

## The Good, The Bad, and The Accused

By Tamra Davis

There are many things that can change the lives of humans or even alter the ways of a culture. Most people also experience the good days and the bad in their everyday lives. However, Bridget Bishop, the first woman accused of witchcraft in 1692 never saw a good day again when her Puritan world turned against her in Salem, Massachusetts. The Puritan life of New England was interestingly the bud of a new U.S. witchcraft craze. The thorough examination of Bridget Bishop illuminates many themes in early U.S. Puritan culture, from the jealousy of the Puritan women in Salem, to the lack of diversity that enveloped Salem and the Puritan way, superstitious beliefs about good vs. evil, how the ergot fungus may have caused these afflictions to finally that sometimes lying may be the only way to survive.

Salem, Massachusetts in the late 1600's was a little different due to the mass hysteria of what is known as witchcraft that passed through it. Even in a little town like Salem, jealousy still caused quite a bit of trouble. However, Salem was also full of Puritans and their ways of living. Bridget Bishop was born in England in the early 1600's and moved to Salem after her first husband died, with her second husband.<sup>1</sup> She was accused during her examination of killing her husband using powers of witchcraft. This was a woman in her late fifties or early sixties who was known to wear a red bodice which in those times would definitely stand out. Females were known to be ignored and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop.html>

to keep to themselves. They were also forced to wear long dresses of little color. The red and multi-colored bodice Bridget wore and her good ways with men caught the attention of the people in her town.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Samuel Shattuck, the very man who helped Bishop with the coloring of her clothes, the laces on her bodice, later testified against her in court.<sup>3</sup> The fact that she basically rebelled against the common way, which may have been more appealing to the men, perhaps had filled the hearts of women with jealousy. Sam Baybrooke states, “How is it then, that your appearance doth hurt these?”<sup>4</sup> The way in which women live now may be different, but our human nature certainly hasn’t changed. Bishop did not carry a good reputation in Salem. William Stacy claims that Bishop professed great love to a certain deponent. “...then Bridget Bishop did give him a visitt, and withall Professed a great Love for this Deponent...”<sup>5</sup> She was accused of stealing from gardens and for not paying her bills. Bishop was also accused of playing ‘shovel board’ and making loud noises late into the evenings at her house. “...said Bishop did entertaine people in her house at unseason-able houres in the night to keep drinking and playing at shovel-board...”<sup>6</sup> With women having little to nothing to do in those days, it seems that Bishop was actually trying to have fun in her time. This would also not be looked good upon in this Puritan town which explains why most women kept quiet. With the combination of the word getting around town that a woman is possibly having fun and the stir of witchcraft, jealousy and accusations occurred. It was not in her favor to have anything negative that could be held against her in a town filled with gossip

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.the-night.net/witches/dead.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-.Examination> of Bridget Bishop

<sup>5</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-> Examination of Bridget Bishop

<sup>6</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer->

and rumors of the Devil conjuring up witchcraft. With Cotton Mather's new influence on Salem people could no longer be too careful.<sup>7</sup>

Having an active role in a Puritan society then was always considered a good thing and otherwise one could be considered evil in certain places or situations. If someone did not attend church consistently they were considered different and no longer welcome.<sup>8</sup> The mass hysteria that swept through Salem could come from the idea of people like Cotton Mather, a minister from Boston who strongly believed in witchcraft and was friends with the five judges during the Salem witch trials. He was also a firm believer in the use of spectral evidence, and spread his beliefs about witchcraft all throughout Salem. This is considered to be one of the reasons or leading factors of how the whole idea of witchcraft began in the first place.

As mentioned above, women in the late 1600's were not allowed much responsibility in their daily lives and usually stayed indoors unless they were picking berries or bringing beer to the men in the fields.<sup>9</sup> Bridget Bishop was known to stay up late in her house on 238 Conant Street making loud noises.<sup>10</sup> If women were not allowed to do much and were ignored for the most part then witnessing other people acting out must also have created these feelings of jealousy. These women of Salem have gone unnoticed routinely yet there is a woman in the same village as them who is getting a lot of attention. Ann Putnam had said that Bishop claimed the Devil to be her God.<sup>11</sup> This was one of the intentional ways of the accusers to keep the attention on them. Thus it

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<sup>7</sup> <http://home.texoma.net/~adwignall/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://endtimepilgrim.org/puritans.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.thecaveonline.com/APEH/witchcraftmidwifery.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop.html>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/ASAL\\_CH.HTM](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/ASAL_CH.HTM)

seems jealousy is a supporting factor in this particular situation that doesn't help Bishop in any way.

Similar occurrences seem to back up the presence of the lack of diversity in Salem village. In these times mostly everyone looked the same and talked the same. This can create problems in any society. It was a problem then because anyone who was at all different was accused of witchcraft and perhaps later hung after a trial with the entire town against you. The Puritan beliefs are an organized religion that had specific guidelines to be considered an actual Puritan. Accepting that everyone is born with sin, the belief in predestination that God only died for a selected few and that God hands out grace unconditionally.<sup>12</sup> However, it was considered extremely bad if someone did anything other than the Puritan ways. One way is if someone isn't fond of or lives a closed life. Bridget Bishop did not seem to live a closed life. Also the lacking of ones social activity or behavior was looked upon poorly. Bishop did not fit into the typical day of a Puritan.

The English Puritan's were building their population and growing strong in America in the 1600's. This is when they were trying to build forces big enough to conquer the English Parliament.<sup>13</sup> The Puritan's were a group of people who started off in England and started the English Reformation to be heard and change the ways of the old English church. The name Puritan came from their active ways in purifying the church.<sup>14</sup> With the new growth in America it has been noted that they not only had quite the political role, but a spiritual role as well. So the old church began to punish the new church under the rule of King Henry and Queen Mary. The old church was to be taught

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<sup>12</sup> <http://endtimepilgrim.org/puritans.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <http://endtimepilgrim.org/puritans06.htm>

<sup>14</sup> <http://endtimepilgrim.org/puritans06.htm>

only in specific ways. For example, during the prosecutions, Fathers were burned for teaching in English as opposed to Latin.<sup>15</sup> This is interesting considering that the Puritans later on prosecuted the accused witches in Salem with the same intentions. Although witches are told to have been burned at the stake, which was mostly in European witchcraft, in Salem they were hung and sometimes pressed with stones.<sup>16</sup>

Having an active role in a Puritan society then was always considered a good thing and otherwise one could be considered evil in certain places or situations. If someone did not attend church consistently they were considered different and no longer welcome.<sup>17</sup> The mass hysteria that swept through Salem could come from the idea of people like Cotton Mather, a minister from Boston who strongly believed in witchcraft and was friends with the five judges during the Salem witch trials. He was also a firm believer in the use of spectral evidence, and spread his beliefs about witchcraft all throughout Salem. This is considered to be one of the reasons or leading factors of how the whole idea of witchcraft began in the first place.

People like Bishop, accused of witchcraft were associated with the devil. The Salem villagers were convinced that these ‘witches’ were making deals with the Devil and believed that they must be evil.<sup>18</sup> The Puritans themselves took on the role of good vs. evil. The accused were supposedly hurting people of the town and were getting people to sign the book of the Devil.<sup>19</sup> Judge Hawthorne, implies Bishop’s use of the book of the Devil. “(Mr H) who is it that doth it if you doe not they say it is your likenes

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<sup>15</sup> <http://endtimepilgrim.org/puritans06.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/oldsalem&tag=public&par>

<sup>17</sup> <http://endtimepilgrim.org/puritans.htm>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.thecaveonline.com/APEH/witchcraftmidwifery.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.the-night.net/witches/dead.htm>

that comes and torments them and tempts them to write in the booke what Booke is that you tempt them with”.<sup>20</sup> The people of Salem listened to the preaching of a minister and certainly with the combination of the other themes it is slowly making more sense of how these horrid accusations were made.

Witchcraft traces back many years and is something studied and practiced still to this day. It dates back to the early 1500’s in Switzerland and Italy.<sup>21</sup> This was when ‘burning witches at the stake’ actually took place. In Switzerland, 500 people were burned on account of witchcraft and in Italy there were about 1000 accusations that lead to death.<sup>22</sup> Most of the executions involved women. It is supposedly used with magic powers and is meant to gain land or property from others while causing them harm. A witch is someone who has taken on powers from evil spirits. People who have studied this field have said that more than half the people in the world today think witches can have some kind of effect on their lives.<sup>23</sup> It has been noted that it was practiced in Europe and that witchcraft is a non Christian belief. When someone wants to become a witch it was known that they would sell their soul to the Devil in exchange for these so-called magic powers.<sup>24</sup>

During the examination Bishop is asked if she has made a contract with the Devil. “(Mr Har) good Bishop what contract have you made with the devil”.<sup>25</sup> The Christian belief is that, in witchcraft, the Devil makes a trade; the soul of someone for diabolical favors. Mercy Lewes believed that Bishop was a witch and that

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<sup>20</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbn/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/oldsalem&tag=public&part>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/frivals/salem/witchhistory.html>

<sup>21</sup> same as 20

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.thecaveonline.com/APEH/witchcraftmidwifery.html>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop\\_court.html](http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop_court.html)

<sup>25</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbn/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/modeng&data>

the Devil was her master. “(Mercy Lewes) oh goode Bishop did you not come to our house the Last night and did you not tell me that your master made you tell more than you were willing to tell...”.<sup>26</sup> She was asked about her consent with evil spirits in Marshall Herrick’s home. Note this is a man making an accusation, not one of the many women; a man who accused Bishop of murder. He stated that Bishop came into his bed chamber at night sometime before the trial. “(Marshall Herrick) how came you into my bed chamber one morning then and asked me whether I had any curtains to sell shee is by some of the afflicted persons charged with murder”.<sup>27</sup>

African, West Indian, and the Indians of North America have studied witchcraft as well.<sup>28</sup> This is unlike European witchcraft in that it is not associated with the Devil. It is known for this particular kind of craft to harm individuals, but possibly that it could help people too.<sup>29</sup> The word ‘witch’ comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *wicca*.<sup>30</sup> This word implies a magician or wise person. Women have primarily taken the term ‘witch’ into female terms because men were instead considered wizards or sorcerers.<sup>31</sup> That is why when most people hear the word ‘witch’ a female visual or thought may arise out of common knowledge. However, men were involved during the Salem witch trials. Not only did they accuse, but they were also convicted and some put to death. Witches were also known to have animals such as cats or dogs by their side that worked for them in conjunction with the Devil. The animal in this case is called a familiar.<sup>32</sup> “Have you not

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<sup>26</sup> Same as 24.

<sup>27</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/modeng&data>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.kindredtrails.com/Massachusetts-History-1.html>

<sup>29</sup> <http://home.texoma.net/~adwignall/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.the-night.net/witches/dead.htm>

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.unexplainable.net/artman/publish/article\\_695.shtml](http://www.unexplainable.net/artman/publish/article_695.shtml)

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.unexplainable.net/artman/publish/article\\_695.shtml](http://www.unexplainable.net/artman/publish/article_695.shtml)

to do with familiar Spirits?";<sup>33</sup> this is an example of Bishops accusations during her examination.

The town of Salem actually settled in the year 1629 as a Puritan settlement and about twelve years later witchcraft became a capitol crime according to the English.<sup>34</sup> Cotton Mather was a preacher from Boston, Massachusetts who helped a sick girl which ended up resulting in possibly the first witchcraft affliction in America. This was a man who very much believed in the ways of witchcraft. He is one of the the ultimate sources that started this mass hysteria. Mather published *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*.<sup>35</sup> In the following year Samuel Paris moved to Salem from Boston where Mather is from. In turn Paris's new fellow villagers were said to have vowed to boycott his salary as a minister and get him to leave the town entirely. And soon after that Paris' daughter Betty and his niece Abigail Williams became ill and acted in the same peculiar ways. The witchcraft accusations came quickly after. It is quite interesting how these girls, whose father was so close with a man preaching about witchcraft himself, happened to draw all this attention onto themselves. All of a sudden friends of Betty were acting unusual too and were beginning to believe in this new trend in their town called witchcraft. This was including Bishop's accusers, Mary Walcott and Mercy Lewis who were only seventeen and Ann Putnam who was just an eleven year old girl.<sup>36</sup> "(Bish) I have made no contract with the devill I never saw him in my life. An Putnam sayeth that shee calls the devill her God".<sup>37</sup> These girls were friends of Betty's, who all now seemed to be up to no good instead of minding their own business. It's

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<sup>33</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.thecaveonline.com/APEH/witchcraftmidwifery.html>

<sup>35</sup> <http://home.texoma.net/~adwignall/>

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.unexplainable.net/artman/publish/article\\_695.shtml](http://www.unexplainable.net/artman/publish/article_695.shtml)

<sup>37</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/mo>

almost as if these girls got together one night and decided to start some mischief in town with the same exact story. And there are certainly reasons to believe this idea. It is known that they all were fairly consistent with any knowledge regarding these afflictions.

There is now a town filled with Puritans who all believed their new minister, Paris, and his preaching's of the Devil's ways. These girls would say things or point fingers at neighbors in town that attracted a great deal of attention, also falling down and claiming that they had bruises or pinching sensations.<sup>38</sup> So at that point the townspeople were wondering which witch did it or which of their familiars followed through on a task. The town was now in such an uproar that accusations of townspeople were occurring left and right. A court and a jury formed under rule of King William and Queen Mary. They were still the Sovereign Lord and Lady of England who had the final say in New England through the early 1700's. It was actually stated during Bishop's trial that they had the last word when the final decision was made. "The Jurors for our Sovereigne Lord & Lady the King & Queen pr'sent that Bridgett Bishop als Olliver the wife of Edward Bishop of Salem in the County of Essex Sawyer -- the Nyneteenth day of April in the fourth year of the Reigne of our Sovereigne Lord & Lady William & Mary by the Grace of God of England Scotland France & Ireland King & Queen Defend'rs of the faith &c and Divers other dayes & times as well before as after, certaine Detestable Arts Called Witchcrafts & Sorceries.".<sup>39</sup> This also shows the link that is between England's royal rulers and New England's new ways. The same place where the Puritans were prosecuted inhumanely not too long ago, when they went against the old Church of England.

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop\\_court.html](http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop_court.html)

<sup>39</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/mod>

First the accused would go under thorough examination and then they would be tried before a jury in the courthouse. What gets even more interesting however is that out of the five judges that were to be involved with the trial, three of them were good friends with Mather.<sup>40</sup> This must have had some affect on these people that were tried. With the new court of Oyer and Terminer, William Stoughton was appointed Chief Justice.<sup>41</sup> With his alliance with Mather, came the willingness for accepting certain procedures in the court that were allowed with much ease.<sup>42</sup> Things such as heresy and anything the people of the court may have said during the examination and the trial were allowed in the courtroom. In a present day courtroom these procedures would most certainly not be allowed. During the examination, the people of the courthouse believed that Bishop was causing harm on the afflicted with the motions of her head. “She shake her head & the afflicted were tortured.”<sup>43</sup> This is an example of how almost anything was accepted under the judges and mostly by Hawthorne himself.

With the outcasts of Salem being accused of witchcraft on a regular basis in 1692, survival tactics were now something important to be considered. At this point in history the people of Salem were making accusations and testimonies and the accused were responding for their lives. The question of course is whether or not truth is of the essence, with everyone involved. Reverend John Hale who was a pastor of the Church of Christ, was a big ‘witch hunter’ in 1692, until his wife was accused of witchcraft. He then thought differently, perhaps to survive, and wrote a book that was critical during the

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<sup>40</sup> <http://home.texoma.net/~adwignall/>

<sup>41</sup> [http://oncampus.richmond.edu/~aholton/121readings\\_html/mather\\_html/index.html](http://oncampus.richmond.edu/~aholton/121readings_html/mather_html/index.html)

<sup>42</sup> <http://home.texoma.net/~adwignall/>

<sup>43</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=i>

trials, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*.<sup>44</sup> Mary Warren a servant and accuser of the Proctor family in Salem admitted to lying and said that the others were lying as well. <sup>45</sup>What she claims to not have been honest about is that she and the others experienced afflictions on their bodies from witchcraft. The girls may have accused Bishop and the others on behalf of survival; “Eliz: Hubbard Ann Putman, Abigail Williams & Mercy Lewes affirmed she had hurt them.”<sup>46</sup> However, the response of Bishop was reflecting these accusations. “I know nothing of it. I am innocent to a Witch. I know not what a Witch is ...”<sup>47</sup> However the first girls claiming affliction were discovered to have what is called a distemper.<sup>48</sup> The doctors who examined these girls were not able to find any reason for such an illness. Then the doctor suggested that they had been bewitched. This perhaps was a belief coming from one of the true sources of this chaotic mess, Cotton Mather. Also, Judge Hawthorne gave Bishop quite the run-around during the examination. Bishop soon realized that she was responding in frustrated manners when denying and herself as a witch.<sup>49</sup> This must have been when she realized that denial is not going to help her; that truth is not in her favor. Bishop never did admit to any such dealings with witchcraft and that is why she was hung at Gallow’s hill on June 10, 1692 and executed by George Corwin. The judge and the jury had decided that she had actually hurt other people and that is why she was sentenced to death. However, John Hawthorne, was a very religious man who acted like a prosecutor

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<sup>44</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Hale\\_\(witch\\_hunter\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hale_(witch_hunter))

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop\\_court.html](http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop_court.html)

<sup>46</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbn/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/>

<sup>47</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbn/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/mod>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/salem/people/bishop.html>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.the-night.net/witches/dead.htm>

more than an impartial judge.<sup>50</sup> Some of the jurors of the King and Queen had even confessed that they were mistaken years after the trial occurred.<sup>51</sup>

There were 150 people put in jail for witchcraft charges, they perhaps were lucky that they were not hung or further punished. Bishop was the first woman convicted of witchcraft and eighteen men and woman soon followed in her footsteps. These people that were jailed were released as free people a year later after the trials had passed. It seems quite plausible that if Bishop had admitted to witchcraft in one way or another she would have had at least a chance of surviving in jail, with the other option being death of course. There was a man in his eighties who was accused and because of his refusal to admit or deny innocence he was pressed to death by stones.<sup>52</sup> Many other accusations were made in 1692 and on people with a good reputation. Perhaps lying about the afflictions being caused by other people of the town, instead of the natural occurrence, would very well save ones life. This is the idea that all the accusers were in fact lying out of immaturity or purely to keep all eyes off them. Everyone that accused, never actually were convicted themselves, so this theory of survival tactics stands firmly.

It is quite interesting however that at the same time as this hysteria was swarming Salem that there most likely was a plant growing along the Atlantic coast called ergot.<sup>53</sup> This is a plant disease that is caused by the fungus, *Claviceps purpurea*.<sup>54</sup> This is known to create hallucinations, vomiting, and physical pain. In 1676 Denis Dodart recorded the significant relationship between bread poisoning and ergot in rye.<sup>55</sup> That was the first

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<sup>50</sup> [http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL\\_BHAT.HTM](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL_BHAT.HTM)

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.kindredtrails.com/Massachusetts-History-1.html>

<sup>52</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BoySal1.sgm&images=images/mode>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.hbci.com/~wenonah/history/ergot.htm>

<sup>54</sup> Same as 53

<sup>55</sup> Same as 53

acknowledgement of ergot that was made just a few years prior to the witch trials. This plant is has certain weather conditions that it needs to grow in; wet, warm, and rainy. Linda Caporaël, who was the first person to recognize the relationship between the Salem witch trails and ergot in the 1970's, read about the conditions in Salem during the trials and discovered that these were indeed the weather conditions in that time.<sup>56</sup> With the likelihood of this plant hitting the people of Salem without them even knowing it, it seems that it would be related to the claims of the afflictions and the accusations made on these good standing people. The accused who claimed to be innocent throughout the examinations and trials may in fact have been punished due to ergot hysteria. Perhaps if they had heard about the first recording of this disease, doctors may have associated it with the girl's afflictions. Although most men were not affected openly it does not necessarily mean that they were not. Men aren't usually very vocal about personal problems they may have because it would make them vulnerable in a male dominated society as it is today. The hysteria that had passed through Europe and Salem seemed complex in many ways. One of them points to the response of Ergot being so closely related to the claims of the afflicted women, it must have some relation. Ergot has been found in Europe and Connecticut as well, around the same time.<sup>57</sup> With witchcraft present as well, this could be a coincidence, but unlikely. Something that should be understood is that with all aspects of this crazed period in history, ergot may have not caused the entire affliction, but it certainly may have added to the madness. People in the locations listed above were all living in societies that consumed rye in some form. There are many uncertainties and confusions of why or what actually caused all of this that

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<sup>56</sup> Same s 53

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.extension.umn.edu/yardandgarden/YGLNews/YGLN-July1505.html>

concerns people now and even soon after the trials ended, but ergot was growing, thriving and most likely consumed during the witch trials. At that point in time the lives of the innocent may have been able to have been saved instead of punished.

There should now be a better understanding of the many underlying themes involved with the Salem witch trials of 1692. The women who secretly want to be more noticed accusing Bishop out of what seems to be jealousy, the lack of diversity in a society can lead to false accusations or death, and whether a good or evil society can last with survival tactics and ergot thriving at this time creating chaos and madness within. It may be a lesson learned that the judgment made upon others may cause pain and suffering. Cultures that accept people for who they are would have a much stronger foundation than without it. Thankfully the world we live in today reflects a much more diverse place, with a more established government system and laws that protect the individuals that live within, than the days of the witch trials.