

Susannah Martin at the Salem Witch Trials

by Rebecca Elizabeth Lane

“Double, double, toil and trouble” is a common phrase associated with witches. In 1692 nineteen people were accused of witchcraft in Salem, MA. One of the individuals was a distant relative of mine, **Susannah (North) Martin**, who was tried and executed as a witch on July 19, 1692. After the trials of 1692 the courts and judge wrote to the families of the wrongly accused, asking for forgiveness.

In the early 1620's, Susannah was born in Olney, Buckinghamshire, England, to **Richard North** and **Joan (Bartram) North**. She was a short, slightly plump, active girl of remarkable personal neatness. Others described her as being very outspoken, contemptuous of authority, and defiant in the face of slander, which had followed her for years.

Mother of Eight Children

Mr. **Cotton Mather** thought of her as impudent, scurrilous and wicked. While some said such mean things about her, a grave marker states that she was an honest and hard-working Christian woman. Susannah married **George Martin**, a blacksmith, on August 11, 1646, and together they had eight children before George's death in the early 1680's.

Even before the Salem Witch Trials, Mrs. Martin had been accused of Witchcraft. In 1667 her husband objected to her seat placement in the town meeting house. Only two years later in 1669, **William Sargent, Jr.**, made an accusation saying that Susannah had had a child with **Captain Wiggins** and was wringing its neck in the stable.

When the man entered she took the man by the collar and told him to stay quiet about the child, or she would kill him. **Thomas Sargent** supported his statement and also said her husband was an imp. In April of 1669 she was tried as a witch. The charges were dropped. A couple of days later, her husband successfully sued for slander.

Susannah also had a capital offense in her records. Apparently she had frightened **Elizabeth Brown** by sneaking up on her and then vanished from the woman's sight instantly. Many believed she was involved in witchcraft after that trial.

Accused of Witchcraft

Throughout the years leading up to the 1692 Salem Witch Trials, Susannah had been accused many times before. Goody Martin was one of the nine people **Abigail Hobbs** named as being a witch. On April 30, 1692 **Jonathan Walcott** and **Thomas Putnam** swore a complaint against Susannah.

Judges **Hathorne** and **Corwin** issued a warrant for her arrest. She was taken to Ingersoll's on May 2, 1692. During the time of her arrest **Joseph Ring** said he

saw her shape at his bedside and felt a pinch. However, instead of afflicting him, the pinch released him from a spell of speechlessness that had gripped him since August.

Supposedly, he had been snatched by witches and taken to their meetings so that he could observe them. To keep him quiet about it all, they put him into a state of speechlessness.

Depositions Against Susannah

After Mrs. Martin was arrested, many people gave depositions against her. On May 11 **William Brown, Barnard Peache** and **John Pressy** gave their depositions. On May 13 **Jervis** and **Josephs** [sic] **Ring** gave their accounts of Goody Martin. During the month of June, **John Allen, Elizabeth Clark, Mary Walcott, Joseph Knight, Robert Hubburd**, the **Putnams, Mercy Lewis, Sarah Vibber** and **Samuel Parris** gave their depositions against Susannah.

While people were making their statements against her, she underwent two physical examinations on June 2, 1692. During these she realized the fraudulent intent and had no hesitation in letting the examiners know about it. Supposedly, the intentions of the exams were to discover whether the accused had any physical abnormalities, especially that could be used to suckle familiars or even the devil himself.

Pleading Not Guilty

Finally, on June 26, 1692 Susannah's trial began. In the beginning she pleaded, "Not guilty." However, as soon as she walked into the town meetinghouse, all the "afflicted" girls went into convulsions. All of those who could speak accused Susannah, except **John** and **Elizabeth Indian**, who said that Goody Martin would never hurt anyone and that she never had hurt them.

Though acquitted of earlier witchcraft charges, **Robert Downer** brought these up again. Mr. Downer wasn't the only person who brought up old cases. Five others did the same thing.

'A false tongue will never make a guilty person'

Throughout the lengthy trial Susannah showed impatience and laughed at the afflicted girls and outbreaks. She also accused them of lying. "A false tongue will never make a guilty person," said Susannah as she was hauled back to jail after a mistrial was declared. Only four days later she had a second trial. She was brought back to Salem before the court of **Oyer** and **Terminer** when she was then hastily condemned to death.

Being found guilty, Susannah Martin was taken to Gallows Hill, also known as Witches Hill, because that was where the hangings took place for those convicted of witchcraft. On the way to her execution she was taken by the spot where Mrs. **Bishop** had been executed in June, Her final stop was at Gallows Hill.

Susannah's Execution on Gallows Hill

Her execution took place between 8:00 a.m. and noon on July 19. Susannah was hung with four other people. Two of the four, **Rebecca Nurse** and **Sarah Good**, have subsequently become famous for their deaths.

Goody Martin went to her death without making any last-minute confessions. Her behavior at the time of her execution helped convince a number of people that she was innocent, but there was still nothing they could do about her fate. Once all the trials were over a total of 141 people had been arrested; 19 were hung and one was pressed to death.

Apologies to the Wrongly Accused

Not long afterwards Cotton Mather wrote an apology for the court to the wrongly accused. In 1692 twelve jurors asked for forgiveness. In 1706 **Ann Putnam** asked for a pardon by confessing at the meetinghouse and was forgiven.

In 1709 twenty-one "witches" and heirs of "witches" had asked that their reputations be restored and to receive compensation. Of those executed only six people who had been accused of, condemned as and executed as witches had not received any compensation. The reversed verdicts of the courts required the colony to pay each of the families of the accused 578 pounds and 12 shillings.

No Compensation for Susannah's Heirs

Even though the courts overturned Susannah's verdict, her children never received anything, because they never applied to the courts for it. Two hundred and eighty-eight years later after her death Susannah's heirs finally cleared her name of all witchcraft charges.

A Martyr of Superstition

As a memorial to Goody Martin, Judge **Greenleaf Whittier** wrote a poem and a memorial to her. The poem is called "A Witch's Daughter." Goody Susannah Martin became and is known as a martyr of superstition.

Even though the people of Salem thought better of their accusations and the jurors apologized to the families of the accused, the outcome remained the same. Susannah (North) Martin had been tried and executed as a witch.

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