

An excerpt from a graphic novel created for the special exhibition *Accused: Fairfield's Witchcraft Trials* at the Fairfield Museum and History Center. Learn more at fairfieldhistory.org.

Enjoying the graphic novel? Purchase a copy in the Museum Shop.



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370 Beach Road, Fairfield, CT | 203-259-1598

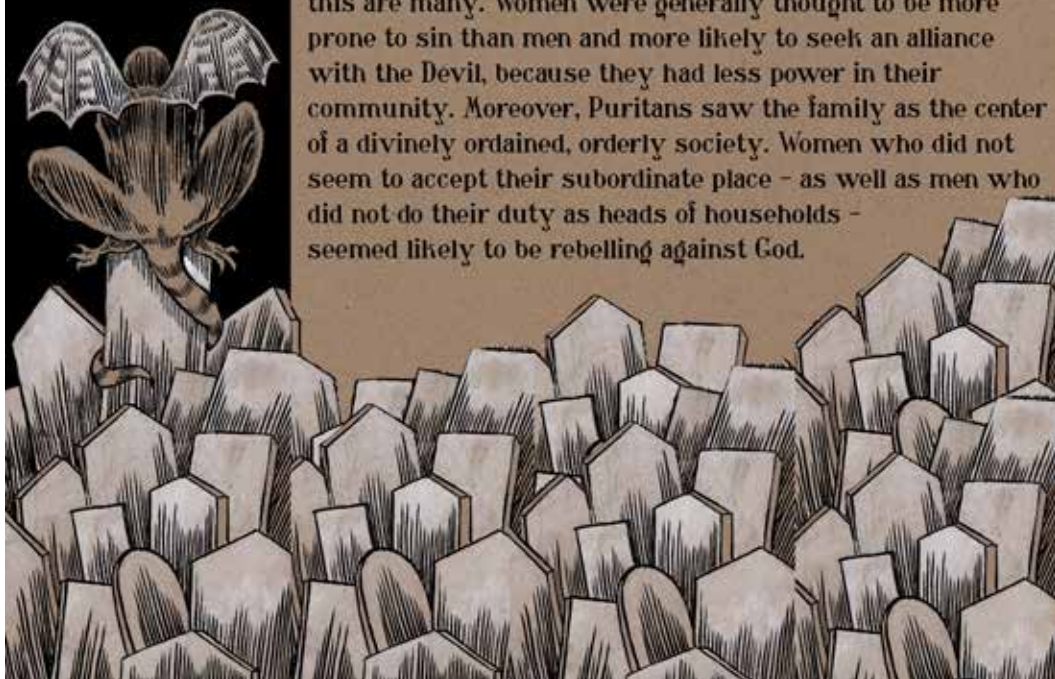
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Witchcraft Beliefs

Belief in witchcraft was one of the deeply-held beliefs that colonists carried with them from England. It was rooted in both longstanding European folk traditions and Biblical teachings, including the passage "Thou shall not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus, 22:18). In New England, ordinary people feared witches, because they were thought to be capable of causing injury, illness, and death to both humans and animals. Furthermore, church and town leaders feared that witches - operating on the Devil's instructions - would undermine the stable Puritan society the settlers sought to build.

Witchcraft prosecutions followed varying patterns in different periods and locales. Hundreds of people were executed in Great Britain from the 1500s to the 1680s; an especially intense period of witch-hunting occurred in the mid-1600s. Conviction rates in England were around 50%. In New England, by contrast, the conviction rate was lower, at about 25%, showing the caution with which accusations were often treated.

Witchcraft had long been associated with women. In New England, 80% of those accused were women. The reasons for this are many. Women were generally thought to be more prone to sin than men and more likely to seek an alliance with the Devil, because they had less power in their community. Moreover, Puritans saw the family as the center of a divinely ordained, orderly society. Women who did not seem to accept their subordinate place - as well as men who did not do their duty as heads of households - seemed likely to be rebelling against God.



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Conflict in a Small Community

Witchcraft accusations emerged from conflicts among neighbors in very small colonial communities. For instance, at the time that Goody Inapp was executed in 1653, Fairfield was a town of about four hundred people. Reputation was crucial, and stories about questionable behavior were passed quickly from person to person, sometimes exaggerated in the telling. People in these communities depended on each other and were closely tied together for everything from defending the town to weaving cloth, helping with a birth, or building a home. Although they knew that they were supposed to be Christian neighbors, bound together in a united community, neighbors often came into conflict with one another. Everyday tensions could eventually build into accusations of witchcraft, if one person became convinced that the other was capable of real evil.



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Witchcraft Comes To Fairfield

We don't even know her first name.



But we know that in 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."



And we know that she was condemned,



confessed her guilt,



and was hanged as a witch.



When she was condemned, she looked around the court and said,



There was another witch in Fairfield that held her head up high.



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