

Revenge in the Salem Witchcraft Hysteria: The Putnam Family and George Burroughs

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"If the Putnams and others ever laid plans to ensnare any one person in the course of the witch-hunt, that person was [George] Burroughs."[<1>](#)

The colonists of Massachusetts Bay expected to have trouble settling in the New World, far from their English heritage. Growing rapidly from the outset, the newcomers busied themselves establishing a governmental and religious order in a purely Puritanical method. With such success, the population expanded as well, shattering the relative tranquility the people of New England had known in the early years of their colonization. For example, in the mid-1600s, Salem divided into two communities: Salem Town and Salem Village, causing strain on the political, religious, and economical institutions of the people. Beyond these social difficulties, one cannot exclude human character and personal vengeance when considering what prompted the hysteria resulting in the death of nineteen men and women for the practice of witchcraft in 1692. Personal assault and revenge played a role in the accusations, often the result of harsh feuds and bitter memories. The members of the Putnam family were significant contributors to this aspect of the hysteria. Their greatest victim was George Burroughs, a former minister of Salem Village.

The people of Massachusetts were in a state of confusion during the time in which the hysteria occurred. Between 1665 and 1692, the colony was enduring a particularly trying period. Political involvement from the crown had been both unstable and unsettling, as the infrequent attention of the distant government often turned violent. "The King's decrees during the Quaker troubles had provoked only minor changes in the actual structure of the Puritan state, but they had introduced a note of apprehension and alarm which did not disappear for thirty years."[<2>](#) The period of neglect during the civil war in England had taken its toll on the faith of the colonists in their leaders, both in England and on the continent. Religious sermons were full of horrific prophecies, revealing tensions among the people.

The struggles became more common, beginning with King Philip's War in 1675, which was a brutal and costly engagement with a confederacy of Indian tribes. In 1676, Charles II began reviewing the charter of the Massachusetts Bay, clearly hoping to revoke it altogether. An Anglican Church, having been built in 1679, against the obvious wishes of the Puritan majority. "The sense of impending doom reached its peak in 1686. To begin with, the charter which had given the colony its only legal protection for over half a century was vacated by a stroke of the royal pen, and in addition the King sent a Royal Governor [Sir Edmund Andros] to represent his interests in the Bay who was both an Anglican and a man actively hostile to the larger goals of New England."[<3>](#) The actions taken were in response to the lessening amount of income derived from the colonies. Having once been a purely mercantile system, where the colony exists for the economical exploitation of the Mother Country, the independent attitude in the colonies was moving

into the economic sector. The people were no longer content simply to provide for those in England, when domestic needs were prevalent. As a result of such issues, the settlers of Massachusetts Bay had, in one swift moment, lost the title to their land and ran the risk of losing the church structure they were devoted to maintaining.

In the colonies, there was great dissent among the people themselves. Where the settlers had prided themselves on harmony and unity, complaints regarding land disputes and personal feuds flooded the courts. A visitor to Boston in 1668 noted the people were "savagely vicious" in their dealings with one another and "acted more out of jealousy and greed than any sense of religious purpose."<4> The social and political atmosphere during the late seventeenth century provides a sense of the rigid societal background that nurtured the outbreak of the witchcraft hysteria of 1692.

When the Puritans swarmed Massachusetts after 1630, Salem thrived economically, partially because of the location, but mostly because of the determination of the people. The increased population and decreased living area resulted in the Town selectmen beginning to make grants to the interior lands starting in 1636. The General Court allowed the Town of Salem in 1639 the legal right to settle the lands to the west of the Ipswich River. The names men who moved into the interior land - "Prince, Putnam, Swinnterton, Porter, Hutchinson, Ingersoll...would appear over and over again on the witchcraft documents of half a century later. For this was the beginning of what in time would be called Salem Village and then, still later, the town of Danvers."<5>

The interior land had no separate identity from the Town of Salem, although many referred to it as Salem Farms. Members of this outer community soon began to resent the power that Salem Town held over them, and sought greater freedoms and authority regarding their personal interests. Those who resided in the Town did not feel that this autonomy needed to be granted, and as early as 1643 with the case of Wenham, communities began to break away to form independent towns. When Salem Farms petitioned for their independence in the late 1660s, the Town refused, and a dangerous wedge formed between the two communities.<6>

One main issue raised during the years following the denial of Salem Farms' petition for autonomy was that of ecclesiastical practice. In 1666, the people of Salem Farms won a small victory when the General Court acknowledged their pleas for their own minister, citing as the cause "great distance from the meeting house."<7> No action took place, however, and the matter remained in the court for over three years. In the interim, a special tax to help the Town in the construction of a new church was introduced. The men of the Farms refused to pay this tax, "unless you likewise of the Town will share with use when we shall build one for ourselves."<8> On November 11, 1672, the men of Salem Village (the name had changed from "Farms" to "Village" by this time), elected their five-man leadership committee, began plans for the meeting house, and hired the first minister. All occurred under the watchful eyes of brothers Thomas and John Putnam

The first preacher in Salem Village was James Bayley, a Newbury native whose enthusiasm could not mend the rift that had formed between the two disputing factions

that had developed among the community. Most of the church members were in favor of the appointment of Bayley as minister, but those who opposed him showed their disapproval by not paying their tithes. Despite the unstable position in which Bayley was ministering to the people, he remained loyal to them for eight years. When his wife died, Bayley chose to leave the village, and accepted a call to a church in Killingworth, Connecticut.

George Burroughs holds in history the distinction of being the only minister executed during the 1692 witchcraft hysteria in New England. Later called the "confederate of the devil," he had studied for the ministry at Harvard College. Four years after his graduation in 1670, a small church in Casco, Maine called for the services of Burroughs. In return for his services, the parishioners provided their new minister with a modest salary, a small house, and a deed to two hundred acres of land.<9> A testimony to the generosity of Burroughs is that he returned all but fifty acres of land, without asking for compensation. Later asked to return another twenty-five acres so that the community might hold a reserve for a parsonage for a future minister, he did so willingly.<10>

George Burroughs' ministerial life was complete with troubles from the beginning. In August of 1676, just two short years after accepting his position at Casco, Indians attacked the town during King Philip's War, captured and killed thirty-four members of the community. Burroughs remained in Casco another four years, and helped the ravished community rebuild their lives and businesses. It was 1680 when he accepted the call to the small church in Salem, Massachusetts. "Salem Village might be safer from Indians, but its own dangers were to prove, at least for George Burroughs, deadlier."<11>

George Burroughs could have been aware of the difficult situation at Salem Farms, yet his faith and determination were the strongest motivators for his accepting their call. He believed that he could bring the two feuding factions together through his ministry, and he hoped to provide for them a successful Christian fellowship. Burroughs quickly discovered, however, the same problems as Bayley, when the opposing faction to his appointment as minister refused to pay their tithes. Burroughs also did not receive payment because of their refusal to tithe. Allotted only sixty pounds per year, most of which was to be for fuel and provisions, he now did not have enough food, fuel, or money with which to care for his family. When the payments stopped coming in, Burroughs stopped preaching.<12>

Despite these unfavorable circumstances, Burroughs remained faithful to the people he had vowed to minister. He became active in the political and religious aspects of the community. Burroughs tried to help the community by encouraging them to build their own church. This goal did not see its fruition, however, because (again in the pattern of his predecessor) his wife died during their stay at Salem Farms. "Ministers James Bayley, George Burroughs... seemed never to gain the endorsement and support of more than a simple majority of the villagers, and typically found themselves entangled in heated, uncharitable controversy with a vocal minority. Upon finding the situation not worth the fight, each would unhappily depart the village."<13>

Discouraged, Burroughs left the town in 1683, returning to Casco. At the time of his departure, the town owed Burroughs over thirty five pounds. Having drawn against this to pay for the funeral of his wife, he arranged with Deacon Nathaniel Ingersoll to pay John Putnam fifteen pounds when the funds in the church treasury were sufficient. "Burroughs had, however, offended Captain John [Putnam] by refusing to preach unless he was paid and was openly planning to leave. Captain John, joined by Lieutenant Thomas (Putnam)...., first petitioned the court to force Burroughs to stay. This failed, and Captain John then filed suit."<14> Shortly after his departure for Falmouth, Maine, the authorities of Salem Town arrested George Burroughs for defaulting on his payments.

When Burroughs returned to Salem to settle the issue of the owed money, he learned that John Putnam had issued the warrant for his arrest. John Putnam recited to the court debts that seemed extraordinary. Nathaniel Ingersoll, a cousin of Putnam, rose in the defense of Burroughs, saying the debts owed Putnam by Burroughs were none. It was common knowledge that the village owed Burroughs money for the services he rendered. Because of this, Burroughs owed different villagers who had lent him money or supplies in his time of need. There was no direct debt to John Putnam. "It could be that John Putnam's action was aimed not so much against Burroughs himself as against those who had been withholding what was owed him. If Burroughs were not paid, Putnam would also lose out...Such tactics [as the imprisonment of Burroughs] suggest a bullying nature that is feeling frustrated, threatened, and vengeful."<15> What the Putnam brothers may also have seen in George Burroughs was an educated man, and they may have been threatened by his obvious intellectual superiority.

The Putnams and their family allies had little to do with Salem Town, and saw no need for their "cosmopolitan outlook."<16> Resentment of the mercantile success of the town allowed the Putnams to forge an elite that remained in control of Village affairs for years. "Their most prominent members were men whose names were to appear again and again on the complaints to the magistrates that led to witchcraft arrests: Thomas Putnam, John Putnam Junior, Thomas's brother-in-law Jonathan Walcott, and Walcott's uncle, the innkeeper Nathaniel Ingersoll."<17> Straight-laced and self-righteous, the family placed themselves at the forefront of the social and political circles of the village. Exhibition of the influence of the Putnam family power is in the various positions they held: Village Committeemen, deacons, church elders, among others.¹⁸ The Putnam brothers had a habit of working together "in an aggressive but underhanded manner to take down an enemy."<19>

This contempt in the Putnam family forces the question regarding the validity of the charges alleged against those who were enemies of the Putnam family. The accusation and arrest of many innocent people could have emerged from jealousy and resentment found in this powerful family, known as "the chief prosecutors in this business."<20> It may not be that their perceived power went far beyond the accusations, because those who spoke out against the witches were not always under the influence of the Putnams. This is clear in the case of George Burroughs, because though many spoke out against him during his trial, the Putnam family did play perhaps the largest role in his arrest and trial proceedings.

George Burroughs returned to Maine after his ordeal over money in Salem expecting never to return. He remained in Casco until 1688, when he moved his ministry to another church in Maine, this time in a small town named Wells. Like Casco once had been, Wells was always under the threat of Indian attack. During this time, Burroughs wrote two letters of petition to officials in Boston, pleading for protection from the hostile neighbors. His letters received little attention, however, because his Indian problems were insignificant when compared to the presence of something much larger - Thomas Putnam, Junior and his brother-in-law Jonathan Walcott made the cry of witchcraft against him. Both men saw George Burroughs as an enemy of their family.

In a written statement, Thomas Putnam accused George Burroughs of witchcraft. Putnam had written a letter, both "unctuous and melodramatic," to John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin, magistrates, in an effort to warn them of the developing case against George Burroughs.

Much honored:

After most humble and hearty thanks presented to your honors for the great care and pains you have already taken for us, for which we are never able to make you recompense...and we, beholding continually the tremendous works of divine providence - not only everyday but every hour - thought it our duty to inform your Honors of what we conceive you have not heard, which are high and dreadful: of a wheel within a wheel, at which our ears do tingle.

Humbly craving continually your prayers and help in this distressed case, so praying almighty God continually prepare you, that you may be a terror to evil-doers and a praise to them that do well, we remain yours to serve in what we are able.<[21](#)>

In this letter, the manipulative nature of Thomas Putnam is evident. His lack of detail exhibits the power Putnam wished to believe he had. He assumed the magistrates would be intrigued by the "tingling of his ears," and rush to him for his knowledge and assistance. "His tone is reminiscent of that of the Shakespearean character often considered the embodiment of evil. Iago's wicked plotting, often thought to be motiveless, was in fact based on sexual and political envy and fury...It seems a reasonable assumption that Thomas was not unlike Iago in his vengefulness, given the great number of his complaints against accused witches and....depositions testifying to their crimes."<[22](#)> Putnam, like Iago from *Othello*, genuinely detested those who had ever crossed him. His daughter, Ann Putnam, Jr., was to be one of the most powerful accusers during the witch trials. Her testimonies against George Burroughs were among the "strangest and gruesome"<[23](#)> of the trials, and perhaps the most damaging. Her father's hatred of Burroughs was evident in the words of Ann's accusations.

Historian Frances Hill believes that Ann Putnam was encouraged to speak especially harsh about George Burroughs by her father. Her parents had little affection for

Burroughs, and it seems that they displayed their hatred openly in front of Ann. She would have known little information about Burroughs, such as his time in Casco, or the death of his wives, had her parents not filled her head with such knowledge. The stories told about him and his abusive nature would have scared a young girl. The terms which her parents used to describe this man whom they detested surely would have frightened Ann enough to the point where she, too, would believe that he was inherently evil. The encouragement of her parents definitely heightened her proclivity towards crying out against Burroughs. "A mixture of guile and manipulation and self-delusion seems more probable than sheer conscious fraud. It is true that if any one person involved in the witch-hunt was utterly cynical and unscrupulous, that person was [Thomas] Putnam." <24>

Ann Putnam's most terrifying vision during the hysteria came just the day before her father wrote to the magistrates of the forthcoming madness. "She had seen the apparition of a minister of God who tortured her and tried to force her to write in his book. When she asked him his name he told her that it was George Burroughs...he was 'above a witch for he was a conjurer.'" <25> With this testimony, Ann Putnam declared George Burroughs to be not only a witch, but also the leader of the witches.

Many accusers swore that Burroughs was the spiritual leader of all the New England witches, having been promised by Satan that he would one day be the King of Hell. Deliverance Hobbs proved to be the most agreeable witness of all the accused witches. She spoke freely; painting details that pleased the magistrates and the spectators. Her most descriptive testimonies declared George Burroughs the leaders of the witch's coven in New England.

The statement Deliverance made was perfect for silencing doubters and confirming everyone else's worst fears. She claimed there was a witches' church in Salem Village that held meetings that were black next to Mr. Parris's house. There were deacons, who gave out red bread and red wine, and a preacher who administered the sacrament. That preacher was an especially sinister figure...The minister urged his followers to bewitch everyone in the village, 'telling them that they should do it gradually, not all and once [and] assuring them that should prevail.' The deacons were Rebecca Nurse and Sarah Wildes. The minister was George Burroughs. <26>

It was claimed that the either Burroughs, or, sometimes, the Devil himself, presided over such meetings. The confessors believed the mock sacrament was to serve as the beginning of a sermon from Satan. <27> "Confessed witches would later testify that he baptized converts to the Devil and led [the] satanic masses in the dark woods." <28>

After hearing testimonies such as these, a warrant was set for the arrest of Burroughs, and Marshall John Partridge went to serve it, though he refused to go alone out of fear. Arriving in Wells during the Sunday morning worship, the men forced Burroughs to leave with them before the services were completed. Partridge and his men were afraid of

Burroughs from the outset of their journey, and were convinced that Burroughs, invoking the aid of Satan in an effort to break free, caused a thunderstorm on their return to Salem. After his arrival in Salem on May 4, 1692, George Burroughs did not receive examination before the council of Magistrates until five days later.<29>

At the first examination, a group of men consisting of Deputy-Governor William Stoughton, William Sewall, Jonathan Corwin, and John Hathorne questioned Burroughs. The questions posed were more of a religious rather than legal nature. For example, when asked how long it had been since he had partaken of the Sacrament. His answer shocked the examiners, because "it was so long since he could not tell: yet he owned he was at meeting on Sab: at Boston part of the day, and the other a [t] Charlestown part of a Sab: when that sacrament happened to be at both, yet he did not partake of either."<30> Also of interest to the examiners was the status of baptism of his children, because only the eldest had received the sacrament. The examiners also brought in evidence about the home of Burroughs in Casco, that toads had overrun it. "The absurdity of this admission fades only slightly on remembering that a toad in Puritan eyes was a sinister creature, perhaps one of Satan's minions, perhaps Satan himself."<31>

After the private inquiry, the Magistrates brought Burroughs before the meeting house so that he could be examined publicly. Many of the girls were taken with seizures when he entered the room, dropping to the floor as though in great pain. Susannah Sheldon was one of the first girls to cry out against Burroughs after Ann Putnam, and her deposition read:

Mr. Burros which brought a book to me and told me if I would not set my hand to it he would tear me to pieces. I told him I would not, then he told me he would starve me to death. Then the next morning he told me he could not starve me to death, but he would choke me to death, that my vittles should do me but little good. Then he told me his name was Borros, which had preached at the village. The last night he came to me and asked me whether I would go to the village tomorrow to witness against him. I asked him if he was examined then. He told [me] he was. Then I told him I would go. Then he told me he would kill me before morning. Then he appeared to me at the house of Nathaniel Ingolson and told me he had been the death of three children at the eastward and had killed two of his wives, the first he smothered and the second he choked, and killed two of his own children.<32>

After Susannah finished reading her statement, the court ordered Burroughs to look directly at her, at which point she, and all the other girls present, fell to the ground. Several began to scream that he had bitten them to discourage them from speaking out against him, showing the teeth marks on the arms to prove their accusations. "It was Remarkable that wheras Biting was one of the ways that the Witches used for the vexing of the Sufferers, when they cry's out of G.B. biting them, the print of the Teeth would be seen on the Flesh of the Complainers, and just such a sett of teeth as G.B.'s would then appear upon them, which could be distinguished from those of some other mens."<33>

The Magistrates forced Burroughs to open his mouth, to prove that he had teeth, as many of those accused of the same actions did not have teeth with which to bite.

The circumstances surrounding the deaths of George Burroughs' wives would become serious accusations that evolved into some of the strongest evidence against the minister. There was testimony that the ghosts of Burroughs' wives appeared to them as a warning. The Putnam family spoke out the loudest against Burroughs.

The Deposition of John Putnam and Rebecca his Wife:

Testifieth and saith, that, in the year 1680, Mr. Burroughs lived in our house nine months. There being a great difference betwixt said Burroughs and his wife, the difference was so great that they did desire us, the deponents, to come into their room to hear their difference. The controversy that was betwixt them was, that the aforesaid Burroughs did require his wife to give him a written covenant, under her hand and seal, that she would never reveal his secrets. Our answer was, that they had once made a covenant we did conceive did bind each other to keep their lawful secrets. And further saith, all the time that Burroughs did live at our house, he was a very harsh and sharp man to his wife; notwithstanding, to our observation, she was a good and dutiful wife to him.<[34](#)>

Other than the Putnam family, others spoke out against the treatment of the wives of Burroughs during their lifetimes. There were testimonies that alleged he had knowingly kept his ill wife outside, forbade contact with their families, and had kept "his two successive wives in a strange kind of slavery."<[35](#)>

The spousal abuse, according to the accusers and the afflicted girls, turned to murder. Susannah Sheldon, Mary Walcott, Mercy Lewis, Abigail Williams, and Ann Putnam, Jr. all swore before the Magistrates that the ghosts of Burroughs' wives appeared to them. Despite their testimony that the murders did occur, there was no one cohesive version that the girls told the court. For example, Susannah Sheldon claimed Burroughs smothered and choked the second. Mary Walcott said that his first wife died while giving birth, because she allowed only in the drafty kitchen. Not surprisingly, it was the testimony of Ann Putnam that was both the most detailed and damning. She testified the ghosts of the two women appeared to her and "... turned their faces towards Mr. Burroughs and looked very red and angry and told him that he had been a cruel man to them and that their blood did cry for vengeance against him and also told him that they should be clothed in white robes in heaven, when he should be cast into hell."<[36](#)> After the disappearance of Burroughs, the women proceeded to tell Ann a detailed account of their respective murders. The first wife said Burroughs had stabbed her, the wound never discovered because Burroughs had placed sealing wax upon it immediately after her death. The second told Ann that she was killed en route to visit her friends, assisted by Burroughs' current wife.<[37](#)>

Mercy Lewis, another of the afflicted girls, was under the employment of Thomas Putnam, and lived in his house with his family. That she lived with Putnam is important, because she experienced his tirades against Burroughs, as did his daughter Ann. Mercy had been in the household of George Burroughs as well, when in 1689, her parents were lost in an Indian raid on Falmouth. Burroughs had taken her in initially, and "shortly thereafter, she came to live with the Sergeant Thomas Putnam...Putnam clan leaders Thomas Putnam and Jonathan Walcott bought complaint against Burroughs on April 30, 1692, for witchcraft. Mercy Lewis was one of his supposed victims, and she joined her name to the list of complainants."<38>

When Lewis read her statement, she felt such pains that she had to take leave of the meeting house before she could return and testify. In her absence, Burroughs said that he could not understand what was happening around him. When asked who he thought was responsible for the accusations of the girls, he answered that he could not possibly know. Burroughs said he assumed that it was the devil. He said, "when they begin to name my name, they cannot name it."<39> This was perhaps a suggestion on his part that the girls were accusing the wrong man.

Mercy Lewis claimed that Satan had appeared to her and offered her "gold and many fine things"<40> if she would sign the book. A few weeks after this experience, Satan again appeared to her, this time in the form of George Burroughs. Mercy Lewis said that "Mr. Burroughs carried me up to an exceedingly high mountain and showed me all the kingdoms of the earth, and told me that he would give them all to me if I would write in his book."<41> Abigail Williams and Elizabeth Parris also said that they were promised fine gifts if they were to accept the rule of Satan.

After more testimony of this sort, the Magistrates ordered George Burroughs taken to jail to await the beginning of his trial. During his time in jail, the Grand Jury handed down four indictments, one saying:

Anno Regis et Regina, etc..., quarto.

Essex, ss. The jurors of our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen, present, that George Burroughs, late of Formuth in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, the ninth day of May in the fourth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord and Lady, William and Mary, by the Grace of God, of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, King and Queen, defenders of the faith, etc., and divers other days and times as well before as after, certain detestable acts, called witchcraft and sorceries, wickedly and feloniously hath used, practiced, and exercised at and within the town of Salem in the County of Essex, aforesaid, in, upon, and against Mary Walcott, of Salem Village in the County of Essex, single woman; by the which said wicked acts the said Mary Walcott, the ninth day in the fourth year aforesaid, and divers other days and times, as well as before as after, was and is tortured, afflicted, pined, consumed, wasted, and tormented, against the peace of our

Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen, and against the force of the statute in that case made and provided.<42>

By the time of his trial on August 5, there were more than thirty depositions written against Burroughs, most of them calling on spectral evidence of the accused girls and "his...supernatural strength and his ability to hear conversations when he was not present."<43> When he was brought to the courtroom to face the Court of Oyer and Terminer, there was a large crowd gathered, for it was Burroughs who was rumored to be the "ringleader" of the witches. Because of the tremendous amount of "evidence" against him, Burroughs sought to convince the court that there was no witch cult. Burroughs made a dangerous admission, saying, "signing a compact with the Devil did not enable a Devil to torment other people at a distance."<44> Burroughs took this argument from a seventeenth-century skeptic, Thomas Ady, who wrote in *A Candle in the Dark*: "The grand error of these latter ages is ascribing power to witches, and by foolish imagination of men's brains, without grounds by the scriptures, wrongful killings of the innocent under the name of witches."<45> The judges, however, were not willing to let the ringleader escape death.

George Burroughs faced death for the crime of witchcraft. Many see his conviction, as well as others given the same sentence, as ludicrous because it was decided upon due to spectral evidence. This is evidence given in the testimonies which claimed that spirits of the accused would torment the young afflicted, often biting or scratching their arms and legs. It is interesting to note that the most outspoken opposition to the use of such evidence was the minister Cotton Mather, who wished the trials to be over as soon as possible, and by any means necessary. It would seem that Mather would favor spectral evidence, because it was the quickest means of purifying the village from the wrath of Satan. Yet, he implored the judicial board, led by John Richards, to be wise in their administration of the trials, especially where spectral evidence was concerned.

And yet I must most humbly beg you that in the management of the affair in your most worthy hands, you do not lay more stress upon pure specter testimony than it will bear. When you are satisfied or have good plain legal evidence that the Demons which molest our poor neighbors do indeed represent such and such people to the sufferers, though this be a presumption, yet I suppose you will not reckon it a conviction that the people so represented are witch'd to be immediately exterminated. It is very certain that the Devils have sometimes represented the shapes of persons not only innocent but very virtuous, though I believe that the just God then ordinarily provides a way for the speedy vindication of the persons thus abused...Perhaps there are wise and good men that may be ready to style him that shall advance this caution a witch advocate, but in the winding up this caution will certainly be wished for.<46>

The use of spectral evidence tainted the trials. Many saw condemnation because of spiritual tormenting, which could neither be proven nor refuted. George Burroughs himself was convicted on the grounds of such evidence, specifically appearing to Mercy

Lewis to demand she sign the Devil's book and for biting several of the young girls to ensure they would not testify against him.

A cart holding George Burroughs and four other condemned witches went to Gallows Hill on August 19, 1692. Historian Robert Calef (c. 1700) provides the most complete account of the behavior of George Burroughs at the hour of his execution:

Mr. Burroughs was carried in a cart with the others through the streets of Salem to execution. When he was upon the ladder he made a speech for the clearing of his innocency, with such solemn and serious expressions as were to the admiration of all present. His prayer (which he concluded by repeating the Lord's prayer) was so well worded, and uttered with such composedness, and such (at least seeming) fervency of spirit as was very affecting and drew tears from many (so that it seemed to some that the spectators would hinder the execution).<[47](#)>

This completion of the Lord's prayer was a feat in the eyes of many, because it was widely believed that men of the devil could not say the prayer because of their evil allegiance. Immediately affected by this, some in the crowd began demanding that the execution be stopped. The afflicted girls, however, shouted that "The Black Man" had been prompting Burroughs during his prayers. Cotton Mather stepped forward, proclaiming that "Burroughs was no ordained minister" and that "the Devil has often been transformed into an angel of light".<[48](#)>

George Burroughs is marked in history as the only minister of God executed as a minister of Satan during the witchcraft hysteria of 1692. Like the other accused witches, Burroughs was most likely innocent, the only evidence against him spectral and legendary. The past convicted George Burroughs, as he had crossed the members of the Putnam family during his tenure as minister of Salem Village from 1680 to 1683. His arrest was one of vengeance and hatred, his other accusers coming forward only after the initial cries of Thomas and Ann Putnam. There can be no doubt of the influence the Putnam family had on the arrest and conviction of the Reverend George Burroughs. History can question the validity of the accusations made against all those accused of witchcraft, as Ann Putnam, Jr., one of the afflicted girls and daughter of Thomas Putnam, recanted her role in the witch trials, saying before the Salem Village Church in 1706 that the deaths of innocent people were caused "due to a great delusion of Satan."<[49](#)> In the end, Ann Putnam, Jr. defended the honor of her father's family, from which the death of George Burroughs had stemmed.

***"I desire to be humbled before God for that sad and humbling experience that befell
my father's family in the year about '92..."<50>
- Ann Putnam, Junior, 1706***

Notes

1 Hill, Frances, *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials*. (New York: De Capo Press, 1995), 125.

2 Erikson, Kai T. "Witchcraft and Social Disruption," Mappen, Marc, Ed. *Witches and Historians: Interpretations of Salem*. (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1980), 107.

3 Erikson, 108.

4 Erikson, 108.

5 Boyer, *Salem Possessed*, 39.

6 Boyer, *Salem Possessed*, 39 -40.

7 Boyer, *Salem Possessed*, 41.

8 Boyer, *Salem Possessed*, 42.

9 Bofanti, Leo, *The Witchcraft Hysteria of 1692*. (Burlington: Pride Publications, Inc., 1992), 28.

10 Bofanti, 29.

11 Hill, 55.

12 Bofanit, 30.

13 Trask, Richard B. *"The Devil Hath Been Raised": A Documentary History of the Salem Village Witchcraft Outbreak of March 1692*. (Danvers: Yoeman Press, 1997), xii.

14 Hoffer, Peter Charles. *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.), 48.

15 Hill, 59.

16 Hill, 56.

17 Hill, 56.

18 Boyer, *Salem Possessed*, 115.

19 Hill, 59.

20 Boyer, *Salem Possessed*, 115.

21 Boyer, Paul and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem-Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1972), 77.

22 Hill, 128.

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