

## Chapter Seven: *The truth, the whole truth...*

Parris' previous problems in the Village had now disappeared and the meeting house had gone from being scarcely attended to overflowing with people. Parris had achieved his objective of getting his opponents to cease their attempts to force him out of his position. Instead of being a source of conflict within the Village community, Parris was now the focus of attention for a different reason. Parris was now a necessary part of the Village. He was needed to lead the people in both their understanding of what was happening in their community and in the spiritual battle ahead. We shall now turn to an examination of Parris' continuing role as the afflictions within his household turned into a full scale witchcraft outbreak. Through the vehicle of his sermons he kept the community's attention firmly focused on the unfolding events. Parris was able to further distract the villagers away from both their battle with him as well as from the older dispute between his allies, the Putnams and their opponents, the Porters. Parris also played the role of a witness, where he readily testified against the accused. Part of the purpose here will be to look at those he testified against and investigate the possible reasons Parris had for taking a part against them. It also seeks to see how his sermons influenced the situation and the extent to which they manifest his motives.

For the period between of the outbreak of the afflictions in January 1692 until the close of the trials in late October, only six of Parris' sermons have survived. Of those sermons, only three survive in their entirety. What does remain, though, informs us how Parris used the pulpit to keep attention firmly focussed on the battle at hand. Through this focus he was able to divert his opponents from their previous attempts to oust him. Even before the girls of Parris' household began to display their 'unseemly' behaviour,

Parris' sermons had begun to take on an ominously militant theme. The sermon he delivered just prior to the girls' afflictions is telling in its prophecy of the future and served the purpose of helping to prepare the villagers for what was to come. On 3 January 1692, just under three weeks before the diagnosis that the girls were suffering under 'an evil hand', Parris asserted that "the Church of God whilst militant is not without sin: well now by sore afflictions, & cross providences, Christ will bring her sins to Remembrance and humble her deeply at the Remembrance"<sup>1</sup>. As we have seen in chapter five, Parris was predicting that it would be found that the Church contained sinners and witches. Through this statement it can be seen that Parris was foreseeing the coming battle between the church and the witches, between himself and his opponents. In the course of events those who opposed Parris would be humbled. Of course, this was in line with much of contemporary preaching. Cotton Mather had already related the dire straits of New England, whether it be the Amerindians, the changing constitutional situation or witches in an especial assault on God's people by the Devil.

In the sermon he delivered on 14 February, just prior to the first accusations, Parris seemed to have been speaking to his congregation from a more personal position, "It is a woful piece of our corruption in an evil time, when the wicked prosper, & the godly party meet with vexations"<sup>2</sup>. It can be assumed that he was talking about how his opponents were materially better off than he and his supporters, and about how his household was sorely afflicted by evil. While Parris was struggling with his opponents on the Village committee, he received neither his salary nor firewood, while his opponents appeared to be prospering. Amongst Parris' supporters the

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons*, 3 January 1692, p.183.

<sup>2</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.186.

average tax paid by the householders was approximately eleven shillings while those of his opponents paid over fifteen shillings<sup>3</sup>. Parris also felt that his household was under an evil cloud, as both his daughter and niece were suffering from unnatural afflictions.

Parris assured his congregation that “stronger he is that is with us & for us, then he is against us”<sup>4</sup>. Given the division within the Village leading up to the outbreak, this sermon can be seen to take on a threatening note. Either the villagers were with him or they were against him. It can be perceived here with this statement that Parris was trying to influence his congregation concerning the division within the Village; there was only his side or there was his opposition. He was informing all the villagers that in the coming ordeal there will be no middle ground. He advised the villagers that, “The Church may meet with storms, but it shall never sink”<sup>5</sup>. informing them with this that he and his faithful supporters might be under siege but they would persevere and be victorious. This sermon seems to be fulfilling another function of rallying his supporters, “Now the counsels & purpose of God cannot faile”<sup>6</sup> and all their graces will be strengthened “so that they shall not fall totally and finally”<sup>7</sup>.

At the same time he also spoke about how God would “make thine enemies thy footstool”<sup>8</sup>. In predicting that God would take retribution upon those enemies, he told his parishioners that they shouldn’t “be offended at the present low condition of the Church in the midst of its enemies. Oh shortly

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<sup>3</sup> P. Boyer and S. Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, Cambridge Mass., 1974, p.82.

<sup>4</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.187.

<sup>5</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.193.

<sup>6</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.187.

<sup>7</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.188.

<sup>8</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.185.

the case will be far otherwise”<sup>9</sup>. With this prophetic phrase we can safely say that Parris was both forewarning his enemies and preparing his congregation for the events that were to shortly come to pass. In less than two weeks the first accusations would be made and the villagers needed to be prepared for the worst. It also can be assumed that with this he was preparing his people to pull together to face the coming trials ahead. He also prepared the villagers’ minds that he was the one to intercede on their behalf with the coming troubles, “But loe here is an Intercessor”<sup>10</sup>. Parris also declared in this sermon that as a minister it was his job to “endeavour a true separation between the precious & the vile, & to labour... to gather a pure Church...of holy subjects... to encourage & comfort: others we are to refuse and reject”<sup>11</sup>. It can be assumed here that Parris was informing the villagers that he would be the one to protect and guide the Godly, while at the same time make the decision about who were the Godly, and to deal with those that were not.

Parris’ sermon of 27 March was one of the most significant of those he delivered during the outbreak. This sermon was given just after the shocking accusations and examinations of the church members Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse. This sermon sought to offer an explanation to why these previously devout members, especially Rebecca Nurse, had been accused. Parris needed to offer this explanation to his parishioners in order to quiet the voice of reason and doubt emerging at the accusation of Corey and, most especially, Nurse. The community found it hard to accept that a person like Nurse, with a previously outstanding reputation could turn out to be a witch. Many found it so hard to believe in Nurse’s witchcraft that they put forward

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<sup>9</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.191.

<sup>10</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.188.

<sup>11</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.190.

petitions to the judges to attest to her innocence<sup>12</sup>. In fact, when Nurse was first put on trial the jury sought to acquit her. It was only after the direction of Judge Stoughton that they reconsidered their decision and brought back a guilty verdict<sup>13</sup>.

Martha Corey was extremely sceptical of both the afflicted girls and the weight given to their evidence. Corey, herself was an early sceptic of the genuineness of the afflicted girls and even went so far as to prevent her husband from attending the examinations of the first three accused by unsaddling his horse<sup>14</sup>. Parris used in his explanation of the witchcraft of Nurse and Corey the telling verse from John 6:70; he said, “have I not chosen you twelve, & one of you is a Devil”<sup>15</sup>. Here Parris was telling the villagers that Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse were the Judases or betrayers amongst them. He highlighted this theme throughout this sermon repeating it several times and went on to state, “that there is an Hypocrite among them, a Devil among them”, that there were “Devils as well as Saints in Christs Church”<sup>16</sup>. Not only was this sermon serving the function of offering an explanation for the accusations against Corey and Nurse, it also had the purpose of preparing the villagers for further accusations.

In order for the prosecution of Nurse and Corey to be successful Parris needed to ensure that seeds of doubt regarding their previous piety were planted. Although Church membership in the Village was made up predominantly of Parris’ supporters, some of his opponents continued to attend services. Parris conveniently made the statement that there were

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<sup>12</sup> *SWP*, Vol II, pp.592-594.

<sup>13</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.7.

<sup>14</sup> C. Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem*, New York, 1969, p.42.

<sup>15</sup> *Sermons*, 27 March 1692, p.194.

<sup>16</sup> *Sermons*, 27 March 1692, p.195.

‘devils’ amongst the congregation and that “Hypocrites are the very worst of men.” He went further to say that “Hypocrites are the sons & heirs of the Devil.”<sup>17</sup> In doing so Parris was putting forward the argument that even though devout people were being accused this was not really the case. By their attendance at Church while reviling him personally, they had made themselves hypocrites and therefore the worst of sinners. Not only was he influencing the opinion of the villagers through his sermons, Parris would have been able to affect the views of the jurors. Some of the jurors and even some of the judges attended the meetinghouse during the outbreak and would have been influenced to see the accused church members in this light. Although many of them including judges Hathorne and Corwin were well educated, they were not theologians. Only Parris was in a position to be a theologian as Judge Stoughton was not a practising theologian even though he had ministerial training. Parris would most likely have been accepted as the authority in this matter of evil and the behaviour of the pretend saints.

In this sermon, Parris repeatedly used the term devil *ad nauseum*, clearly wishing to reinforce the fact that devils are real and not just a theological construct. Parris was very careful to make clear exactly what he meant by the term devil. He used it to describe “vile & wicked persons” and not just Satan<sup>18</sup>. He carefully listed the qualities that would categorise a person as a devil. Certain sins should be watched for. According to Parris, the people should watch that they did not become, “A liar or plunderer, A slanderer or accuser of the godly, A tempter to sin, An opposer of godliness as Elymas [a sorcerer], Envious persons as Witches, A Drunkard, Last. A proud person.”<sup>19</sup> Through this sermon he was speaking directly to his

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<sup>17</sup> *Sermons*, 27 March 1692, p.196.

<sup>18</sup> *Sermons*, 27 March 1692, p.195.

<sup>19</sup> *Sermons*, 27 March 1692, p.198.

parishioners about their behaviour and that they should be on their guard. Parris can be seen here as guiding his congregation, and the afflicted. He was trying to impress on them the sort of persons whom it could readily be assumed were devils and witches. He highlighted his point by saying that “none then build their hopes of Salvation [merely] upon this, that they are Church-members”<sup>20</sup>. He pointed out that though they outwardly appeared pious, they should have a care not to transgress against god’s laws and himself. Just as Elymas the sorcerer had attempted to turn the people away from the faith, so there were those amongst them that were trying to turn the congregation away from the God’s church and from his minister<sup>21</sup>.

It is most unfortunate that the next three sermons that Parris delivered do not remain intact. For the sermon he gave on 8 May the only part that survives is a note of the biblical passage that he employed. The quote he used though can, in itself, be quite telling. “Ye cannot drink the Cup of the Lord, & the cup of Devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lords table, & of the Table of Devils.”<sup>22</sup> Parris was reinforcing the previous theme of the 14 February sermon that there was no middle ground, they were either with him or against him. Parris was continuing with the theme from the 27 March sermon on militancy and the denunciation of those who would attend Church but still be hypocrites and ‘devils’. Again Parris was using a sermon to guide public opinion against those villagers who spoke against him, yet who now flocked to his services in the wake of the witchcraft episode.

The text of the remaining two sermons from this period are lost. All that survives of the 19 June and 31 July sermons is the biblical references that

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<sup>20</sup> *Sermons*, 27 March 1692, p.197.

<sup>21</sup> *Acts* 13:8;10.

<sup>22</sup> *Sermons*, 8 May 1692, p.199.

Parris built them around. Gragg suggests the reason that these sermons do not survive is that Parris was too busy during this time to rewrite them into his permanent collection<sup>23</sup>. For the sermon delivered by Parris on 31 July, the biblical passage that he noted down is from John 6:48, “I am that bread of life”. In John 6:47-51, Jesus was saying it was only through him that his followers could attain salvation. The question here is, was Parris setting himself up as the saviour of his community? It is not inconceivable that this explanation is correct as Parris had drawn comparisons between himself and Christ in the past. When Parris was beginning to experience dissent in the Village, and difficulties with his salary, Parris likened himself to Christ then and referred to Judas’ betrayal of him for money<sup>24</sup>. If this explanation is correct, Parris can be seen to have been reinforcing perceptions of his own authority and indispensability. While this can not be proved, it remains a plausible explanation.

Fortunately Parris’ next sermon has survived in its entirety as it was delivered at a very critical time for the events then unfolding. By September 1692, eleven people had been hanged as witches and many more were languishing in prison. This sermon came just two days after the condemnation on 9 September of Martha Corey, who, as Parris noted at the beginning of his September sermon, was in “full communion with our Church”<sup>25</sup>. On 11 September Parris’ was again using the pulpit to inform and guide the villagers about the events underway. In this sermon Parris again returned to a militant theme. He spoke eloquently on the subject of war. He compared the spiritual war between the Lamb and Satan with the

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<sup>23</sup> L. Gragg, *A Quest For Security: The Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720*, New York, 1990, p.134.

<sup>24</sup> *Sermons*, 12 January 1690, p.73.

<sup>25</sup> *Sermons*, 11 September 1692, p.199.

war between the witches and the Village's godly community. Although this sermon was militant in nature, Parris reassured his people that though the war might be long, they were assured of eventual victory because Christ is "Lord of Lords"<sup>26</sup>.

At this particular time in the course of the witch trials, we can see that the tide had turned away from the previous attitude by the accused of maintaining their innocence. People now understood that a confession was a way to ensure escape from the gallows. Now the floodgates opened and lurid confessions elaborated upon Tituba's early statement that there were nine witches. The confessors then developed this into a vast conspiracy numbering in the hundreds. One confession, from William Barker of Andover, declared that the witches had particularly chosen the Village as a target of destruction because of its divisiveness and conflict with their minister<sup>27</sup>. Parris used this sermon to again guide the congregation in their understanding of why Satan had chosen their Village as his battleground, "what Multitudes of Witches & Wizards has the Devil instigated with utmost violence to attempt the overthrow of Religion?"<sup>28</sup> To aid this understanding of why there were so many witches, he informed them that it was because the Devil is the enemy of religion and therefore of himself as the representative of their religion. He went on to say that the finding of witches in their community should serve as a rebuke to those whose credulity would not stretch to believe in their reality. Parris informed them that it was not "so strange a thing [that] there should be such [witches]: no nor that some Church Members should be such"<sup>29</sup>. Parris told the villagers that it was not only the

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<sup>26</sup> *Sermons*, 11 September 1692, p.200.

<sup>27</sup> *SWP*, Vol I, p.67.

<sup>28</sup> *Sermons*, 11 September 1692, p.201.

<sup>29</sup> *Sermons*, 11 September 1692, p.202.

obvious sinners that were devils and witches but also those who would war with Christ by being rebellious and disobedient to authority. Disobedience to “Christ’s Ordinances is Rebellion against Christ, & making war with him.” So was “warring [against] Magistrates, opposing them in their duties.” These were the actions of witches who “fight against the Gosple”. Here Parris appeared to be speaking against those who had been rebelling against legitimate authority and his in particular. He spoke out against those villagers who refused to accept either the constable’s or magistrate’s orders to pay him.

Parris preached that “When men [do] not receive the Gosple, & do what they can to hinder the course of the Gosple, this is to make war with the Lamb. When men will not receive the Gosple themselves, then they fight [against] the Lamb.” Parris also proclaimed that to “Not accept of terms of Peace, is to proclaim war”<sup>30</sup>. With these last points, it was very clear of whom he was speaking. Only three weeks prior to this Parris had found himself in extreme difficulty with a group of dissenting brethren, Samuel Nurse, John Tarbell and Peter Cloyse, who were relatives of the accused witches. For “several Sacrament days past our brother Peter Cloyes, and Sam Nurse and his wife, and John Tarbell and his wife have absented from Communion with us at the Lord’s Table, yea have very rarely (except our brother Sam Nurse) been with us in common public worship”<sup>31</sup>. On 14 August 1692 Parris requested a delegation of Church members to seek out Cloyes, Nurse and Tarbell, “to know the reason of their absence” but received no satisfaction from them<sup>32</sup>. Parris would also have been speaking to those others whose church attendance had been declining in the pre-trial period.

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<sup>30</sup> *Sermons*, 11 September 1692, p.205.

<sup>31</sup> *Church Records*, 14 August 1692, p.279.

<sup>32</sup> *Church Records*, 14 August 1692, p.279.

Not only was he speaking directly to those who dissented against him, but again he was guiding the opinions of the villagers against his opponents.

Parris wound up this sermon by offering words of comfort to his congregation. “For encouragement hereto Devils & instruments shall not war against us always” and that they should “Fear none of those things which thou will suffer: behold, the Devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; & ye shall have Tribulation...[to] be thou Faithfull unto Death, & I will give thee a Crown of Life”<sup>33</sup>. It can be seen here that Parris was telling his people that the witchcraft crisis would have an end. The last part of this passage is also open to a further interpretation. By saying that some of them might be tried and thrown into prison Parris can be seen to have acknowledged that some of those accused were actually innocent of the crime of witchcraft.

The last sermon that Parris gave before the end of the witchcraft episode took on a distinctly different air. Rather than the militant theme that he had formerly adopted, he then took on a conciliatory attitude. Significantly this sermon was delivered on 23 October 1692, only three days before the Court of Oyer and Terminer, created to try the accused witches, was dissolved by Governor Phips. This sermon dealt with the gentler theme of love and reconciliation. Parris looked to the Gospel of Luke when he said “Oh be Reconciled, to me, & give me a kiss of Reconciliation”<sup>34</sup>. Parris, again, acted the prophet. Gragg has labelled Parris as opportunistic because he “clearly did not want to be an isolated advocate of more trials” when he felt the tide of public opinion turning against the proceedings<sup>35</sup>. Through

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<sup>33</sup> *Sermons*, 11 September 1692, p.206.

<sup>34</sup> *Luke* 15, 20; *Sermons*, 23 October 1692, p.209.

<sup>35</sup> Gragg, *Quest For Security*, p.146.

statements such as “Kisses are very sweet among true friends after some jars and differences”, Parris was attempting to guide the villagers towards peace and reconciliation, even towards those who dissented against him. Despite this stance, Parris was still not willing to give ground on where the blame for the witchcraft episode lay, “especially since they know the fault is wholly on their side”<sup>36</sup>. With this, Parris maintained his position that the witchcraft outbreak had occurred because his opponents had challenged his position and authority in the Village.

We have seen how Parris used the vehicle of his sermons to guide and influence his audiences’ understanding of the unfolding events. Next we shall turn to an examination of Parris’ role as witness and how he guided the trials through his own accusations. Parris offered testimony against ten of those accused of witchcraft. Although Parris would have witnessed the afflictions at many of the examinations of the accused, he did not act as an official witness in all of these cases. We shall, though, investigate those where he did testify and look at some of the possible motivations Parris could have had in taking a part against them. The testimony itself does not offer up much information and follows, what appears to be, a formula. An example of this formula only stated that Parris, “testifieth & saith that divers of the afflicted by Witchcraft were much tortured at the examination” of the accused<sup>37</sup>. In the case of Sarah Good, the only information that remains to us is that Parris was sworn in as a witness. One interesting piece of information that is apparent in those testimonies is that Parris did not actually act as a witness on his own. His signature usually appeared only with those that were his most ardent supporters, usually Thomas Putnam and Nathaniel Ingersoll.

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<sup>36</sup> *Sermons*, 23 October 1692, p.211.

<sup>37</sup> *SWP*, Vol. II, pp.598, 675, 686, 756.

There was only one exception to this and this was in the case of the testimony he offered against his slave, Tituba. Although there were many more accused from the Village, the other accusations would have stemmed from the Putnam factions' own agenda. This is evidenced by Parris' lack of participation in more of the trials as a witness.

We have seen how Parris benefited from the actual outbreak of afflictions to ensure his survival in the Village, but it is less clear about the choice of those who became targets of witchcraft accusations. As a slave Tituba would have been an easy choice for Parris to target as a accused witch. Firstly, he could be sure of his control over her testimony by using his position as her master. Robert Calef reported that Tituba's confession actually came as a direct result of being beaten and otherwise abused by her master<sup>38</sup>. It is plausible to conclude that Tituba's testimony was, if not completely inspired by Parris, at least at the suggestion of another party. Parris had the most interest in seeing Tituba convicted as a witch. By having the first afflicted and using Tituba as the accused witch, Parris could completely ensure his direct control over the proceedings.

The choices of Good and Osbourne are less clear. Sarah Good's selection might have been an expedient to rid the community of an unwanted and contentious member who relied on the charity of the villagers. Sarah Osbourne, on the other hand, was a different matter. Osbourne had some status as the widow of Robert Prince, a Village landowner, but it was her later marriage to Alexander Osbourne that brought the hint of scandal to her name. It is significant that Osbourne's second husband was a staunch

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<sup>38</sup> G.L. Burr (ed.), *Narrative of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706*, New York, 1914, p.343.

opponent of Parris<sup>39</sup>. With Alexander Osbourne's stand against Parris, and Sarah's two sons from her first marriage firmly in Parris' camp, it is easy to see who Parris would favour. By getting 'rid' of Sarah, Parris could also rid himself of an opponent. With his wife in jail accused of witchcraft, Alexander Osbourne's standing in the community would have been shaken. It would also have cleared the way for the two Prince boys to take possession of their inheritance which was currently in possession of the Osbournes.

After the initial accusation and examinations of the first three accused, Tituba, Good and Osbourne, there was no cessation of torments for the afflicted. Tituba's confession, in which she stated that there were at least nine witches in the area, contributed to this continuation and opened the way for others to be accused. These were not long in coming and by the middle of March, Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse were accused. The accusation of these two of such a crime was a shock to this small community as these two women were previously held up to be pious and devout members of the church, members of God's elect. Martha Corey, like Osbourne, also had some scandal attached to her name, having previously had an illegitimate child<sup>40</sup>. Boyer and Nissenbaum argue that it was to suit the Putnam's interests that Corey was accused in their ongoing dispute with the Porter faction. They argue that by accusing Corey it was but the next step up the social ladder which then led to the accusation of Rebecca Nurse<sup>41</sup>.

There is another possible explanation for the accusation of Corey though. While it may have suited the Putnams' purpose for Corey, it was also to Parris' benefit to silence this woman. Martha Corey was extremely

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<sup>39</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.194.

<sup>40</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.146.

<sup>41</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, pp.146-7.

sceptical of both the afflicted girls and the weighting given to their evidence. During her own examination, she said that, “they were poor distracted children and no heed to be given to what they said”<sup>42</sup>. It was this voice of reason that was the greatest threat to Parris. If this voice had prevailed at this early stage of proceedings and the girls credibility was questioned, it would have brought the episode to an end. It was in both Parris’ and the Putnam’s interests to see such a sceptic removed from the scene. In the same way that Parris preached against Corey, implying she was Judas, he may have testified against her to neutralise the threat she posed to his agenda.

Like Corey, Martha Carrier and Susannah Martin were sceptical of the spectral evidence. Carrier of Andover and Martin of Amesbury were two others that Parris testified against. When looking at the cases of these two women, there are no obvious other explanations for why Parris had any motivation in seeing them accused. These women had no apparent connection to Parris or his opponents. One explanation for Parris acting as a witness against these women and using his powerful influence against them was their reactions when facing the afflicted as they were examined. Both of these women faced the examinations in a calm and unafraid manner and both doubted the credibility of the afflicted girls. In the case of Susannah Martin, a seventy year old widow, this was not the first time she had faced accusations of witchcraft and so she was familiar with the procedure. When asked her opinion of whether the girls were really afflicted, her reply was, “No. I do not think they are.” and that the afflicted, “may lye for all I know”<sup>43</sup>. Martha Carrier had a similar reaction to that of Martin. Carrier insisted to the judges that it was “shameful that you should mind these folks

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<sup>42</sup> D.D. Hall (ed.), *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth Century New England*, Boston, 1991, p.284; *SWP*, Vol.I, p.250.

<sup>43</sup> *SWP*, Vol.II, p.551.

that are out of their wits” and replied to the afflicted’s accusations by saying, “you lye, I am wronged”<sup>44</sup>. Parris would have found himself having to respond and quash this scepticism before it infected others.

On the 11 April 1692 Elizabeth and John Proctor were examined following the accusation of witchcraft. Elizabeth and John Proctor were linked by “loving” friendship to Israel Porter, a leader of the anti-Parris faction. John Proctor was the first man to be accused and examined on the charge of witchcraft. Elizabeth and John were both accused on the same day. The primary accuser of John Proctor was his servant Mary Warren. It can be seen that Mary Warren had a very good reason for levelling the accusation of witchcraft against her master. John Proctor, it appears, was less than impressed by the seemingly torturous afflictions that Mary was undergoing and thought that a good beating was what she needed rather than being made one of the star attractions of the event<sup>45</sup>. Like Martha Corey, John Proctor was a voice of reason at this time of madness. In fact it was his ‘voice’ that was to cause Mary Warren to recant her previous afflicted state and gave to the authorities the opportunity to question the legitimacy of the accusers afflictions. Unfortunately, the authorities chose not to take this opportunity and Mary was in turn accused. If Proctor had succeeded in challenging the truthfulness of the girls’ afflictions, and they were exposed as fraudulent, especially so early in the proceedings, then Parris’ campaign to rid himself, or at least undermine, his opponents was threatened.

It can be clearly seen that the next group that Parris was to act as witness against were part of the anti-Parris faction in the Village. These were

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<sup>44</sup> *SWP*, Vol.I, p.185.

<sup>45</sup> B. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, Cambridge, 1993, p.45.

Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Cloyse, John and Elizabeth Proctor and John Willard. All of these people were in some way linked by ties of friendship or blood to the two leaders, Israel Porter and Francis Nurse, who were the most active against Parris. With this group it can be assumed that by acting against these people, Parris was attempting to weaken the position and status of his opponents by using whatever resources were at his disposal.

The accusation of Nurse is not really all that surprising though. Nurse was rumoured to have been an object of special hatred for Parris<sup>46</sup>. As the wife of one of the anti-Parris leaders, she also made a prominent target and once successfully accused, would have put the rest of those opposed to Parris firmly on their guard. By accusing Nurse, a woman whose piety was previously unquestioned, Parris' prophecy to his parishioners to be "not be offended at the present low condition of the Church in the midst of its enemies. Oh shortly the case will be far otherwise",<sup>47</sup> at last reached fruition. Sarah Cloyse was Rebecca Nurse sister while John Willard was the husband of Rebecca's niece. The choice of these people as victims is not apparent except for them being a part of the network of those that opposed Parris.

Although Parris did not directly attack his most inveterate opponents, such as Israel Porter and Francis Nurse, he was able to strike at those they were closest to. In accusing Elizabeth and John Porter, Parris was able to attack two people linked in "loving" friendship to Israel Porter. Unlike Francis Nurse, no-one in his immediate family was accused, except his brother-in-law Daniel Andrew. In the case of Francis Nurse, thirteen

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<sup>46</sup>S.P. Fowler, "An Account of the Life and Character of the Rev. Samuel Parris, of Salem Village, and of his Connection with the Witchcraft Delusion of 1692", S.G. Drake (ed.), *The Witchcraft Delusion of New England, Its Rise Progress and Termination*, 3 Vols, New York, 1866, Vol III, p.210.

<sup>47</sup> *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.191.

members of both his immediate and extended family had been accused by the end of the episode<sup>48</sup>. Having an accused witch in the family would have undermined their prestige and authority. The accusation of witchcraft alone, even without indictment, had the stain of scandal attach itself to their reputations. By acting as a witness, it could be said that Parris was throwing his weight behind the accusations of those he wanted the villagers to believe were really witches and in the process bolster his own position in the Village.

In acting as a witness Parris was lending his prestige to the proceedings in order to guide the opinion of the villagers and influence the decision. From the outbreak of the afflictions within his household to the end of the witch trials, Parris can be seen to have worked to use whatever influence he had to rally the villagers to his side. Parris was able, using his position as minister, to use his sermons to guide the Village's opinion to accept his vision of events and accusations. During the period of the trials Parris, temporarily achieved his goal of elevating his status and ensuring his indispensability to the villagers while undermining the standing of his opponents. But his success would only be temporary.

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<sup>48</sup>Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.184. For further information on the anti-Parris network, see Appendix 2.

## Chapter Eight: *Revenge is a dish best served cold!*

In this chapter, we shall be examining the aftermath of the witch trials and Parris' final days in the Village. In the last days of the trials, the conflict between Parris and his opponents had only been suspended and with their drawing to an end the conflict would rekindle. Parris' opponents were to seize upon a far more immediate and personal reason for seeking his removal, the deaths of their loved ones. Parris was to now enter a desperate struggle to retain his tenuous position within the Village. This time his opponents attacked not only his place in the Village but his status as a minister, which he had fought so hard to maintain before the trials. The anti-Parris faction put aside its pre-trial efforts to rid themselves of their minister for purely political reasons (the Village's independence) and concentrated solely on their personal animosities towards him. To this end was mustered a core group of dissenters who saw Parris' hand at work in the witchcraft trials. Brought together by the conviction that Parris was a wicked man who had guided the trials for his own ends, they vowed to achieve his removal from the Village church. The renewed friction between Parris and his opponents would become an even more bitter struggle and cause the division within the Village to become further entrenched. This new dimension in the conflict would render all Parris' previous efforts to ensure his indispensability for naught and was to become the most savage fight of his life and one that was to end with the most bittersweet of victories.

The accusation and subsequent execution of Rebecca Nurse turned out in the end to have been a mammoth tactical error for Parris as he sought to maintain his position in the Village. For it was this event that brought a new dimension to the ongoing friction between Parris and his opponents and eventually led to his reluctant resignation from his post in the Village. For it

was Nurse's trial and execution that led a core group of Parris' opponents to finally break with the Village church and to intensify their efforts in ridding themselves of Parris. To this end this a core group of dissenters which consisted of Samuel Nurse, John Tarbell and Peter Cloyes, began to absent themselves from church meetings and from the taking of the sacrament.

Less than a month after the execution of Rebecca Nurse, the conflict between Parris' and his most ardent opponents began to escalate. The first indication of this came on 14 August 1692, when Parris requested a delegation of church members to seek out Cloyes, Nurse and Tarbell, "to know the reason of their absence"<sup>1</sup> because for "several Sacrament days past our brother Peter Cloyes, and Sam: Nurse and his wife, and John Tarbell and his wife have absented from Communion with us at the Lord's Table, yea have very rarely (except our brother Sam: Nurse) been with us in common public worship"<sup>2</sup>. It is not surprising that this core group had chosen to absent themselves from the church at this time, for they were close to Rebecca by ties of both blood and affection. Samuel Nurse and Mary Tarbell, wife of John Tarbell, were the children of Rebecca. Sarah Cloyes, wife of Peter Cloyes, who had stormed out of the meetinghouse in March and was subsequently charged and jailed, was Rebecca's sister. Much effort was expended to meet with these absentees but apart from Samuel Nurse they proved elusive. Their excuses tell us that were not yet ready for a direct confrontation with Parris. Tarbell claimed to have been "sick, unmeet for discourse" and Cloyes was often absent from his home visiting his wife, Sarah, in jail<sup>3</sup>. The meeting with Nurse, though, must have had some effect,

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<sup>1</sup> *Church Records*, 14 August 1692, p.279.

<sup>2</sup> *Church Records*, 14 August 1692, p.279.

<sup>3</sup> *Church Records*, 31 August 1692, p.279.

as Parris noted in the Church Records on 31 August that “brother Nurse and sometimes his wife attends our public meeting, and he the sacrament”<sup>4</sup>.

To heal this worsening breach, Parris invited these dissenters to return to the meetinghouse. Parris’ effort to head off any further animosity and to effect a reconciliation with these dissenters can be seen in the content he chose for his sermon on 23 October 1692. For this sermon he spoke, at length, about absent friends, of reconciliation and of kisses. For Parris these kisses were symbolic of the expression of love, friendship and goodwill, a “cordial union between two parties” which “allows a liberty of access and communication at all times”<sup>5</sup>. With this sermon Parris was attempting to bring the dissenters back into the fold of the congregation by assuring them that they would be welcomed unstintingly and without rancour for their recent differences; “kisses are exceedingly sweet among friends long absent” and “are very sweet among true friends after some jars and differences, whereby they testify true Reconciliation”<sup>6</sup>. Parris did not seem to be totally forgiving of their slight against him by their absence, however, and he alluded to a warning in this text that their return to the congregation should be genuine and that the reconciliation between them should not be false as those who, “kiss treacherously: they kiss when they intend to kill”. He implied with this sermon that, like Christ, his “designe is to save all he kisseth”<sup>7</sup> and that as Christ’s ambassador he was sent to “court thy acceptance” of such saving<sup>8</sup>. He also warned that they should “consider how miserable thy case will be if thou rejectest this offer” and that “if you will not be kissed by

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<sup>4</sup> *Church Records*, 31 August 1692, p.279.

<sup>5</sup> *Sermons*, 23 October 1692, p.210.

<sup>6</sup> *Sermons*, 23 October 1692, p.211.

<sup>7</sup> *Sermons*, 23 October 1692, p.213.

<sup>8</sup> *Sermons*, 23 October 1692, p.215.

him...you must be cursed by him”<sup>9</sup>. This last warning from Parris was somewhat more explicit in that he stated that to reject this overture of friendship and reconciliation was to court further trouble. This effort from Parris to head off further dissent amongst his congregation seems to have been effective and within a week of this sermon John Tarbell brought his infant son, Jonathan, to Parris for baptism<sup>10</sup>.

Unfortunately this seeming peace was not to last and the dissenters began to gear themselves for a confrontation. On 7 December 1692, the Village Committee, which was made up of members of the anti-Parris faction which included John Tarbell, gave notice of a meeting to be held on 13 December to discuss the selection of the next committee and notably to consider “what shall be done about our ministry house and land, it seemingly to be conveyed away after a fraudulent manner”<sup>11</sup>. By including this matter in their agenda they effectively served notice to Parris that the battle for his removal was about to begin in earnest. The record of the actual meeting that was held on the thirteenth does not speak of any resolution made about the issue of the ministry house, but only that a rate for Parris’ salary was made for the period between 1 July 1691 to 1 July 1693 for the sum of £136.4s<sup>12</sup>. Although this record states that the rate was set for this amount and that some members of the community had been abated certain sums, it does not record that the remainder of this sum was actually collected.

As a matter of course, it seems that even though the Village Committee went through the motions of setting the rate for Parris it does seem that the

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<sup>9</sup> *Sermons*, 23 October 1692, p.215.

<sup>10</sup> L. Gragg, *A Quest For Security: The Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720*, New York, 1990, p.154.

<sup>11</sup> *Village Records*, 7 December 1692, p.358.

<sup>12</sup> *Village Records*, 13 December 1692, p.358.

rate was not collected as the lack of entry in the Village Record indicates. On 26 December 1692 the church members unanimously voted to submit a petition to the Court of Common Pleas for them to intercede on their behalf with the Village Committee over their neglect of Parris' rate and that of the meetinghouse<sup>13</sup>. The filing of a formal complaint through the courts seems to have spurred the Village Committee into action or at least to adopt the appearance of such. The next entry in the Village Records comes on 15 January 1693, and although this record again says that a rate for Parris' salary was made for the sum of £67 for the period July 1693 to July 1694, there is yet again no mention that this rate was collected<sup>14</sup>.

While Parris did not have much of a say in the affairs of the Village Committee, he could and did use his sermons to speak his mind about the current state of affairs with the contention within the congregation and speak to those dissenters still absenting themselves from the church and communion. On this same day that the Village committee met, January 15, to set his rate, Parris speaks about communion and how it was a Christian's "necessary duty" to partake of it and it was a slight against Christ "who has instituted and appointed this holy ordinance"<sup>15</sup>. He also refers to Paul's criticism of the Corinthians for allowing "contentious, nay some who were vicious" people to participate in the ordinance of communion<sup>16</sup>. Here he seems to not only be speaking to those who had absented themselves from the sacrament but to Samuel Nurse, who while under 'division' did sometimes partake.

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<sup>13</sup> *Church Records*, 26 December, 1692, p.280.

<sup>14</sup> *Village Records*, 15 January 1693, p.358.

<sup>15</sup> *Sermons*, 15 January 1693, pp.218-9.

<sup>16</sup> *Sermons*, 15 January 1693, p.216.

When the Court of Common Pleas met with the Villagers on 17 January 1693 to rule on this matter it seems the law was on Parris' side. The Court found, after considering the allegations of both parties that, indeed, the Village Committees for both 1691 and 1692 had been negligent in their duties in "not raising their minister's maintenance". To address this, the Court then ordered that Constable John Putnam "warn and give notice" to the Villagers that they were to convene a meeting on 25 January to elect a new committee in order to attend their duties to Parris<sup>17</sup>. This victory in the courts for Parris was only to be a temporary one though, and having opened up the option of taking the battle to an outside authority Parris' opponents soon followed his example.

There is no entry in the Village Records that the meeting ordered by the Court of Pleas was held but the next entry is on 3 February to propose a meeting to be held on 14 February. It was the agenda for this designated meeting that was especially significant for Parris. The agenda proposed would address the issues of who was capable of voting in the Village meetings. More importantly for Parris the other issue up for discussion was to consider making void Parris' original salary contract as "he [was] not complying with it" and also to void the vote that granted Parris the ministry house and adjoining lands in what they considered "a fraudulent manner"<sup>18</sup>. Again this issue of the ministry house was raised but with the further dimension of wishing to void the vote that contracted Parris in the first place. This was further escalating the actions attempted against Parris. The accusation that he was not living up to the terms of the contract was a direct insult against Parris' ministry and one that Parris could not fail to answer. By

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<sup>17</sup> *Church Records*, 17 January 1693, p.256-7.

<sup>18</sup> *Village Records*, 3 February 1693, p.359.

attacking his ministry they were attacking his position as an authority figure in the community.

In the intervening time before the meeting set for 14 February Parris attempted to defuse the situation. After the Sabbath of 5 February, Parris along with Nathaniel and John Putnam and Bray Wilkins were chosen to approach the dissenters in order to discuss their lack of attendance in Church. Parris and his supporters met with Nurse and Tarbell on 7 February and with Cloyes on 8 February. Parris spoke to each man individually at length, with the exception of Wilkins who he was unable to speak to due to the time he spent with Tarbell and Nurse. It seems the main thrust of these men's grievances was his conduct during the witchcraft outbreak and subsequent trials. According to Parris' record of his conversations, Tarbell accused him of idolatry "in asking the afflicted persons who they saw upon other afflicted persons". Tarbell also complained that he did not "understand how [his] oath was safe in court", implying that his truthfulness was in question. He also asserted that the responsibility for Rebecca Nurse's execution was solely because of Parris and that he "had been the great prosecutor". Tarbell said that since others in Parris' position had renounced their former error during the trials, "he could not join" in communion until Parris, too, admitted to his mistakes<sup>19</sup>. Parris' record indicates that both Samuel Nurse and Peter Cloyes had the same complaints. Parris' answer to the men's complaints was that he "did not see sufficient grounds to vary [his] opinion" and he stated that he was entitled to his opinion as they were to theirs and would not quarrel with them. Although they had this lengthy discussion on the matter of their complaints, nothing was resolved at this initial meeting. The dissenters wished time to consider matters and agreed to meet again with Parris. This

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<sup>19</sup> *Church Records*, 16 February 1693, p.282-3.

new meeting was set for two days after the Village meeting, possibly for the dissenters to see what position they should adopt subsequent to the voting.

For the Village meeting on 14 February there is no existing record of the Villagers' discussions of the issues directly concerning Parris but they did reach a resolution on the matter of who was entitled to have a say in the Village's affairs. They agreed that "all men are ratable" who lived within Salem Village and that they all should have "liberty in nominating and appointing a committee and voting in any of our public affairs"<sup>20</sup>. This resolution indirectly went against Parris as by this they were circumventing the law by which only church members could vote in such matters. Since the church was strongly behind Parris this would have eroded any probability of electing a pro-Parris committee in the future <sup>21</sup>.

When Parris finally met again with his dissenting parishioners on 16 February they presented the following paper containing their grievances against him, which Parris reproduced in the Church records.

Whereas we, Tho. Wilkins, and John Tarbell, and Samuel Nurse, having been a long time gone under the burden of great grievances by reason of some unwarrantable actings of Mr Parris, as we esteem them, and were proceeding in an orderly way to obtain satisfaction from him, and taken some steps thereunto, according to the advice of some neighbouring elders. But obstructive to our proceeding therein, Mr Parris and some brethren of the church are appointed by the church to demand a reason of us for withdrawing from communion. The regularity of which, the proceeding, we do not understand, because in this case we esteem ourselves to be the plaintiffs, and parties

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<sup>20</sup> *Village Records*, 14 February 1693, p.359.

<sup>21</sup> Gragg, *Quest For Security*, p.155.

offended, and in an orderly way seeking satisfaction, tho' hitherto denied.

Our answer to the church is that we esteem ourselves hereby prevented in our duty, which we account a grievance, seeing we were first in prosecution of the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ laid down in Matth. 18, 15-16. Wherefore, if the church please give us the liberty and freedom of attending our duty, as according to the rule bound, possibly then further trouble may be prevented; or otherwise the case will unnecessarily and regularly come before them. But if they deny us this request, we shall as in duty bound give the reasons of our proceeding to the church, or any others, when orderly demanded.<sup>22</sup>

As we can see from the above paper, the dissenters clearly saw themselves as the wronged party due to Parris' "unwarrantable" acts and that Parris and his supporters were being obstructive in sorting out this grievance by requesting of the dissenters their reasons for their absence from communion rather than addressing what they saw as the real issue of Parris' questionable ministry and his repentance.

The dissenters, claimed upon this second meeting that they were trying to proceed, as advised by "some neighbouring elders", according to the Church rule based on Matthew

- 15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.
- 16 And if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

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<sup>22</sup> *Church Records*, 16 February 1693, pp.281-2.

- 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.<sup>23</sup>

When the dissenters first met with Parris, they spoke with him individually, but for this second meeting they brought with them a church member, William Way, in accordance to the rule, to act as their witness. The fact that the dissenters had approached the “neighbouring elders” without his knowledge was a direct slight against Parris as their minister and he was quick to point out to them that they should have “first spoken to the Pastor himself before they went to consult with neighbouring elders” and that “they did ill reflect upon the church, who, as also the Pastor, was ignorant of their methods.”<sup>24</sup>. In the end this second meeting still failed to resolve the differences between them as Parris refused to speak with them “as there was but one brother, there should be two...and advised them to take (according to the rule) some other brother or brethren... or else [he] could not hear them”<sup>25</sup>. It can be seen that both sides here were attempting to use this Church rule in order to gain some advantage over their opponents<sup>26</sup>.

The next meeting with the dissenters was on 27 March. This time they brought with them a written request for a council of elders to be “mutually chosen to hear all our grievances...and to determine where the blameable cause is.” Parris asked of the dissenters, “who this paper came from” with the reply given as “all the Plantation, or a great many of them at least”. To this Parris demanded, “why, then, did none subscribe to it”. When he was told that he would know the extent of his opposition all in good time, Parris

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<sup>23</sup> *Matthew* 18:15-17.

<sup>24</sup> *Church Records*, 16 February 1693, p.282.

<sup>25</sup> *Church Records*, 16 February 1693, p.283.

<sup>26</sup> *Church Records*, 16 February 1693, p.282.

refused to give the dissenters the immediate answer they desired to their request and only promised that he would consider it. The next evening, March 28, the dissenters came again to Parris requesting his answer, but again Parris put them off saying only that he “had not considered of it yet”<sup>27</sup>. Meanwhile, the record shows that Parris’ strongest supporters, Nathaniel and John Putnam, lodged yet another complaint on the 28th against the Village committee “for not raising their minister’s maintenance”<sup>28</sup>. The Village record reflects that at some time Parris’ supporters must have petitioned the court against the Village’s earlier vote that made “all men ratable” as there is a note entered into the Village records under the hand of Stephen Sewall, dated also March 28, that the Court of the General Sessions of the Peace rendered this decision “repugnant to the laws of this province” and declared it null and void<sup>29</sup>. Again Parris proved that he was able to fight back against the dissenters’ attempts to manipulate Village affairs in their favour.

The very next church meeting after the dissenters presented their request to Parris for a council of elders, Parris again used the pulpit to publicly admonish them for what he, obviously considered to be treacherous actions. The sermon delivered on 2 April directly addressed the dissenting brethren about their duplicity and their refusing to partake of the sacrament, “that is serves to condemn one and all, who have long had this bread offered to them and they intreated outwardly by the word, and it may be inwardly by some strivings of the spirit, more or less to accept of it, and yet will not”<sup>30</sup>. He appears here to be pointing out to the dissenters that although outwardly they show a pious spirit that they inwardly do not since they have forsaken

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<sup>27</sup> *Church Records*, 28 March 1693, p.284.

<sup>28</sup> *Church Records*, 28 March 1693, p.257.

<sup>29</sup> *Village Records*, 28 March 1693, p.359.

<sup>30</sup> *Sermons*, 2 April 1692, p.235.

the holy sacrament and that in this denying of the sacrament they are committing one of the greatest of sins by their “slighting and neglecting of it”<sup>31</sup>.

On 20 April 1693, after his lecture, again the dissenters came to Parris to discuss with him his answer to the petition they brought to him on 27 March to request a council of elders. Parris’ affronted reply was that upon consideration “he looked upon it as libel”. The dissenters produced a “like paper” to the one originally presented to Parris “subscribed by said brethren [John Tarbell, Samuel Nurse, Thomas Wilkins and Peter Cloyes], and divers more to the number of forty and two names”. When Parris noted that on this new paper the signatures “all seemed to be one and the same hand”, he questioned the authenticity of this document and requested the original. Parris also wished to know whether he was dealing with “displeased people or displeased brethren”, probably to know how much of his own supporters from the church had eroded<sup>32</sup>. The remainder of this meeting was spent, not on finding a solution to their differences but debating on the proper procedures and which of them were following them correctly. It seems that both sides were intent, not on mending their differences but on each proving the righteousness of their individual causes.

With nothing resolved the dissenters again met with Parris, the two deacons and William and Aaron Way at Deacon Ingersoll’s the next morning. The dissenters brought with them a scroll containing some 15 articles. Seven of these article listed their reasons for their withdrawal from communion and their absence from public worship. The other eight dealing with their reasons

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<sup>31</sup> *Sermons*, 2 April 1692, p.236.

<sup>32</sup> *Church Records*, 20 April 1693, p.284.

for 'separating' from Parris' ministry. Further manoeuvring went on at this meeting, mostly along the lines that the dissenters would only yield a copy of this new scroll of detailed complaints if and when Parris called a meeting of all church members. The two groups were still intent on power plays rather than the actual solution of their differences<sup>33</sup>.

On 18 May 1693 Parris convened the Church meeting as per the request of the dissenters, Samuel Nurse, John Tarbell and Thomas Wilkins, "you desired the Church to give you a meeting, now they are here and I have you to acquaint them with your reason for desiring of it." The dissenters answered that it was to present their charges against Parris with "witnesses to prove it". Parris was far too cunning to allow the dissenters such a public and official forum to voice their complaints. In a more deliberately intended to frustrate the manoeuvres of his opponents, Parris insisted that the congregation first vote on the propriety as to whether the dissenters had followed procedure according to Matthew. The vote came back that they had not and that the dissenters would be heard only if they were to bring the case to them again, this time following the "Christ's rules"<sup>34</sup>.

Parris noted at the end of this meeting that the "general deportment of the said displeased brethren was...unchristian...to the minister [and] very irreverend towards him". When the dissenters were asked why they requested the meeting of the church, they replied that the "church could not judge the case, was not capable of it" but rather they only wished to bring about agreement of the church for a council of elders. When asked about the extent to which they were offended they would only commit themselves to

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<sup>33</sup> *Church Records*, 21 April 1693, p.285.

<sup>34</sup> *Church Records*, 18 May 1693, p.286.

being equally offended by Parris. Parris replied to the dissenters that since they were all of a mind he would no longer meet with them as a group but individually, proclaiming that he was ignorant of their intentions the first time and now he was clear as to their ‘drift’ he would be more prepared to debate with them. Samuel Nurse’s comment to this was that “he did not care to come to the house, nor to discourse...alone”<sup>35</sup>. From this session, again we can see Parris’ attempts to further frustrate his opponents and as well an attempt to divide them. From Nurse’s comment it seems that he was wise to Parris’ machinations.

During May, again Parris received the court’s support when they passed another judgement in his favour. The Court of the General Sessions of the Peace, upon hearing the allegations from both parties, found that the Village committee was still delinquent in its duties towards Parris. This time the four members of the committee responsible for Parris’ rate were fined the princely sum of 52s.6d. each after being found guilty by a jury. The members of the rate committee were also directed to assess and collect all monies owing to Parris for the previous two years, as well as the present one, with these monies to be paid to Parris. This judgement may have been worded in this way, “and paid to the said Parris” in order to prevent what they had done previously in setting the rate but not collecting it.

The dissenters, frustrated in their attempts to deal with Parris and the Village church, decided on 7 July 1693 to petition Governor Phips and the General Court for them to intervene on their behalf. The dissenters “humbly petition[ed] that your excellency and the much honoured General Court would...appoint a sufficient number of impartial persons to take cognizance

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<sup>35</sup> *Church Records*, 18 May 1693, p.286.

of out miserable condition and give us what advice they shall in their wisdom think fit...[so] that peace and truth (which are now so much wanting) may prevail among us”<sup>36</sup>. Since they could not force Parris to consent to a council of elders, they too, decided to join Parris in using the courts to force his agreement to outside mediation. Maybe at this time the secular authorities would find in their favour since, to date, they had not won a battle in this arena.

It seems that word of the Village’s troubles had reached the ear of some of the elders of Boston by this time. Mr Willard wrote to John Higginson and Nicholas Noyes of Salem and John Hale of Beverly on behalf of the Boston Elders asking them to beseech Parris to take steps towards the resolution the Village’s difficulties. In mid-October Parris received letters from ministers Higginson and Noyes and Hale urging Parris to join with the dissenters in calling a council of neighbouring churches. When Parris consulted with his congregation about the matter, the vote was unanimous “to call a council in an orderly way”, setting the meeting with the dissenters for 23 October in order to arrange for the calling of a council<sup>37</sup>.

Upon meeting together with the dissenters, again there was much disagreement as to procedure. At their arrival, it seems that the dissenters chose to bring with them supporters that were outsiders “which we had not sent for”. After some debate Parris and his supporting brethren voted to allow into the meeting only those outsiders who were full members of other churches. The dissenters chose Mr Israel Porter, the leader of the anti-Parris faction prior to the trials, as their witness<sup>38</sup>. Further disagreement occurred

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<sup>36</sup> *Church Records*, 7 July 1693, p.258.

<sup>37</sup> *Church Records*, 19 October 1693, p.287.

<sup>38</sup> *Church Records*, 23 October 1693, p.288; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*,

when the dissenters were asked for what reason they desired a council of elders. The dissenters replied that their reason for their request was because of their “offence...against Parris” but when Parris requested a written copy of their complaint against him, “that we might consider of it and we would deal the like by them, give them our charge under our hands”, they refused, saying they would “never do so”. Parris and the church proclaimed that they “would not hear it” unless they left a copy, implying that they would not be agreeable to a council if they did not but the dissenters’ only rejoinder before their departure was that “they would have a council whether we would or not”<sup>39</sup>.

Promptly upon the dissenters abrupt departure, Parris quickly penned a letter to Higginson, Hale and Noyse in order to pre-empt the dissenters and make sure that they knew where the blame, for not being able to negotiate a council of elders, truly lay. Parris outlined the events of that day’s meeting as well as their previous one, saying that it was the stubbornness of the dissenters in not handing in a written copy of their complaint that was preventing the call of a council of elders in an orderly manner<sup>40</sup>.

Several more meetings were to occur between Parris and the dissenters in order to organise a council of churches, but those meetings were to run along a similar line to that of 23 October 1693. In the end the discord became so scandalous that even the notable worthies Increase and Cotton Mather became involved in the affair. It wasn’t until 3 April 1695 that both parties were able to come together before a council of elders. The persistence of the dissenters stands as testimony to the intensity of their belief that Parris should be held accountable for his role in the witchcraft trials.

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p.184.

<sup>39</sup> *Church Records*, 23 October 1693, p.288.

<sup>40</sup> *Church Records*, 23 October 1693, p.289.

This council of elders consisted of the elders from North Boston, Weymouth, Malden, Rowley as well as the old Church and the third Church of Boston and was made up of ten laymen and seven ministers, including Samuel Willard, Cotton Mather and the eminent Increase Mather<sup>41</sup>. These worthies heard the complaints of the dissenters. This list of complaints included their reason for absenting themselves from communion as well as their direct grievance against Parris himself. The dissenters listed three reasons for their withdrawal, these being, first that they could not, due to the commotion from the afflicted girls, have any “hearing or understanding and profiting of the word preached”, in the second, they had “apprehensions of danger of ourselves being accused...we seeing those whom we had reason to esteem better than ourselves thus accused” and thirdly because they saw Parris using his sermons to pursue his own agenda so “thought it our most safe and peaceable way to withdraw”<sup>42</sup>.

In explanation of their refusal in participating in communion, the dissenters asserted that they were “justly aggrieved and offended with the officer who doth administer [communion]”<sup>43</sup>. They went on to provide further detail of their particular dissatisfactions. Among their allegations the dissenters charged that Parris paid unwarranted attention to the accusations of the afflicted girls and had undue faith in the spectral evidence offered by them. The dissenters claimed that he, by putting questions to them, used the afflicted to discover “who were the Devil’s instruments to afflict the sick and pained.” The dissenters charged that this was contrary to the general opinion of the orthodox ministers of the whole country. In particular, they questioned

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<sup>41</sup> For a complete list of those sitting on this Council see *Church Records*, 3 April 1695, p.308.

<sup>42</sup> *Church Records*, 26 November 1694, p.296.

<sup>43</sup> *Church Records*, 26 November 1694, p.296.

Parris' integrity by "His unsafe and unaccountable oath, given by him against sundry of the accused" and that he failed in his duties by "not rendering to the world so fair, if true, an account of what he wrote on examination of the afflicted"<sup>44</sup>. This particular charge from the dissenters was the key to their grievances against him along with the fact that Parris continued to uphold his position long after others had admitted to their errors.

Even though the council generally found in Parris' favour, they censured his actions during "the late and the dark time of the confusions" which afflicted Salem Village. They concluded that Parris had taken "sundry unwarrantable and uncomfortable steps" during the witchcraft outbreak. This finding of a council composed of some of the most eminent clergymen of the colony vindicated the dissenters stand that Parris, indeed, had taken an active role in manipulating the witchcraft episode.

The conviction of the dissenters that Parris had taken an active hand in the trials had fortified the dissenters in their campaign to effect his removal. Had he taken a less aggressive role in the outbreak, Salem Village may have been able to quickly settle back into a quiet bucolic existence. The actions of Parris ensured that the Village would continue to experience friction. His arrogance meant that the Villagers would be unable to heal the rift which the trials had exacerbated while he remained as their minister. Despite a number of efforts towards reconciliation, the dissenters remained convinced that their loved ones had been the victims of Parris' pursuit of prestige and security.

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<sup>44</sup> *Church Records*, 26 November 1694, pp.296-7.

## Conclusion

The Salem witchcraft outbreak of 1692 was no accident. This thesis has proceeded on the contention that the Reverend Samuel Parris was an active participant in the beginnings of the witchcraft outbreak, and as well in its length and its intensity. It was Parris' role at the very onset of the girls' afflictions that was to cause a witchcraft outbreak of previously unknown ferocity. In his attempt to assure his security and indispensability in Salem Village, Parris went to extraordinary lengths. While the evidence is far from unequivocal, it is not beyond the bounds of reason to interpret Parris' role in the witchcraft episode as the result of pre-meditated actions.

Chapter one demonstrates that Parris was a man concerned with his status and position in life. This concern would have an impact on his actions during the witchcraft episode. Parris, the son of a prosperous English merchant turned Barbados landowner, was raised in an environment of relative privilege. From a young age he would have been used to being treated in a manner befitting a 'lord' by slaves and servants. Parris' Harvard education prepared him for the social leadership he had now come to regard as his birthright. His father's death changed his circumstances. Parris now sought to assure his position in Barbados society through success in the mercantile arena. Parris wisely foresaw the upcoming decline in the Barbados economy and chose to liquidate the bulk of his holdings on the island and make a new beginning in Boston.

For all intents and purposes Parris' career in Boston was moderately successful. Upon his arrival Parris acquired sufficient property to insure his immediate prosperity. He established himself in business and began to enjoy the rewards of his success. Parris soon became a freeman of the city and

even occupied minor political office. Unfortunately this period of affluence was not to last as Parris' fortunes suffered several reverses. In 1683 Parris found himself before the courts, sued for outstanding debts. It seems that a career as a merchant did not offer Parris the prestige and assurance of security that he seemed to crave. For all of his efforts the most he was able to achieve was mediocre success. Within Puritan society merchants were generally not held in high regard. In large part this and his failure to attain the resounding prosperity he coveted, may have prompted him to consider a change in career paths. He turned to the ministry which promised the respect and security which he seemed to require.

Having made his decision to enter the ministry, Parris now searched out a suitable position. Unfortunately few positions were readily available. Even fully qualified graduates found themselves without positions. Despite not graduating from Harvard Parris was fortunate in achieving a temporary post at Stow. Perhaps Parris was testing the suitability of his new career path before irrevocably committing himself. Parris' decision to consider Salem Village may have been prompted by an earlier favourable encounter with Captain John Putnam, a leading figure of the Village. The Village was in the process of establishing an independent church and was seeking a suitable minister. Despite his reluctance to accept a position in so minor a community, the Villagers sent 'suppliants' to implore him to accept the position on no less than three occasions. This may have acted as a balm to his wounded ego after his previous battering in the courts.

Chapter two covers the period of Parris' negotiations over the terms of his salary package. Throughout this negotiation process Parris was keen to assure both his financial and social position. During these negotiations the more abrasive and arrogant side of Parris' personality appeared. These

negotiations for his salary contract reflected his mercantile background and in the end were drawn out and more complicated than what the Villagers would have expected. He insisted upon being accorded the level of respect and deference which he thought he was owed as a minister of the church. To this end he insisted upon conditions which were in many cases akin to those enjoyed by a lord of the manor. Such was the case of his requirement for firewood which took on the status of an offertory to Parris as 'lord' of the Village. After having struggled to achieve these hard-won conditions, Parris when threatened, was not about to meekly relinquish them. It is not inconceivable that Parris was willing to adopt strong means to protect his newly won position.

On the surface a position in Salem Village would have appeared to Parris as being an ideal opportunity. Unfortunately that position came under threat from the local division within Salem Village. The Village community had become polarised over the issue of local autonomy away from that of Salem Town. The community was fairly evenly divided over this issue. The establishment of a local covenanted church with its own minister had become the symbol of that autonomy. While a section of the community wholeheartedly supported their new minister, others were less welcoming to the man they saw as symbolising the Village's independence. By the time of Parris' arrival in the Village, the Villagers had a long established routine with which it dealt with its ministers.

In chapter three we saw that the three ministers that preceded Parris eventually found their living to be too uncomfortable and soon quit the Village. Each minister in turn had come under fire from the faction within the community that opposed autonomy and an independent church. This was the maelstrom into which Parris stumbled. Parris' arrival in the Village was

to spark a new and more bitter dimension to the previous conflict. The pro-autonomy faction had gained a new victory in finally achieving an ordained minister for the Village, something that the past ministers had not attained. So began the latest phase of an ongoing campaign to force the new minister out. Now the anti-autonomy faction launched an immediate and vitriolic attack on Parris' very position in the community. This was a threat Parris could not ignore. Under no circumstances would he give up the prestige and security which he had only so recently obtained. This may have set the foundation for Parris' actions during the witchcraft outbreak.

Throughout chapter four we saw how the relationship between Parris and his opponents began to break down as they attacked those things which he held dear. Within only a month of his ordination he began to experience difficulties in the Village. While those that supported Parris were in control of the governing body of the Village, his troubles were merely an inconvenience. They did not actually threaten his employment. His allies were even able to aid him in further consolidating his security. Early in his tenure as the Village's minister, Parris had been awarded title to the ministry house and its lands. This initial 'honeymoon' period was not to last and eventually his supporters could not sustain their dominance in Village affairs.

Following the success of his opponents in gaining control of the Village committee they now had the means by which they could challenge his living within the community. The legality of Parris' title to the ministry house and lands now came under examination. They also brought up the question of whether his remuneration should be voluntary or by compulsory subscription. This would have directly attacked his source of income as those who opposed him could legitimately refuse to pay for his maintenance. Parris suffered many other inconveniences and slights at the hands of his enemies.

There was a chronic absenteeism amongst those allied with his opponents. He complained many times over the villagers' lack of respect for him. Even the firewood that Parris considered so important to him, failed to be delivered. These attacks against Parris culminated in questions over the validity of his appointment to the Village ministry. This was quickly followed by the initial outbreak of witchcraft accusations.

The contention that Parris took an active hand in the accusations which followed closely upon the initial revelations of witchcraft is supported by an examination of his sermons in the lead-up to the outbreak. Through his sermons he both reassured his friends and castigated his enemies. As his opponents gained in power and influence Parris' sermons began taking on an increasingly ominous theme that would foreshadow later events. Instead of focussing on the temporal quarrel between himself and his antagonists, he chose to interpret this battle in a spiritual context. Through his sermons, Parris chose to translate his enemies' actions as being against God's messenger and therefore God himself, rather than against a man and his ambition. At this time Parris introduced the notion of witches rampant in the community. This belief was central to the events that were soon to unfold. Throughout chapter five we have seen how Parris repeatedly warned that retribution would descend upon the wicked and ungodly. Coincidentally those wicked and ungodly members of his congregation to whom Parris referred, were also his most vocal opponents.

In the face of his opponents' successes, Parris also launched a campaign of his own to emphasise his own dignity and status as a minister. In his sermons he continually returned to the theme of the divine grace with which God had invested his ministers. This divine gift was essential if he was to succeed in his role as the agent of God. Only through him could his

parishioners attain admission to heaven. This sense of superiority prompted Parris to consider that he was not receiving the respect due to a man of his position. This induced him to remind them that they should be more mindful of him over all others. Despite attempts to highlight the significance of his position in a myriad of ways, Parris continued to consider that the respect due to him was in decline. After all of Parris' trials, it was not in his character to passively relinquish his new-found pre-eminence. This deterioration in Parris' status was only arrested by the outbreak of the witchcraft episode. The minister then became an essential member of the community in their battle against Satan's minions.

Through Parris' sermons we have for the first time direct evidence of Parris taking an active hand in the events as they unfolded. His actions at this time were critical in determining the course of events. Following a direct challenge to his position in the Village community, the first incidents of supernatural activity appeared in the minister's own household. Parris seized upon the physician's opinion that both his daughter and niece were under an evil hand to declare that witches were at work within the Salem Village community. A few accusations of spectral torment soon grew into a torrent of allegations. In chapter six we saw how Parris radically departed from the established norm for dealing with this type of situation. By uncritically accepting the accusations of the afflicted girls where other ministers were less credulous, Parris insured that an initially limited incident would be escalated in to a full blown witchcraze. By publicising the girls' accusations and by encouraging the community to give spectral evidence more credence than otherwise it deserved he fed upon the fears of the community to intensify the outbreak to point of hysteria. A more judicious handling of the girls' accusations may have avoided the entire episode. Nevertheless Parris did

succeed in diverting his enemies' attention away from their struggle with him while enhancing his own renown.

In chapter seven we saw that Parris was able to use his sermons to keep the community's attention firmly focussed on the events as they developed. He used the vehicle of his sermons to guide and influence his congregation's understanding of the events. Parris informed the faithful that there were witches amongst the community who sought to defeat Christ's work and to bring down his church. Parris pointedly instructed the community exactly how to identify the witches amongst them and why they chose the Village as the target of their attacks. He continued to reassure his supporters that though they would be besieged by evil they would be victorious. As God's instrument he would act as their general in their war against Satan and his minions. As well as preaching from the pulpit he also took the witness chair. Parris readily testified against a number of the accused. An examination of the relationships within the village and its factions reveal that Parris was taking an active part against those who were associated with his enemies. While the episode lasted Parris attained his goal of staving off the attacks of his opponents and assuring his indispensability to the community.

This indispensability was not to last. With the end of the witchcraft episode old tensions and hostilities resurfaced. In chapter eight we have seen that in the renewed struggle with Parris, a new dimension of bitterness was added. A core group of Parris' opponents were adamant that the minister's hand had been at work in the witchcraft trials. They declared that his attention to the afflicted's accusations was unwarranted and went as far as to declare him unorthodox in his ministry. They even accused him of having perjured himself with his false recording of testimony. While much of the other evidence is equivocal, the opinion of this significant group is not open

to question. They remained firm in their conviction that Parris was a wicked man who had guided the trials for his own ends. Their testimony cannot be easily dismissed.

Given this trail of fact and coincidence it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Parris was an active participant who shaped the entire episode to his own agenda. I would suggest that indeed it is more than likely that such was the case. While the episode endured Parris was certainly the winner. Attacks upon his security ceased as he became the indispensable leader of the community in its hour of crisis. Through his sermons Parris had the means to guide and influence his community's reaction to what was unfolding before them. His close relationship with the first self-confessed witch and with the first of the afflicted girls gave him the opportunity to gain a level of control over the shaping of the coming events. He readily seized upon this opportunity to change the battle from a worldly conflict to a spiritual one, bringing it to an arena of his own choosing. The political crisis enveloping Salem Village in which he found himself mired certainly gave him the motive to act. Parris' role was certainly more than just that of a country pastor.

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## Appendix 1

### **A Chronology of The Salem Witch Trials 1692**

#### ***January 20***

Nine-year-old Elizabeth Parris and eleven-year-old Abigail Williams began to exhibit strange behavior, such as blasphemous screaming, convulsive seizures, trance-like states and mysterious spells. Within a short time, several other Salem girls began to demonstrate similar behavior.

#### ***Mid-February***

Unable to determine any physical cause for the symptoms and dreadful behavior, physicians concluded that the girls were under the influence of Satan.

#### ***Late February***

Prayer services and community fasting were conducted by Reverend Samuel Parris in hopes of relieving the evil forces that plagued them. In an effort to expose the "witches", John Indian baked a witch cake made with rye meal and the afflicted girls' urine. This counter-magic was meant to reveal the identities of the "witches" to the afflicted girls.

Pressured to identify the source of their affliction, the girls named three women, including Tituba, Parris' Carib Indian slave, as witches. On February 29, warrants were issued for the arrests of Tituba, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne.

Although Osborne and Good maintained innocence, Tituba confessed to seeing the devil who appeared to her "sometimes like a hog and sometimes like a great dog". What's more, Tituba testified that there was a conspiracy of witches at work in Salem.

#### ***March 1***

Magistrates John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin examined Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne in the meeting house in Salem Village. Tituba confessed to practicing witchcraft.

Over the next weeks, other townspeople came forward and testified that they, too, had been harmed by or had seen strange apparitions of some of the community members. As the witch hunt continued, accusations were made against many different people.

Frequently denounced were women whose behavior or economic circumstances were somehow disturbing to the social order and conventions of the time. Some of the accused had previous records of criminal activity, including witchcraft, but others were faithful churchgoers and people of high standing in the community.

***March 12***

Martha Corey is accused of witchcraft.

***March 19***

Rebecca Nurse was denounced as a witch.

***March 21***

Martha Corey was examined before Magistrates Hathorne and Corwin.

***March 24***

Rebecca Nurse was examined before Magistrates Hathorne and Corwin.

***March 28***

Elizabeth Proctor was denounced as a witch.

***April 3***

Sarah Cloyce, Rebecca Nurse's sister, was accused of witchcraft.

***April 11***

Elizabeth Proctor and Sarah Cloyce were examined before Hathorne, Corwin, Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth, and Captain Samuel Sewall. During this examination, John Proctor was also accused and imprisoned.

***April 19***

Abigail Hobbs, Bridget Bishop, Giles Corey, and Mary Warren were examined. Only Abigail Hobbs confessed.

### ***April 22***

Nehemiah Abbott, William and Deliverance Hobbs, Edward and Sarah Bishop, Mary Easty, Mary Black, Sarah Wildes, and Mary English were examined before Hathorne and Corwin. Only Nehemiah Abbott was cleared of charges.

### ***May 2***

Sarah Morey, Lydia Dustin, Susannah Martin, and Dorcas Hoar were examined by Hathorne and Corwin.

### ***May 4***

George Burroughs was arrested in Wells, Maine.

### ***May 9***

Burroughs was examined by Hathorne, Corwin, Sewall, and William Stoughton. One of the afflicted girls, Sarah Churchill, was also examined.

### ***May 10***

George Jacobs, Sr. and his granddaughter Margaret were examined before Hathorne and Corwin. Margaret confessed and testified that her grandfather and George Burroughs were both witches.

Sarah Osborne died in prison in Boston.

### ***May 14***

Increase Mather returned from England, bringing with him a new charter and the new governor, Sir William Phips.

### ***May 18***

Mary Easty was released from prison. Yet, due to the outcries and protests of her accusers, she was arrested a second time.

### ***May 27***

Governor Phips set up a special Court of Oyer and Terminer comprised of seven judges to try the witchcraft cases. Appointed were Lieutenant Governor William Stoughton, Nathaniel Saltonstall, Bartholomew

Gedney, Peter Sergeant, Samuel Sewall, Wait Still Winthrop, John Richards, John Hathorne, and Jonathan Corwin.

These magistrates based their judgments and evaluations on various kinds of intangible evidence, including direct confessions, supernatural attributes (such as "witchmarks"), and reactions of the afflicted girls. Spectral evidence, based on the assumption that the Devil could assume the "specter" of an innocent person, was relied upon despite its controversial nature.

### *May 31*

Martha Carrier, John Alden, Wilmott Redd, Elizabeth Howe, and Phillip English were examined before Hathorne, Corwin, and Gedney.

### *June 2*

Initial session of the Court of Oyer and Terminer. Bridget Bishop was the first to be pronounced guilty of witchcraft and condemned to death.

### *Early June*

Soon after Bridget Bishop's trial, Nathaniel Saltonstall resigned from the court, dissatisfied with its proceedings.

### *June 10*

Bridget Bishop was hanged in Salem, the first official execution of the Salem witch trials.

Following her death, accusations of witchcraft escalated, but the trials were not unopposed. Several townspeople signed petitions on behalf of accused people they believed to be innocent.

### *June 29-30*

Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes, Sarah Good and Elizabeth Howe were tried for witchcraft and condemned.

### *Mid-July*

In an effort to expose the witches afflicting his life, Joseph Ballard of nearby Andover enlisted the aid of the accusing girls of Salem. This action marked the beginning of the Andover witch hunt.

### ***July 19***

Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, Sarah Good, and Sarah Wildes were executed.

### ***August 2-6***

George Jacobs, Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John and Elizabeth Proctor, and John Willard were tried for witchcraft and condemned.

### ***August 19***

George Jacobs, Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John Proctor, and John Willard were hanged on Gallows Hill.

### ***September 9***

Martha Corey, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Dorcas Hoar, and Mary Bradbury were tried and condemned.

### ***September 17***

Margaret Scott, Wilmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, Mary Parker, Abigail Faulkner, Rebecca Eames, Mary Lacy, Ann Foster, and Abigail Hobbs were tried and condemned.

### ***September 19***

Giles Corey was pressed to death for refusing a trial.

### ***September 21***

Dorcas Hoar was the first of those pleading innocent to confess. Her execution was delayed.

### ***September 22***

Martha Corey, Margaret Scott, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Wilmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, and Mary Parker were hanged.

### ***October 8***

After 20 people had been executed in the Salem witch hunt, Thomas Brattle wrote a letter criticizing the witchcraft trials. This letter had great

impact on Governor Phips, who ordered that reliance on spectral and intangible evidence no longer be allowed in trials.

***October 29***

Governor Phips dissolved the Court of Oyer and Terminer.

***November 25***

The General Court of the colony created the Superior Court to try the remaining witchcraft cases which took place in May, 1693. This time no one was convicted.

Chronology courtesy of the Salem Office of Tourism and Cultural Affairs

