



Fairfield Museum AND HISTORY CENTER

Accused: Fairfield's Witchcraft Trials

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Educator Guide





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Educator Guide Introduction

This Educator Guide features background information, essential questions, student activities, vocabulary, a timeline and a booklist. Created in conjunction with the exhibition *Accused: Fairfield's Witchcraft Trials*, the guide also features reproductions of Jakob Crane's original illustrations and storylines from the exhibition. The guide is also available for download on the Fairfield Museum's website at www.fairfieldhistory.org/education

This Educator Guide was developed in partnership with regional educators at a Summer Teacher Institute in July, 2014 and co-sponsored by the Fairfield Public Library. Participants included:

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- Leslie Greene, Side By Side, Norwalk, CT
- Lauren Marchello, Fairfield Ludlowe High School, Fairfield, CT
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About the Exhibition:

In 17th century New England religious beliefs and folk tradition instilled deep fears of magic, evil, and supernatural powers. How else to explain unnatural events, misfortune and the sudden convulsions and fits of local townspeople? In this exhibition, the fascinating history of Connecticut's witchcraft trials is illuminated by author and illustrator Jakob Crane. In graphic novel form, powerful depictions of the events and characters are reimagined through storylines and pen and ink drawings.



Introduction: The Legacy of Witchcraft

Colonists brought a belief in witchcraft from England, where it was rooted in the Bible and reinforced by the Church, laws and folk traditions. Early Christianity rejected other beliefs, labeling these practices as pagan, “non-Christian” and those people heretics.

In the European middle ages, heretics were seen as “Devil-worshippers” and a mythology developed. Heretics renounced God, therefore they made pacts with the Devil. They acted in secret and shared rites. Diabolical images, twisted gargoyles and images of Satan were everywhere, popularized through art, architecture, music and writing. The printing press enabled the mass distribution of literature focused on witchcraft. In 1487 German clergyman Heinrich Kramer published a manual on how to prosecute witches, the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Trials for accused witches occurred regularly throughout Europe in this era. Torture was an accepted method of coercion. Cases were under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Church. Later, secular courts operated regionally and locally, often with little oversight. Witchcraft hysteria can be loosely tied with periods of highly stressful political, environmental and social change, such as the Hundred Years War, the Black Death and a “mini Ice Age” with horrible weather patterns that destroyed crops. Historians debate the total number of people who were killed in these witchcraft persecutions between 1400 – 1700, from 50,000 to 150,000 or even more.

By 1560 – 1600, the “craze” phenomenon emerged, especially in Europe and the British Isles - right before colonial settlement in New England. Hundreds of people were executed in Great Britain from the 1560s to the 1680s. Conviction rates in England were around 50%, much lower than elsewhere. In New England, by contrast, the conviction rate was lower, at about 25%, showing the caution with which accusations were often treated. By the time the colonies were settled, the Biblical injunction, “**Thou shall not suffer a witch to live,**” (Exodus, 22:18) was part of Colonial law.

In New England, ordinary people feared witches, because they were capable of causing injury, illness, and death to both humans and animals. In such tight-knit communities, neighbors depended on neighbors. Often the dispute started small; with a quarrel or two, a trade dispute, land boundaries, family illness, or the death of a child. The death of a cow, beer gone flat or butter that couldn't be churned could all be attributed to supernatural forces. Seemingly unconnected occurrences could escalate into accusations, especially if other



neighbors agreed. The witch was accused of *maleficium*: a highly feared ability to cause harm to others by supernatural means.

Townpeople feared *maleficium* for personal reasons. Church and town leaders feared that witches—operating on the Devil's instructions—would undermine the stable Puritan society the settlers sought to build. Yet prosecuting witches was another matter. Accusations did not always result in trials, and evidence was always difficult to judge.

The most urgent cases involved possession – fits, contortions, outbursts and strange behavior – that could not be explained by any “medical” condition. The possessed took center stage, and described “virtual” harm or invisible torture, amidst screams and contortions. “Spectral” evidence included this testimony, yet magistrates and jurors often disagreed on how to weigh this evidence.

Once accused, an alleged witch would endure an invasive series of examinations, questioning and even a water “ducking” test. Other women were called upon to examine the accused for “witch’s marks,” which served as evidence of her pact with the Devil. Neighbors came forward to testify (either in support or against the accusation) or signed petitions. Often they could supply little hard evidence for the case.

In many cases, the woman was assumed guilty and her confession was sought as solid evidence towards conviction. Groups of women and intimidating magistrates would apply psychological and social pressure, urging the accused to name others and confess “voluntarily.” In rare cases, torture was considered a necessary means to secure a confession. In some cases, magistrates decided on light punishment, which included fines, probation or outright banishment from the community.

In New England, 80% of those accused were women. Witchcraft has long been associated with women for multiple reasons. People believed that women were weak, more prone to sin than men and more likely to seek an alliance with the Devil. Puritans saw the family as the center of a divinely ordained, orderly society. A woman’s duty was to get married and bear children. Women had less power in the community and were especially vulnerable if they had no male heirs or children. If a woman spoke out against injustice, she was also held under suspicion. Women who did not accept their subordinate place—as well as men who did not do their duty as the head of the household—seemed likely to be rebelling against God.



The importance of this history cannot be understated. The Salem craze was atypical of what happened throughout New England and the Connecticut stories paint a different picture. Witches survive in the imagination of popular culture and the media, from the Wicked Witch of the West to Buffy the Vampire Slayer. This exhibition and Educator Guide seeks to temper these representations by contextualizing the witchcraft trials within the Puritan New England society. As we study the other trials, the sequence of events, the evidence and the people involved, we can learn from the past, inform the present and create a better understanding for the future.

Big Ideas & Essential Questions

These themes and accompanying essential questions were developed with regional educators and museum education staff at the Summer Teacher Institute in July, 2014.

BIG IDEA: Tolerance

Should we strive for tolerance or acceptance?

What does it mean to tolerate / to accept?

In what way is tolerance hindered or supported by social beliefs?

Is tolerance the only goal?

FOCUS QUESTION: Did tolerance exist in Puritan society?

BIG IDEA: Influence

Do Puritan beliefs influence America today?

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

What religions / ideologies / backgrounds / beliefs influence politics today? How?

Should they or should they not have this influence in American government?



BIG IDEA: Individual / Community

What is the balance between personal rights and community goals / expectations?

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

How is cultural identity beneficial or detrimental?

What are the benefits of a rigid society vs. a flexible society?

Can an individual really make a difference?

How did CT Governor John Winthrop, Jr. influence ...

How did Katherine Branch influence ...

BIG IDEA: Law / Due Process

When, if ever, should individual rights be compromised by the government for the safety of a community or nation?

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

How have evidentiary standards changed over the course of US History?

How has the interpretation of law changed over the course of US History?

How does hysteria / panic / fear / revenge / retribution / extremism influence political actions by a government?

Do laws follow people or people follow laws?

Accused: Fairfield's Witchcraft Trials

Excerpts from the exhibition by artist, author and illustrator Jakob Crane [located at the end of this document]

Panels 2, 3 & 4 outline the first recorded execution for witchcraft in America, Else Young of Windsor in 1647.

Questions:

Q: What are some possible reasons why Else Young was accused of being a witch?

A: Quarrelling with a neighbor, illness, dead livestock, being a difficult person, healing or fortune telling.

Q: Which reasons do you think seem more likely than the others? Why?

Q: If someone today was "a difficult person," what might happen to them?



Online Teacher Resources – Lesson Plans and Student Activities

The resources below can be utilized to complement a field trip to the Fairfield Museum as suggested pre and post activities. These resources can also be implemented in the classroom as stand-alone “mini-activities.”

These resources give excellent background information for the study of the witchcraft trials in New England. The links also provide non-fiction text and articles for student reading and are followed by suggested questions for writing assignments and/or discussion.

Teachers are strongly suggested to review these materials to determine if the content meets grade level comprehension and expectations.

PRE-ACTIVITY

1) Background Information: Pilgrims vs. Puritans – What’s the Difference?

Puritanism – History Channel

<http://www.history.com/topics/puritanism>

This short video discusses why the English colonists settled the Massachusetts Bay Colony and helps to explain the differences between Puritans and Pilgrims. Differences of religious beliefs helped to shape present-day New England (although the video does not get into detail on Connecticut history). (2:42)

2) Background Information: What is Puritanism? – Scholastic

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/puritanism>

Print the article from the link above and have students read the article. Suggested questions to answer and for discussion are below:

- Why did the Puritans flee England?
- What is an example of a Puritan ideal?
- Did they believe in the separation of church and state?
- How did they influence American beliefs?

3) Background Information: Puritan Ideals are Tested

God in America, The New Adam - PBS & Frontline

<http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/study-guide/one.html>

This selection focuses on the New World and religion with special attention to the stories of John Winthrop and Anne Hutchinson.



Suggested Activity:

From the link above, have students read:

A Model of Christian Charity by John Winthrop

The Puritan Experiment

Religious Individualism and Anne Hutchinson

Discussion:

What crisis did Anne Hutchinson cause?

How did Anne threaten the Puritan community, its beliefs and ideals?

How did individualism affect freedom of religion in later U.S. history?

POST-ACTIVITY

The Devil in the Shape of a Woman Review – University of Virginia

<http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/karlsenrev.html>

A review of Carol Karlsen's book *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. The article gives a short explanation of Karlsen's argument on the role of women and their accusers in the trials.

- What was the role of women in Puritan society?
- Why were the witchcraft trials predominantly accusing women?

Witch Trials in the 21st Century – National Geographic

http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/news/witch-trials-21st-century/?ar_a=1

Note to teachers: This article cannot be downloaded or printed. Students must read the article on a computer or tablet device.

This article discusses witchcraft in the 21st century. This modern-day phenomenon continues to result in the accusation, trial, and sometimes execution of men and women today.

Writing Prompt

Disborough was released, having spent a year in jail. We do not know much about what became of her, Elizabeth Clawson or Katherine Branch in the years that followed.

What do you think happened to the people involved in witchcraft accusations five or ten years later?



**Additional Online Resources For
Lesson Plans, Student Activities & Primary Sources**

Salem Witch Trials: Documentary Archive – University of Virginia
<http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/home.html>

Primary sources on the Salem Witch Trials, including court records, personal letters, record books, and diaries. This site also includes historical maps, archival collections from New England libraries, and contemporary books with additional information.

Salem Witch Trials: Understanding the Hysteria – National Endowment for the Humanities
<http://edsitement.neh.gov/launchpad-salem-witch-trials>

An excellent source for lesson plans, essential questions, primary sources and group activities that encourage students to engage in analytical thinking about Puritan life.

Which of You Is a Witch? The Salem Witchcraft Trials and The Crucible
– National Teacher Training Institute
http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/ntti/resources/lessons/1_witch/

Through the activities presented in this lesson, students will gain comprehensive background knowledge of the Salem witch trials in preparation for reading Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

The Salem Witch Trials

Chronology of Events Relating to the Salem Witchcraft Trials – Famous American Trials
http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/asal_ch.htm

An extensive timeline outlining the events that occurred in Salem from 1629 until 1992, from the settlement of the town, to the dedication of a witchcraft memorial.

The Witchcraft Trials in Salem: a Commentary – Famous American Trials
http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL_ACCT.HTM

This source discusses the causes of the Salem Witch Trials, why it occurred in Salem, and other circumstances that lead to the events. Douglas Linder explains how several unavoidable factors lead to the Salem hysteria.



Teacher Background Information - Salem

Before Salem, the First American Witch Hunt – History Channel

<http://www.history.com/news/before-salem-the-first-american-witch-hunt>

An article on the 1662 Hartford witchcraft trials and the ensuing hysteria.

Tapping the Scales of Justice: Witches and Witchcraft – Connecticut Judicial Branch Law Libraries

<http://www.jud.ct.gov/lawlib/history/witches.htm>

A quick summary of Connecticut's history with the witch trials beginning in 1642 and wrapping up in 1750. This site features links referencing the witchcraft trials to primary sources in Connecticut's colonial records.

New England Witchcraft Trials Overview

John Demos, in *Entertaining Satan*, studied the historical documents from the New England trials. He outlined the chart below to show the various steps, traits and outcomes accusations of witchcraft often went through.

<i>Accusation:</i>	evidence of witchcraft accusation or suspicion, but without recorded legal action
<i>Complaint:</i>	some formal step taken (such as a petition or deposition)
<i>Presentment/Indictment:</i>	appearance before the courts by the accused
<i>Slander:</i>	cases in which legal action was initiated by suspected witch
<i>Repeater:</i>	cases in which the accused had been previously in court
<i>Confession</i>	the accused confesses; a guilty charge or execution highly likely

In the case of a trial, results would include an acquittal, conviction or execution.



In New England (excluding the 20 people executed in Salem in 1692):

- There were at least 100 cases involving witchcraft in New England. Many more are possible, but sparse records cannot give details
- Females outnumbered males 4:1
- 78% were female
- 16 people were executed for witchcraft, 11 of these were in Connecticut, 2 male (both husbands of the accused)
- Witchcraft figured in 52 cases in Connecticut and New Haven colonies
- Of the 14 convictions in CT, two were reversed and one reprieved

Who was likely to be accused? Traits include:

- Over 40 years old
- Single or widowed women, those over 60 especially vulnerable / past childbearing age
- Women who stood to inherit property (because they had no sons or brothers)
- Outspoken and displayed pride, self-assertion or anger (especially in front of neighbors)
- Women who were dissatisfied with their lot in life; hardship, despair, sometimes bad luck
- Some practiced folk medicine, mid-wifery

Why women?

- Women were seen as weak and drawn to Satan by promises of wealth, fine clothes, and future husbands
- Threatened divine and social order by rejecting God or gender norms
- Women had the responsibility for healing and nurturing. There was fear that this could be turned towards evil ends.



New England Witchcraft Trials Timeline

Details from trials and quotes are from the records of the General Court. Much of this information is sparse and many more accusations of witchcraft could have occurred.

December 1, 1642

A law passed by the General Court stated that anyone convicted of being a witch would be put to death.

1620-1646: no witchcraft prosecutions

1647

Also (Alice) Young, from Wethersfield, was the first person in Connecticut and the colony to be tried and executed for witchcraft. She was found guilty of having "consulteth with a familiar spirit" and developing a relationship with Satan.

1647-1663:

- Zealous period of witch-hunting, trials and prosecutions
- Intense witch fear
- 34 people tried, nearly half were convicted and hung
- Connecticut executed 11 of the 15 convicted in New England
- This was also period of mass witch trials in England

1664-88:

- Period of skepticism sets in; witchcraft prosecutions decrease
- Only a few went to trial, none were executed

1688-1693:

- Resurgence of witchcraft prosecutions
- Convergence of ministers and townspeople who agreed on the guilt of the accused
- Eventual rejection of spectral evidence in Salem trials led to demise of witchcraft prosecutions

In Fairfield County

1651: Goody Bassett Hangs in Stratford

- May 1651: the governor and two other men were called to go down to Stratford "to keep court upon the trial of Goody Bassett for her life."
- She was condemned, confessed her guilt, and was hanged as a witch.
- When she was condemned, she looked around at the court and said that "there was another witch in Fairfield that held her head up high."



1653: Goody Knapp Hangs in Fairfield

- Accused of being the witch in Fairfield to whom Goody Bassett referred
- A committee of women was appointed to examine her body for witch's marks
- Under pressure to name other witches, she said, "I have sins enough to answer for already, and I will not add this to my condemnation."
- She came close to naming Mary Staples (whom she thought had testified against her) but did not, saying, "I must not render evil for evil."
- But just before she was hanged, while she stood on the gallows, she asked to speak with town leader Roger Ludlow
- He later said that she had whispered the name Mary Staples to him
- Thomas Staples, determined to defend his wife's name, tried to have Ludlow arrested, then sued him for slander
- The court ruled against Ludlow, ordering him to pay Thomas Staples damages
- By ruling against one of the most important men in the colony, the court halted what could have become another witch-hunt and affirmed the rule of law
- There wasn't another witchcraft trial in the area for almost a generation

October 28, 1692: Fairfield Trial of Goody Clawson and Goody Disborough

Katherine Branch, a servant girl living with Daniel and Abigail Wescott, becomes possessed. The cause is determined to be witchcraft. She accuses six women in total and two go to trial: Elizabeth Clawson and Mercy Disborough (or Disbrow). After many deliberations between the jurors, magistrates, ministers and the colonial government in Hartford, the jury acquits Goody Clawson and finds Goody Disborough guilty. Fearing more hysteria, three magistrates grant Disborough a reprieve based on a technicality. Recent events in Salem should be "warning enough" they write.

1697

The last people to be tried for witchcraft in the colonies were Winifred Benham and Winifred Benham Jr. from Wallingford, Connecticut. They were acquitted.

1715

The law allowing capital punishment for witches still exists when public records are reprinted.

1750

The law allowing capital punishment for witches disappears when public records are reprinted.



Vocabulary

adjudicate: to make a formal judgment or decision about a problem or disputed matter

circumstantial: pointing indirectly toward someone's guilt but not completely proving it

consensus: general agreement in opinions, values, or preferences

covenant: to agree, especially by lease, deed, or other legal contract. Witches were accused of entering into a covenant with the Devil, renouncing the Puritan faith.

defamation: the action of damaging the good reputation of someone; slander or libel

heresy: rejection or dissent from the established doctrine of a church

heretics: someone who has opinions that challenge religious, political, or social views

incarcerated: to be put in jail

incriminate: to cause (someone) to appear guilty of or responsible for something (such as a crime)

indictment: a formal written accusation for a serious crime

jurisdiction: territory to which a set of laws extends

magistrates: public official with judicial or executive powers

maleficium: to cause harm to others by supernatural means

political witch hunt: a group or the media exerts pressure on a person or political party, questioning their political views or motives, such as McCarthyism

"prove beyond a reasonable doubt": if the jurors or judge have no doubt as to the someone's guilt, then they are guilty

Puritan: Protestants who fled England in order to practice their religion freely, have very strict moral and religious disciplines

scapegoating: someone blamed for the wrongs of others

slander: a false statement intended to injure someone's reputation

spectral evidence / testimony: a victim who appears possessed and "sees" her invisible attacker (s), describing what is happening and who is causing harm

statute: a law

subversive: to undermine or overthrow an established authority

superstition: beliefs with no basis in fact

vindictive: desiring revenge

water "ducking" test: an accused witch is bound, hand and feet, and thrown into water, such as a pond. If she floated, she was a witch. If she did not, then she was innocent.



Young Adult Books

Aronson, Marc, *Witch-Hunt: Mysteries of the Salem Witch Trials*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003.

Crane, Jakob and Timothy Decker. *Lies in the Dust: a Tale of Remorse from the Salem Witch Trials*. Islandport Press; 25 September 2014.

Hearn, Julie. *The Minister's Daughter*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2005.

Hoobler, Dorothy. *Priscilla Foster: the story of a Salem girl*. Parsippany, NJ: Silver Burdett Press, 1997.

Lasky, Kathryn. *Beyond The Burning Time*. Scholastic, 1996.

Martin, Michael. *The Salem Witch Trials*. Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2005.

Petry, Ann. *Tituba of Salem Village*. Harper Trophy, 1991.

Rinaldi, Ann. *A Break with Charity: A Story about the Salem Witch Trials*. Gulliver Books, 2003.

Schanzer, Rosalyn. *Witches! The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem*. National Graphic Society, 2011.

Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. Laurel Leaf, 1978. Grades 5 and up.

Yolen, Jane. *The Salem Witch Trials: An Unsolved Mystery from History*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2004. Grades 3 – 6.

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John Demos, *The Enemy Within: 2,000 Years of Witch Hunting*. (New York : Viking, 2008)

Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem: The Other Witch Hunt of 1692* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Lawrence Goodheart, *The Solemn Sentence of Death: Capital Punishment in Connecticut* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011)

David Hall, *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Duke University Press, 2008)



Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. (W. W. Norton & Company, 1998)

Taylor, John M. *The Witchcraft Delusion: The Story of Witchcraft Persecutions in Seventeenth-Century New England, Including Original Trial Transcripts*. Grammercy Books, 1995. Grades 8 and up.

R.G. Tomlinson, *Witchcraft Trials of Connecticut*. (Hartford, Bond Press, 1978)

R.G. Tomlinson, *Witchcraft Prosecution: Chasing the Devil in Connecticut* (Picton Press, 2012)

Walter Woodward, *New England's Other Witch-hunt: The Hartford Witch-hunt of the 1660s and Changing Patterns in Witchcraft Prosecution*. (Organization of American Historians, *Magazine of American History*, July, 2003)

Else Young:

The First Recorded
Execution For
Witchcraft In America

We do not know why Else Young of Windsor, Connecticut was the first person in the colonies to be **executed for witchcraft**. Only two simple journal entries written in 1647 exist to record the incident. Matthew Grant gives us her name and the date of the hanging, while Massachusetts Bay Governor John Winthrop writes:

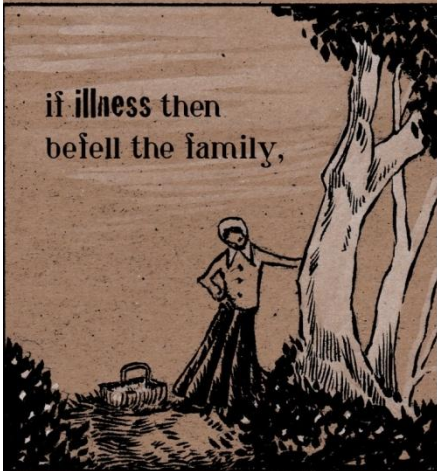
“One...of Windsor
arraigned and
executed for a witch.”



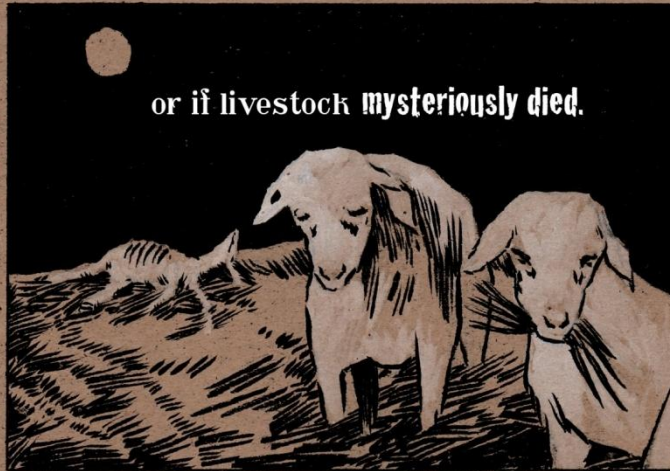
Young may have come
under **suspicion** after
quarrelling with
a neighbor,



if **illness** then
befell the family,



or if **livestock mysteriously died.**



Perhaps she was known as a difficult person,
one whose **Grudges** and muttered **curses** might
lead to **evil-doing.**



If she was known for skill in **magical healing** or **fortune-telling**, **shadows** could have easily fallen over her name.

