

I have seen many people ask why **people acted** the way they did in 1692. In the latter half of the 1600s the Age of Enlightenment started in Europe among the thinkers there. It slowly gained adherence by the upper class and finally slipped across the ocean and by 1725 scientific method was being accepted. But in 1692 people acted on what they had been taught. We must understand witchcraft beliefs go back to before written history, and apparently in most or all cultures.

‘The belief in witchcraft and its practice seem to have existed among all primitive peoples. Both in ancient Egypt and in Babylonia it played a conspicuous part, as existing records plainly show. It will be sufficient to quote a short section from the recently recovered Code of Hammurabi (about 2000 B.C.). It is there prescribed,

*“If a man has laid a charge of witchcraft and has not justified it, he upon whom the witchcraft is laid shall go to the holy river; he shall plunge into the holy river and if the holy river overcome him, he who accused him shall take to himself his house.”*¹

The above gives the first water test of a witch, jump in the river and if you drown the guy who called you out gets your goods. Later among Europeans the water test would be if you drown, too bad, if you float we will kill you so too bad again.

The various sources also states “It is not easy to draw a clear distinction between magic and witchcraft.” Both are superhuman magnifications, but witchcraft is usually considered magic with the aid of supernatural or diabolical being and includes a pact with that being.

In Persia, Egypt and other early civilizations various sources point to the court magicians who would come and advise the king or pharaoh. We see references in the Christian and Jewish Bibles of this practice, Moses talking with the Pharaoh and turning his staff into a snake, Daniel in Babylon being thrown to the lions and surviving.

Around 700 BC we have the story of Circe in Homer’s *The Odyssey* which shows her to be a beautiful woman capable of turning Men into swine. This may not have been too hard in some cases. This is supposed to be the first story of a beautiful woman using magic potions to change people. Men who used the same tactics were apparently acceptable.²

In 1611 King James I (England) VI (Scotland) had a new Bible in the English language translated and published. This was to be the cream of the crop of all English language Bibles. He gathered scholars and poets and took the Vulgate Bible and translated it into the vernacular and had the Psalms updated as recognizable poetry. The King James Bible was the main Bible in many churches for almost 400 years, it is only in my lifetime that other translations have been accepted by many believers.

In Exodus chapters 21, 22, and 23 we see a list of laws directly after the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 22:18 it says “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” Difficulties with the interpretation

¹ Catholic Encyclopedia *Witchcraft* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15674a.htm> Accessed 2/7/2019

² Turkilsen, Debbie. *An Examination of Ancient Greek and Roman Witches throughout Literature* https://www.academia.edu/3672405/An_Examination_of_Ancient_Greek_and_Roman_Witches_throughout_Literature Accessed 4/3/2019

make it hard to know exactly what problem the early Jews were trying to solve. Some scholars have indicated that this meant that you couldn't allow a poisoner to live, other say sorcerer or necromancer. In the story of the Witch of Endor (not so named in the Bible) she was called "a woman proficient in necromancy". She called upon the ghost of Samuel to show himself to Saul, even though it was a prohibited practice, 1 Samuel 28:7.

"The strong condemnation of witches and other ritual specialists with whom they are often grouped may be the result of an attempt by ancient Israelites to distinguish their religious practices and beliefs from those of surrounding cultures, as well as to provide central state control of all forms of religious observance."³ The ancient Jewish religion had only Levites and sacrificial priests, no magicians. Yet with the number of references to various magical practices in the Bible, traditions from other cultures and times must have hung on over the centuries.

This is the culture the Puritans grew up in. The 1500's and 1600's were very much steeped in Bible reading. Now, for the first time, they could read the Bible in their own language. Different interpretations were based on both the reader's understanding and the translation available. This helped to confuse matters and make divisions into different sects possible for the first time. Prior to this period, everyone who could read had to read the Bible in Latin.

This confusion of Bibles lead King James to issue the one scholarly Bible with Psalms that had songs that could be put to music. It is possible that James himself dictated the wording of Exodus 22:18, James definitely believed in witches. In 1597 he wrote *Demonology* setting out his personal beliefs in Satan and witches. Some believe he might have "updated" the language about witches from what had been there before. He was sure that he was cursed. Going back to the ancient Israeli language it is hard to know what the original meaning was.

When things went wrong in the dark of winter, Puritan's had it on the best authority that the devil was out to get them. It was known the devil lurked in wild places (like their woods) and motivated the heathens (anyone without their beliefs) and tempted the weak (mostly women). Therefor in their time of extreme anxiety, with war, death, taxes, dark of winter and even small pox, it must be the devil when little girls cried out and the adults couldn't understand why.

Besides the war and the war dead, the small pox, uncertain political changes from home rule to being ruled by the King and parliament, religious tolerance suddenly being inflicted on what had been a uniform society, there was infighting in how their house of worship should be lead. For years the area asked to have their own meeting house but the church in Salem had rejected the plea because all the members belonged there. However the long trek to Salem for meeting was difficult for some to make at all and in winter it could be impossible for all.

In March "1672 Salem Village is set off from Salem as a Parish with authority to hire a minister, build a meetinghouse, and gather taxes for public improvements."⁴ "From the beginning, there was conflict from those in Salem Towne who opposed the building of a separate church, as well

³ Metzger, Bruce M., Coogan, Michael D. Editors, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Oxford University Press 1993 page 805

⁴ Salem Witch Trials: Documentary Archive and Transcription Project. <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Danvers.html> accessed 6/4/2019

as those in Salem Village, regarding the choice of a minister. Over the next several years the dissension would divide the community ... Though this was not unusual in many New England communities, many historians believe that Salem Village had a greater amount of conflict than was typical. During the 1670's-80's the new church's first three ministers would all step down, unsatisfied with the position, the church, and the village itself.”⁵

Reverend James Bayley moved to Salem Village in October 1672, he was three years out of Harvard and was not yet ordained. This meant that he was limited in what services he could provide. He, and the next two ministers, could not administer communion or admit candidates to formal church membership so the congregants remained formally attached to Salem Town Church or other Churches in the area. Five farmers donated a 40 acre plot where he could build his house, but that same year 14 villagers did not pay their taxes for church support.

The issue was who had to authority to call or fire a minister. As Salem Village was not a town, its main authority came from the church. Salem Towne Church got into the fray and sided with Bayley, which probably stirred things up more. Even the Colonial Legislature had to try to mediate the conflict.

Accused of neglecting his church duties and omitting his family prayers, Bayley gave up and left town in 1680. He continued his ministry in Killingworth, Connecticut and then became a doctor in Roxbury, Massachusetts. The Village continued to be divided.

George Burroughs came in 1680, ten years out of Harvard.⁶ He had married Hannah Fisher in 1673 and the family moved to Falmouth, Maine, in 1674 where he was the pastor until the town was destroyed in a raid August 11, 1676. The Native American raid killed 32 killed or kidnapped and left the survivors, 10 men 6 women and 16 children including Burroughs and Mercy Lewis and her family, on an island in Casco Bay where they had to forage for food until they were rescued.

In 1680 Burroughs accepted the call to Salem Village from Salisbury, Massachusetts where he had been serving as minister. At this point he had been serving as minister in two communities for about six years with no known discord. At first Burroughs and his family stayed with John Putnam, Sr., until the parsonage was repaired. After moving into the parsonage he hired Mercy Lewis as a servant.

It was reported that the residents were feuding leaving Salem Village in a continual state of conflict and Bayley left after he had been caught between feuding factions and no longer was being paid. Burroughs had the same problems plus was faced by hostility by those who had supported Bayley.

According to the book *Salem Witchcraft* by Charles W. Upham:

⁵ Legends of America: Salem Village, Massachusetts – Witch Hunt City. <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ma-salemvillage/> accessed 6/4/2019

⁶ The Witchcraft Trial of Reverend George Burroughs <https://historyofmassachusetts.org/reverend-george-burroughs-salem/> accessed 6/4/2019

“Immediately upon calling to the village to reside, he encountered the hostility of those persons who, as the special friends of Mr. Bayley, allowed their prejudices to be concentrated upon his innocent successor. The unhappy animosities arising from this source entirely demoralized the Society, and, besides making it otherwise very uncomfortable to a minister, led to a neglect and derangement of all financial affairs. In September, 1681, Mr. Burrough’s wife died, and he had to run in debt for her funeral expenses. Rates were not collected, and his salary was in arrears.”

Burroughs had to borrow the money for his wife’s funeral from John Putnam and had to marry again quickly to care for his young children. He married Sarah Ruck Hathorne. By 1683 the salary for Burroughs was stopped and he left town. In May of 1683 he visited to meet the village committee to settle his accounts and was arrested for nonpayment of the loan for his first wife’s funeral, it was quickly settled. About this time Sarah died and he married again.

Deodat Larson arrived from Boston, another unordained minister he followed Burroughs. He served as pastor from 1685-1688. Although Larson tried to become ordained he failed. Things continued to deteriorate and he left at the end of his contract in 1688. The fighting of the two groups in the village are generally attributed by the Proctor and Putnam spheres of influence. Many members of the church moved their membership back to Salem Town during this time.⁷

June 1689 Samuel Parris came to Salem Village.⁸ In 1690 Burroughs moved to Wells, Maine where he was preaching in 1692.

⁷ Legends of America: Salem Village, Massachusetts – Witch Hunt City. <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ma-salemvillage/2/> accessed 6/5/2019

⁸ The Vengeful Putnams of Salem Village, Massachusetts <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ma-putnam/2/> accessed 6/4/2019

On June 18th 1689 a general meeting was held with all the villagers to vote for a new minister.⁹ Samuel Parris was a guest-preacher around the Boston area. He was an ordained minister and was voted to the position. Parris then arrived in Salem Village, a village divided against itself. As an ordained minister he could give communion and accept members into the church, something the majority wanted. He was voted an annual salary of 66 pounds and firewood for the church and parsonage.

Parris had been born 1653, he started as a merchant and planter in London and Barbados and then attended Harvard in the 1670s. After his father died he returned to Barbados without graduating and tried again to be a merchant. In 1680 he returned to Boston to improve his lot, it is possible at this time he may have returned to Harvard to complete his degree. By 1688 he was ordained in some way and was doing utility preaching when he came to the attention of Salem Village.

As an ordained minister, Parris could accept members into the church and perform all the ceremonies. The church charter was finally signed November 19, 1689, at last they had a full church in the village. This made those who worked so hard to get a church happy, but others were not so enamored with this change.

Problems started right off, he was allowed the parsonage for the duration of his being an active minister in the contract, something Parris said he didn't see. Later he was given the parsonage in a second contract. Now that Salem Village had a full church it soon became plain that the church would be more intrusive and expensive than the village was accustomed to. Parris was not without faults, his theological conservatism and rigidity along with his efforts to make the church the center of the village created friction in an already volatile situation.

The two main spheres of influence in the village were the Porters and the Putnams. The Porter faction included John Porter, Sr., Daniel Andrew (his son-in-law), Joseph Hutchinson (a sawmill operator blamed for flooding the Putnams' farms), Joseph Porter, Thomas Porter, **Francis Nurse** (who had boundary disputes with Nathaniel Putnam), and that included the following families: Howe, **Towne**, Hobbs and Wildes of Topsfield for more boundary disputes. John Proctor who owned a tavern who sold to "outsiders". Philip English was also on the Porter side.

The Putnam clan elder was John Putnam (born 1580) married to Priscilla Gould in 1611 and that couple's seven children made up the center of the clan. They migrated to New England in about 1634 and were granted land in Salem Farms (Salem Village). The Putnams controlled much of the area in Salem Village and the village started to petition for separation from Salem Town in the late 1660's. Some farmers resented the authority that Salem Town had over them, and the distance to church meetings. This caused friction between town and village and between the various farm families.¹⁰

⁹ Legends of America: Salem Village, Massachusetts – Witch Hunt City. <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ma-salemvillage/2/> accessed 7/18/2019

¹⁰ Legends of America: The Vengeful Putnams of Salem Village, Massachusetts. <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ma-putnam/2/> accessed 10/27/19

The Putnams followed traditional Puritan beliefs of a simple but austere life. Salem Town had a thriving economy and rich merchants which Putnams thought did not live the communal life they followed. The Putnam family actively sought the church for the community, and once they gained it tried to control the community through it. Putnam allies were his brother Edward Putnam, brother-in-law Jonathan Walcott, the innkeeper Nathaniel Ingersoll who was Walcott's uncle and in competition with John Proctor for business.

Porters on the other hand gained wealth with their farming and invested in commercial opportunities in Salem Town and were active in the government. In 1672 a Porter sawmill dam flooded Putnam farms, the year the community finally got their own church. Porters enjoyed their relations to Salem Town and saw no need for a local church, possibly because of the local expense in raising rates to pay the minister and upkeep.¹¹

As Baker points out in *Storm of Witchcraft* on page 64-65 "There was a major shift in Politics and political leadership in the 1680s in towns throughout Massachusetts. The politics of deference gave way to a new order, as more men became actively involved in local politics. In large part, this was a response to two related factors: war and taxes. King Philip's War had placed a substantial new burden on each town to provide money and soldiers for the colony. Taxes skyrocketed during the war." ... "High taxes and a postwar economic slump meant the 1680s were a decade of hardship. In 1684, no less an authority than Governor Bradstreet warned Edward Randolph, 'The people here as you know are generally very poor.'"

As the political and financial problems continued to rile the colony, the war continued on and other things came up from smallpox to religious tolerance enforced by law added to their woes. The longstanding division between the Putnams and the Porters boiled up and in October 1691 a new Committee of Five was chosen from the Porter faction to run things and announced it would refuse to relinquish the ministry house and land to Parris and would no longer collect his salary.

¹¹ Legends of America, The Vengeful Putnams of Salem Village, Massachusetts.
<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ma-putnam/> accessed 10/27/19

The Parris household in 1691 consisted of the Reverend Samuel Parris, Elizabeth Eldridge Parris, his wife who was often ill, Thomas Parris born in 1681, Elizabeth Parris Jr. known as Betty born in 1682, Susannah born in 1687, Abigail Williams, age about 11 and possibly both a relative and servant, and two slaves, Tituba and John Indian apparently Native Americans. An African slave boy had died some time before.

At the end of November, 1691, Betty turned 9. With the change of administrators in the church in October 1691 it was announced they would refuse to relinquish the ministry house and land to Parris and would no longer collect his salary.¹² Even his allotment of fire wood was stopped, so either his slave or he himself would have to provide it or the house would be cold. Parris then began to preach that Satan was trying to destroy the church.¹³ Again, remember the trials of high taxes, war, political change and smallpox. All of this Betty would have heard at service, around town, and in her own home. Parris was probably not quiet about all the concerns and his opinions at home.

Betty was probably a very normal girl, but she was growing up in a church which emphasized that she needed to be of the chosen, that her actions would reflect her status and those who were bad would not go to Heaven. With her dad being very inflexible on many points of faith, one has to wonder what she was hearing day and night.

In the middle of January 1692, first Betty and then Abigail began to act strangely, to cry out or scream, acted as if they were in pain, and the descriptions vary but they made noises. One source says they barked like dogs. Some say they awoke screaming. Others give general symptoms. It is hard to understand what might have set them off at this distance. Nightmares and Hysteria? An ear infection and croup? Something was wrong.

Parris tried prayers and remedies, then called in the doctor after more than a month along with the Reverend John Hale. Neither men came up with any explanation except witchcraft. The girls were being troubled by witches. And so it began.

About that time Mary Sibley baked a witch cake. With Parris and his wife out of town on Thursday, February 25, Mary had Parris's slaves bake a rye bread mixed with urine from the two girls and fed it to the dog. This was white magic to allow her to know who was disturbing the girls. Soon the girls cried out against Tituba.¹⁴ Parris then turned the blame on Mary Sibley, chastising her from the pulpit for using "diabolical means" and saying this is what attracted the devil in the first place.

February 25th is also the day that Ann Putnam Jr. and Elizabeth Hubbard had their first demonic visitation. Ann was 12 year old daughter of Thomas Putnam, Elizabeth Hubbard was working as a maid for her aunt and uncle Rachel Griggs and Dr. William Griggs, possible the unknown

¹² Legends of America, Reverend Samuel Parris of Salem Village, Massachusetts.
<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ma-samuelparris/> accessed 11/1/2019

¹³ ThoughtCo., Biography of Elizabeth Parris, Accuser in the Salem Witch Trials
<https://www.thoughtco.com/elizabeth-betty-parris-biography-3530319> accessed 11/1/2019

¹⁴ Baker, Emerson W., *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience*. 2016, Oxford University Press paperback. Page 15

doctor who was caring for the girls. Ann soon called out against Sarah Good. Elizabeth spoke out against Sarah Good and also Sarah Osburn.

On February 29 Thomas Putnam and his brother Edward Putnam with Joseph Hutchinson and Thomas Preston went to Salem Town to start proceedings against the accused Tituba, Good and Osburn. The men swore out complaints accusing the women of witchcraft before magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne who issued warrants for the women's arrest.

The next day a hearing was held and the four girls faced the women. The women were questioned by Hathorne who seemed to believe the women guilty. Sarah Good was a poor woman with a temper who was known even to turn against those who helped her. Sarah Osburn was an ill widow who had previously upset the village when she purchased an indentured servant only to marry him.¹⁵ When the women denied they were responsible the girls acted out and appeared tormented.

Why did the girls act as they did is frequently asked. It was not Ergot in the rye bread, the symptoms of that isn't just like LSD, but includes rather horrible physical problems that were never mentioned. "Conversion disorder" also called mass hysteria comes from psychological anxieties being exhibited as physical symptoms such as strange behaviors and fits and can cause blindness or paralysis and aphasia or the inability to speak.¹⁶

Remember these girls were growing up in a fairly strict setting with war and taxes and illnesses and even pirates. At home in the Parris house Betty and Abigail were hearing and living through a time when things were getting tougher and possibly colder with no firewood coming from the community. Also the authority figure was ranting about how the devil was afoot in the woods and community. For Betty, the first girl, we have to assume that it all became just too much and she couldn't take it anymore and so converted her anxiety to screams.

Betty was reported to have been sent off to a relative in Boston quite soon after this. There her symptoms quickly disappeared and she is reported to have had a loving relationship with these people. She quietly grew up and married, having five children.¹⁷

¹⁵ Baker page 16-17.

¹⁶ Baker page 99-100

¹⁷ Baker page 234