

Mysteries of the Salem Witch Trials: What Can We Learn?

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Key Events

- January 1692, Berry Parris (9) and Abigail Williams (11) develop illness with “fits” and convulsions
- Local doctor blames the Devil
- Another girl, Ann Putnam (11), develops similar symptoms
- Under pressure, the girls name Tituba (slave), Sarah Good (beggar), and Sarah Osbourne (elderly, poor woman) witches.



The numbers...



- 12 people executed for witchcraft in New England prior to 1692
- In Salem, between 1692 and 1693...
 - 185 people were accused (141 women)
 - 29 were found guilty
 - 19 were hanged
 - 1 was pressed to death
 - 5 died in prison

Key Figures in the Trials

THE ACCUSERS

- Betty Parris
- Abigail Williams
- Mercy Lewis
- Ann Putnam, Jr.
- Elizabeth Hubbard
- Mary Walcott
- Mary Warren
- Elizabeth Booth

THE ACCUSED

- Bridget Bishop
- Rebecca Nurse
- Sarah Good
- Tituba
- Sarah Osbourne
- Dorothy Good
- John Proctor
- Martha Corey
- Giles Corey
- Elizabeth Jackson
- George Burroughs
- Mary Eastey
- Alice Parker

Judges and Religious Leaders

- Jonathan Corwin
- John Hathorne
- William Stoughton
- Cotton Mather (*Memorable Providences*)
- Increase Mather
- Governor Phipps

Rebecca Nurse

- 71 years old when accused
- Upstanding citizen in Salem
- 39 members of the community signed a petition on her behalf
- Found innocent initially later found guilty



Giles Corey

- Accused in April 1692 and refused to plea
- Those who would not plea could not be tried.



- To keep him from “cheating” justice he was pressed.
- His last words were “curse the town of Salem.”

Witch Hunting History

- Between the 14th and 16th centuries in Europe, 40,000 to 50,000 people were executed as witches.
- Witch hunts were used to eliminate enemies.



- In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII declared witchcraft a heresy.
- In 1486, the book *Malleus Maleficarum* was published as a guide to witch hunts.

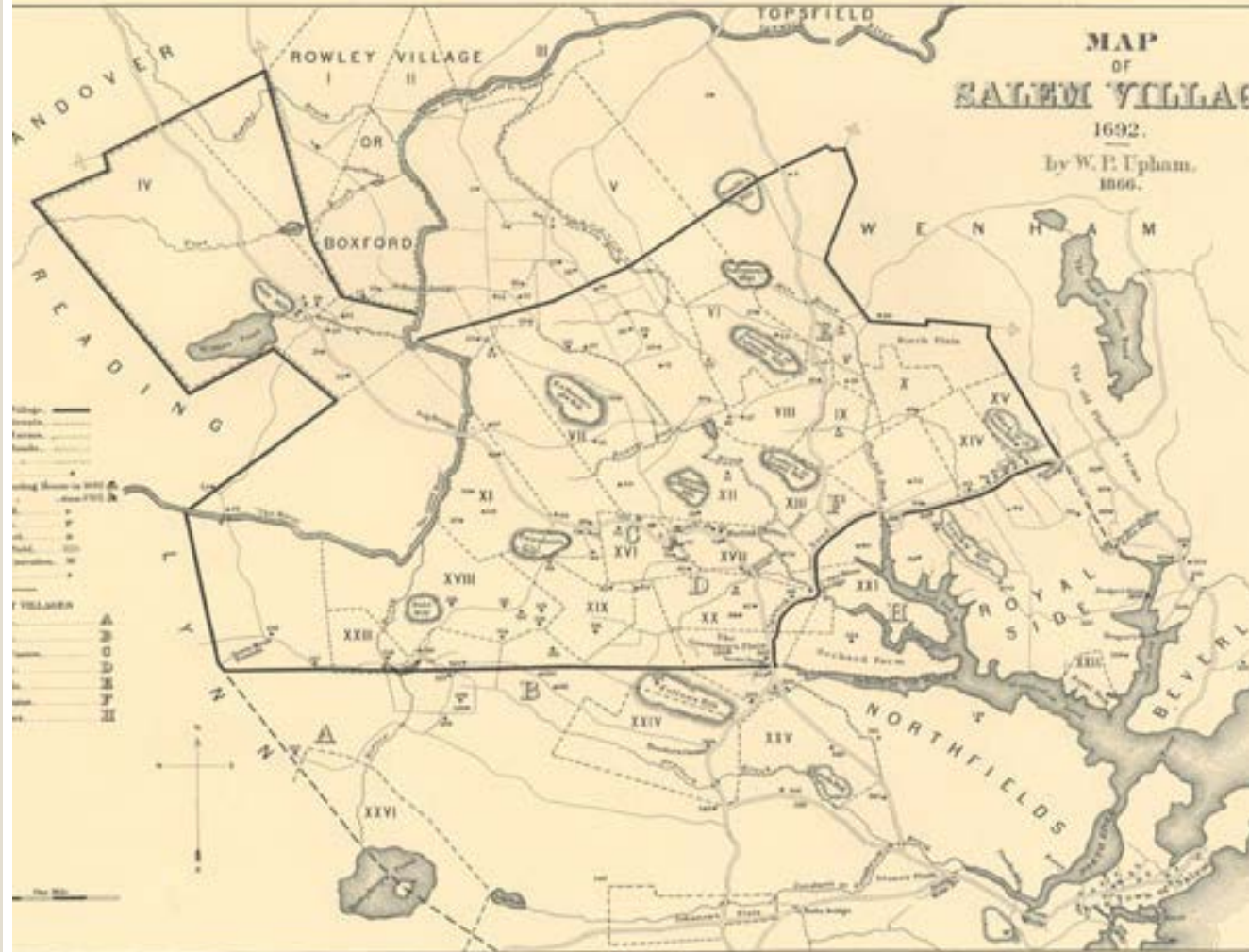
Witch Tests

- Evidence?
 - Devil's Mark
 - Swimming a witch
 - Torture to get confessions



Salem Village

- Witch hunting practices come with the Puritans
- 1648 was first witchcraft trial in New England
- Fear was very real
- Stress of living in dangerous "New World" and of the religion



The Ergot Hypothesis

- Symptoms seem “too real”
- Symptoms of the girls match ergot poisoning
- Ergot was thought to be “sun baked” kernels of rye
- The growing conditions were right.



Problem?

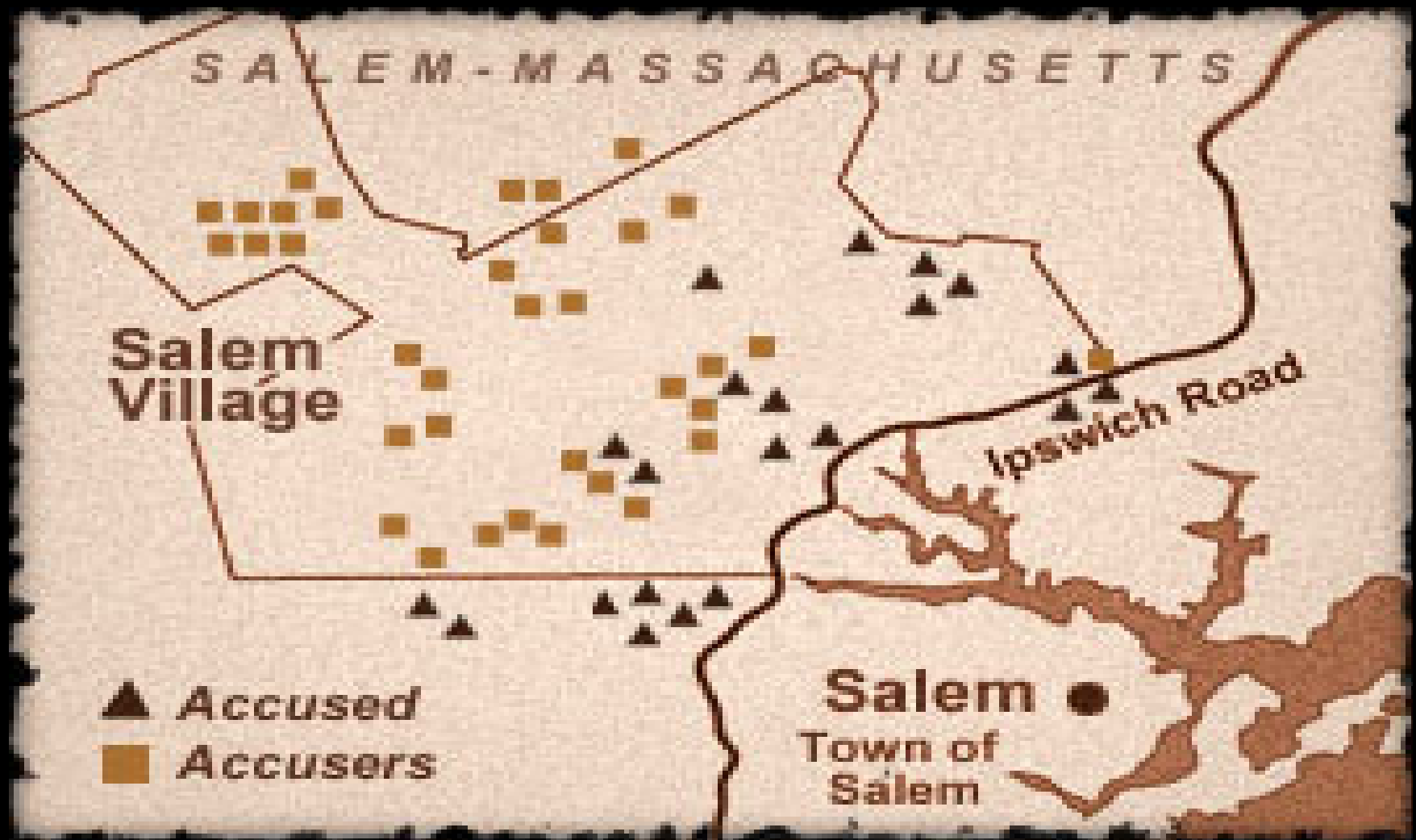
- Mary Warren admitted to faking.

Similar Symptoms?

- Convulsions
- Hallucinations
- Prickling, pinching, biting
- Vomiting



The Evidence



Was religion to blame?

- Satan was real and always looking for an opportunity.
- Predestination was stressful.
- Misogynistic religion
- No separation of church and state



Perceptions of Women

- Women were more likely to be persuaded by the Devil.
- Women were to be silent and docile.
- Women who went against the ideal were problematic.



Were they faking?



- Caught practicing white magic?
- Had power for the first time?
- Puppets of their families and town leaders?

The Factionalism Hypothesis

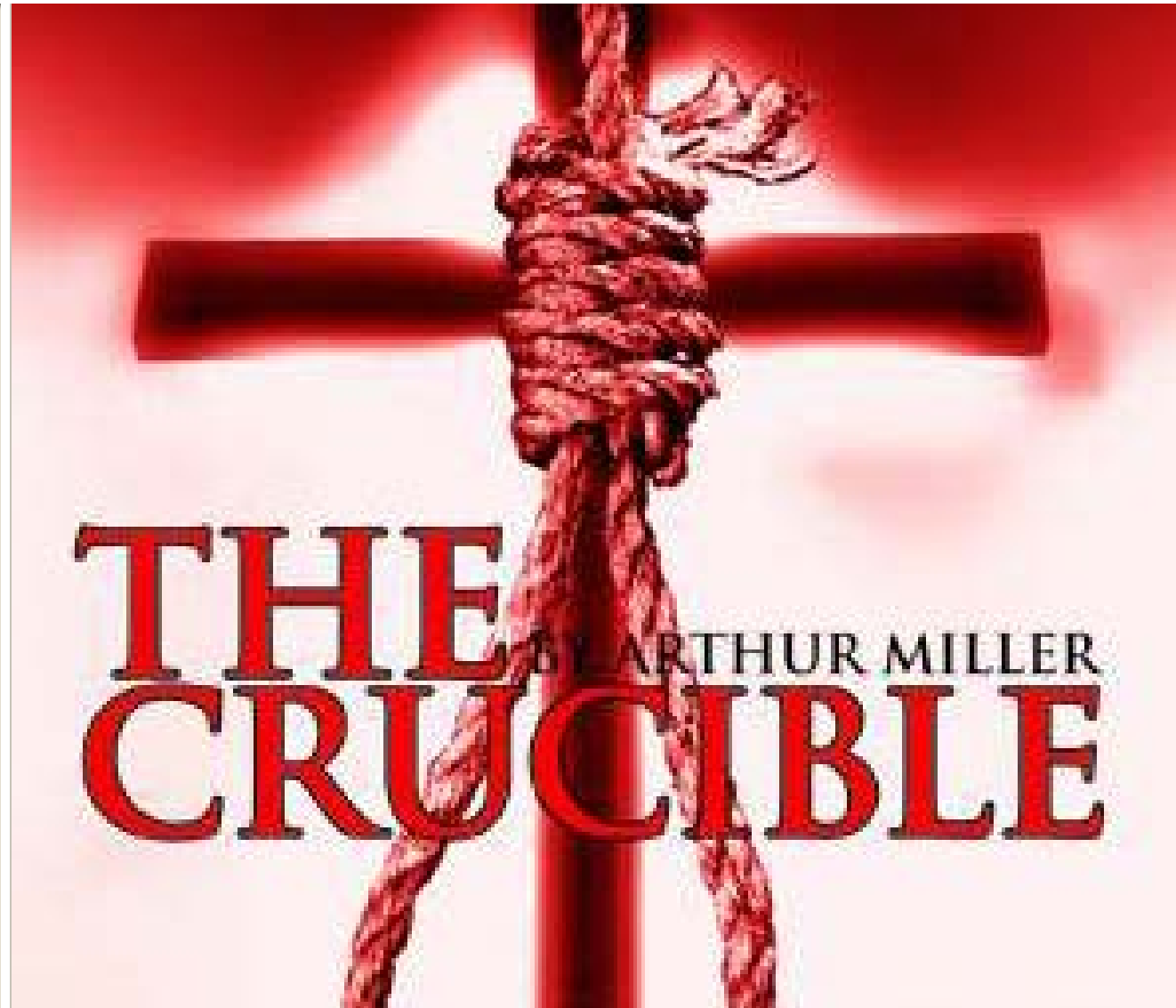
	Percentage of households in each tax bracket, 1695-1696	
	Pro-Parris (average tax: 10.9 shillings)	Anti-Parris (average tax: 15.3 shillings)
Under 10 shillings ($n = 31$; $n = 15$)	61 percent (8.032)*** [2.702]*	43 percent (0.744)
10-20 shillings ($n = 16$; $n = 12$)	31 percent (0.047)	34 percent (0.008) [0.085]
Over 20 shillings ($n = 4$; $n = 8$)	8 percent (9.741)***	23 percent (0.8718) [3.885]**

Notes: Tax records are taken from Boyer and Nissenbaum (1974, p. 82). The figures in parentheses below the percentages are χ^2 statistics (with square roots following, approximately, a normal distribution) for tests of the actual percentages against a uniform percentage (i.e. 33 percent) for the pro- and anti-Parris factions. The figures in brackets below the percentages are similar χ^2 statistics for tests of differences between the Pro- and Anti-Parris percentage within each tax bracket (e.g. 61 versus 43 percent, etc.). ***[**](*) denote significance at the 0.01 [0.05] (0.10) level. Finally, the numbers in parentheses below each tax bracket represent the number of observations according to the pro-Parris and anti-Parris dichotomy, respectively

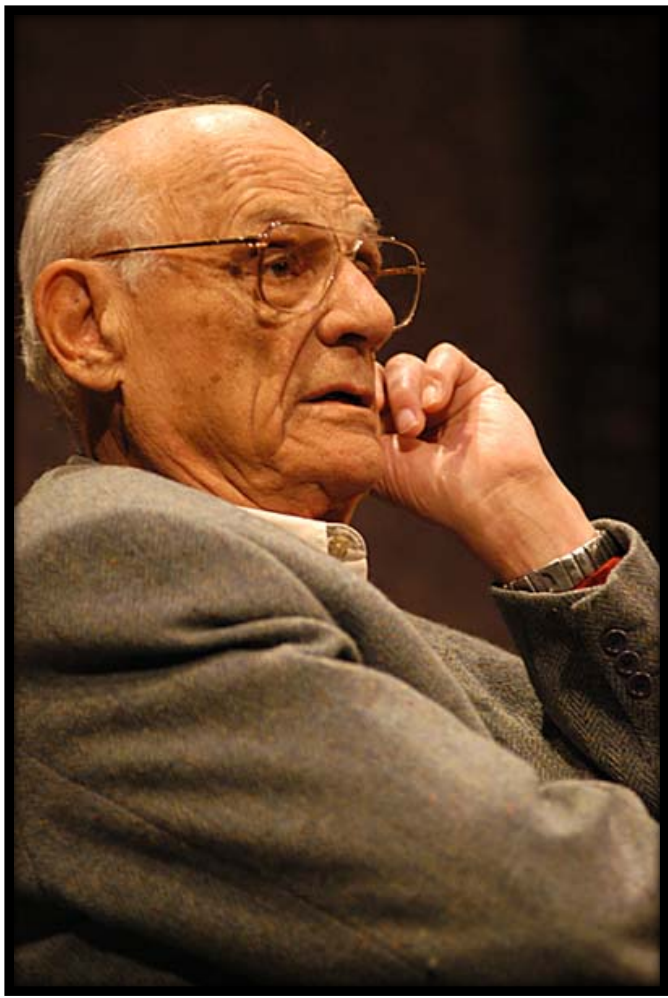
Table II.
Economic and
religious
factionalism in
Salem village

What can we learn?

- *The Crucible* written in 1952 during “Red Scare”
- Made comparisons between McCarthyism and the witch hunts in Salem



Arthur Miller on the Salem Witch Trials and *The Crucible*...



"But by 1950, when I began to think of writing about the hunt for Reds in America, I was motivated in some great part by the paralysis that had set in among many liberals who, despite their discomfort with the inquisitors' violations of civil rights, were fearful, and with good reason, of being identified as covert Communists if they should protest too strongly."

"I am not sure what *The Crucible* is telling people now, but I know that its paranoid center is still pumping out the same darkly attractive warning that it did in the fifties."

The Legacy

- Ann Putnam was the only girl to apologize in 1706.
- In 1992, Salem erected this memorial in honor of the victims.



Salem Today

- Visitors come from all over the world to visit Salem's museums dedicated to the events in 1692.



Photo from a "Trial Trail" event in Salem.

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