events occur?
3. “Spectral evidence” is testimony concerning hard done by the “spectre” or an image of a person which is only visible to those afflicted. Was any of this evidence spectral?
4. Were any “poppits” or physical images of the afflicted people found in the home or possession of the accused?
5. Were any suspicious books or potions found?
6. Was this person’s body physically examined for a witch’s teat, or the mark of a familiar? If so, were any found?

#### E. Grand Jury Inquest

- Sworn Oaths before the Jury of Inquest added to the bottom of evidence
- Summons for Witnesses
- Indictment

1. Can you tell if and when this person’s case was brought before a grand jury?
2. There were two possible ways to charge someone with the crime of witchcraft: *maleficium* (afflicting a person) and *conventanting* (making a pact with the Devil). What was this person formally charged with, according to the indictments? When and where did the crime(s) allegedly occur?
3. What witnesses were supposed to give evidence to the grand jury?
4. Grand juries could accept or reject the bills of indictment presented to them, marking them either “billa vera” (‘true bill’) or “ignoramus” (‘we do not know’). What did the grand jury decide about the indictments against this person?

#### F. Jury Trial and Verdict

- Jurat in Curia added at the bottom of evidence
- Entry in a court record book
- Requests for reversal of attainder or compensation
- Published accounts by Cotton Mather, Increase Mather, Calef, etc.

1. Did this person go to trial?
2. When and where was the trial?
3. What was the verdict?
4. If the person was found not guilty, when were they released?
5. Did anything strange or unusual happen at this person’s trial?

#### G. Execution or Release

- Warrant for Execution
- Requests for compensation or reversal of attainder
- Entry in a court record book
- Account in Cotton Mather, Calef, or Sewall’s diary

1. Who signed the warrant for execution or signed a reprieve?
2. When was this person executed or reprieved?
3. If executed, who carried out the execution?
4. If reprieved, why was the person granted a reprieve?

#### H. Restitution

- Requests for reversal of attainder
- Requests for restitution

1. Even if someone was pardoned and not executed, they were still considered guilty in the eyes of the law, unless the attainder on their name was reversed by the Court. Did anyone apply for a reversal of attainder for this person? If so, who and when?
2. Was it granted?
3. The costs incurred by the families of those imprisoned included meals, transportation and jailers’ fees. Did anyone apply for restitution for this person? If so, who and when?
4. How much, if any, was granted?