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Abstract

The Salem witch trials have fascinated historians since the eighteenth century, but as Mary Beth Norton aptly states there is still “much of the complicated Salem story [that] remains untold.” Previous scholarship has failed tell fully the story of the trials’ aftermath. In this paper, I follow the story of a group of witch trial victims and their families to illuminate the religious and political tensions after the trials ended in 1693. I argue that reconciliation came only after the resignation of the Reverend Samuel Parris and the out-migration of the disaffected families to a new community. I discuss the emigration of the Nurse, Cloyse, and Bridges families to Framingham in light of conflict over the extension of church membership through the Halfway Covenant during the Reverend Thomas Green’s tenure in Salem Village. Green’s efforts to heal the parish were met with limited success because of the persistent factionalism in the community. After 1692, the religious and political conflicts in Salem Village provided the impetus for community formation and expansion in the new town of Framingham.

Keywords

Salem Witch Trials, Salem Village, religion, witchcraft, Salem, Framingham, Massachusetts

“This Fire of Contention”: Factional Conflict in Salem Village after 1692

By Shaw Bridges

“Why is it that twentieth-century historians of Salem witchcraft have not bothered to explore the history of Salem Village, or the lives of the men, women, and children who peopled it, apart from that fleeting moment when the community achieved lasting notoriety?”¹

“Men who have the democracy of diversity must also accept the vocal and sometimes violent conflicts that give rise to that kind of democracy. It is pointless for them to wish for the ease of perpetual consensus, unless they envision withdrawing from the whole in a doomed effort to restore the homogeneity of the past.”²

In 1711, the Province of Massachusetts Bay General Court granted the reversal of the attainders, which exonerated the witch trial victims of social stigma and restored their right to entail their property to their families. Nearly two decades earlier, the Court of Oyer and Terminer doled out judgments against well over a hundred individuals in their effort to extirpate witchcraft from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In the process, the witch trials claimed the lives of twenty innocent individuals, mostly women, and led to the torture and imprisonment of well over a hundred more.³ Family members related to accused witches were forced to post bail for their imprisoned relatives. Others sustained losses from the confiscation of their property and many more struggled to return to the normalcy of day-to-day life.⁴ Some historians debate whether it was a spark of internal factionalism, which ignited the witch-hunt in Salem Village (or as Mary Beth Norton aptly argues, the “Essex County witchcraft phenomenon”), while others contend the epidemic spread of accusations was fueled by manifold historical conditions such as the early European colonists’ deep-seated fear of Wabanaki attack, the position of women in puritan society, or the antiquated religious conservatism of the New England village leadership.⁵ Consequently, scholars have overlooked fundamental historical parallels which link the Salem

¹ Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: the Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), xi.

² Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: the First Hundred Years* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1980), 138.

³ Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 51.

⁴ One of the younger victims, four-year-old Dorothy Good, required constant supervision for the rest of her life after her experience in prison, which left her “very chargeable having little or no reason to govern herself.” Bernard Rosenthal ed., *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009), abbrev. *RSWH*, 871. Doc. 907, “Petition of William Good for Restitution for Sarah Good, Dorothy Good, & Infant.”

⁵ For a thorough analysis of the relationship between the Native American frontier raids of Maine and the Salem Witchcraft outbreak, see Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: the Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Knopf, 2002). For a classic scholarly treatment of the factionalism of Salem Village leading up to the Salem Witchcraft Trials see Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*; Richard Latner, “Salem Witchcraft, Factionalism, and Social Change Reconsidered: Were Salem’s Witch-Hunters Modernization’s Failures?” *WMQ* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 423-48.; Benjamin C. Ray, “The Geography of Witchcraft Accusations in

story to the narrative of community development in late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century New England. In his classic work, *Salem Witchcraft*, Charles Upham portrayed the Salem witch trials as the catharsis of the village factional struggles.⁶ Subsequent scholarship reveals the devolution of the Salem ministry's capacity to settle the villagers' conflicts; however, historians have not examined how these factional struggles were ultimately resolved.

I will reassess how factional politics rent a schism between the allies of Reverend Parris, and the Cloyse, Bridges, and Nurse families who sought justice for the witch trial victims. In spite of their efforts, it was only after these families' out-migration when reconciliation occurred under Reverend Thomas Green. The new Salem minister recognized that the church's long-term institutional security and financial support were dependent on a robust parish membership. He implemented the Halfway Covenant, which extended the privileges of full membership in the Covenant with God and His Saints to second and third generation Puritans in the vicinity of Salem Village via the suspension of the required "conversion experience" to maintain the "continuity contained in Puritan Covenant theology."⁷ This liberalization of membership qualifications in the Puritan churches across New England began decades before the Salem witch trials at the Church Synod of 1657, but the theological controversy over this doctrine persisted well into the 1670s and persisted in Salem Village in the 1690s.⁸ Whether or not this conservatism galvanized the accusers, the minister Samuel Parris' relentless persecution of suspected witches and village dissidents culminated in the out-migration of churchgoers to Framingham, and made the adoption of the Halfway Covenant necessary for the continuity of the parish.⁹ Moreover, I maintain that the indecisiveness of reconciliation between the disparate factions, which preceded the destruction, and reconfiguration of Salem Village parallels the developmental course of New England towns in the eighteenth century.¹⁰

1692 Salem Village," *WMQ* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 449-78.; Boyer and Nissenbaum, "Salem Possessed in Retrospect," *WMQ* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 513-34.

⁶ Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: With an Account of Salem Village, and a History of Opinions On Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects* (1867. 2 vols. Reprint, Salem: Higginson Book Company, 1991), Vol. 2, 447-522.

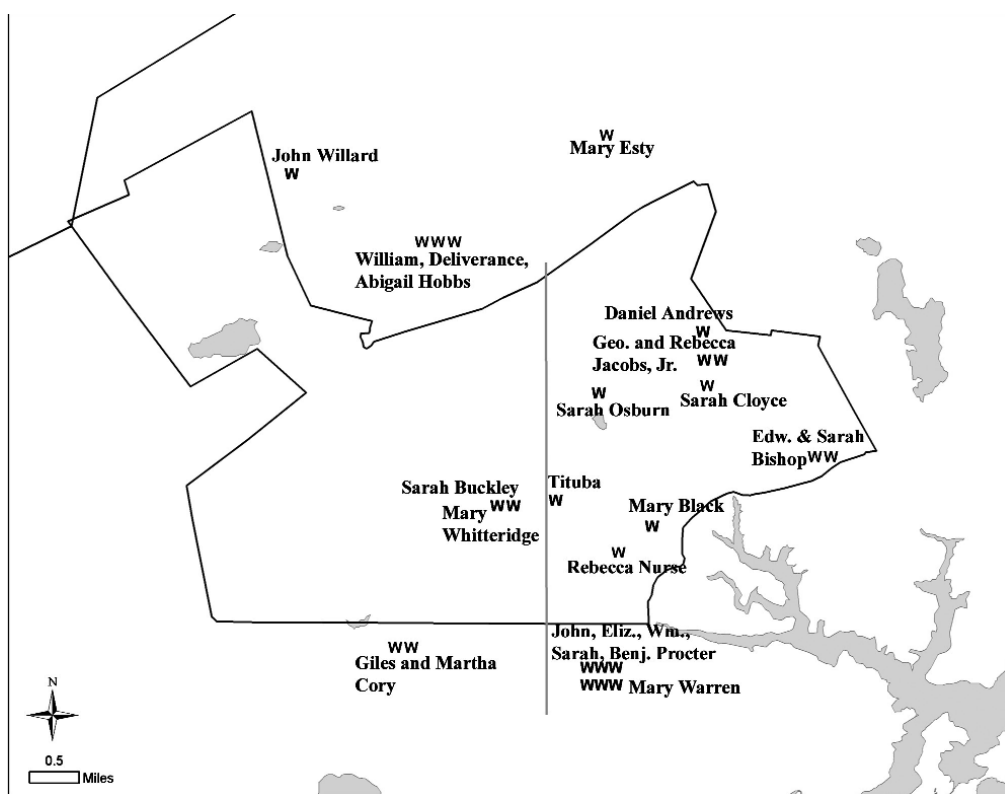
⁷ Lewis Milton Robinson (1964), *A History of the Half-way Covenant*, Abstract, (Church History, 33, 484-484), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3162838>.

⁸ Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*. v. 2.

⁹ The post-1692 Salem narrative has mostly remained unchanged since Charles Upham penned his seminal two-volume work on the Salem witch trials. In his nuanced description of the villagers' persistent conflict with the Reverend Samuel Parris he overlooks aspects pertinent to its resolution. *Ibid.*, 509. Even though Upham briefly refers to several families that left the Village after the trials, he neither discusses the reasons for their migration nor the role they played in Salem politics. *Ibid.*, 465.

¹⁰ Salem historian Benjamin Ray discusses the religious contention between the pro-Parris members of the Village Covenant and those attendees who were members of other parishes. He argues that the Salem Village church's unyielding conservatism produced theological disagreements that explain why most accused individuals did not join the Salem Village Covenant Benjamin C. Ray, "Satan's War Against the Covenant in Salem Village, 1692," 74. Likewise, Richard Latner contends that Reverend Green's conciliatory social and religious policy underscores the magnitude of this theological divergence Richard Latner, "Here Are No

I. The narrative of the victims' families, whose livelihoods were tainted by the stain of witchcraft accusations, can elucidate the struggle for social and religious consensus in Salem Village at the turn of the eighteenth century. The families of the accused sisters Sarah Towne Cloyse, Rebecca Towne Nurse, and Mary Towne Easty were at the center of this struggle.¹¹ The trial records suggest that even a well-respected figure in Salem like Rebecca Nurse was susceptible to accusation. Several historians have tried to analyze these sisters' accusations in reference to their geographical locations, however, as Benjamin Ray's map reveals, the victims occupied a large expanse of the town and its environs [Fig. 1]. Rebecca's friends and neighbors vouched for her good character in several petitions to the Court of Oyer and Terminer, but to no avail. The young female accusers and the allies of Samuel Parris crusaded against the Towne sisters despite the fervent support of their defenders and even some of the accusers.¹² In the end, while Sarah endured life in prison shackles, both Rebecca and Mary were excommunicated, cut off from the Covenant with God, and condemned to the gallows.



Newters': Witchcraft and Religious Discord in Salem Village and Andover," (*The New England Quarterly* no. 1, 2006: 92-122), 118.

¹¹ *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex*, in the Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project, <http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/Essex/> (accessed November 18, 2012), v vii 32-3.

¹² The trial records show that Nathaniel Putnam who accused several individuals himself, stood by Rebecca Nurse during her trial and "submitted his own petition on her behalf." Similarly the constable Joseph Herrick Sr. came to her defense. Benjamin C. Ray, "The Geography of Witchcraft Accusations in 1692 Salem Village," 465-66.

Figure 1. This map is an updated version of Boyer and Nissenbaum's map and depicts the number of witches "W" accused in the geographical area in and around Salem Village.

"Revised map of the accused residents of Salem Village and environs," courtesy of Benjamin C. Ray, "The Geography of Witchcraft Accusations in 1692 Salem Village," *WMQ* 65, no. 3, 462.

Family members of the deceased Towne sisters Rebecca and Mary were exasperated by the lethal sentences delivered in court despite the indeterminate evidence brought to bear against the accused women.¹³ Sarah Towne Cloyse's second husband, Peter Cloyse, and his in-laws refused to attend parish services and meetings to express their vexation with the trials, specifically towards the Reverend Samuel Parris' role in provoking accusations through his sermons.¹⁴ The memory of Rebecca's body hanging unceremoniously from the gallows was still fresh, when on August 14th, 1692 Samuel Parris spoke to his congregation about the absence of her family members from church, likely feigning ignorance of their collective frustration with the ongoing witch-hunt:

Brethren, you may all have taken notice, that, several sacrament days past, our brother Peter Cloyse, and Samuel Nurse and his wife, and John Tarbell and his wife, have absented from communion with us at the Lord's Table, yea, have very rarely, except our brother Samuel Nurse, been with us in common public worship: now, it is needful that the church send some persons to them to know the reason of their absence.¹⁵

The individuals mentioned above were unwilling to consult with Parris, let alone attend his inflammatory sermons that led to their loved one's execution and expulsion from everlasting salvation. Peter Cloyse was preoccupied visiting his accused wife Sarah in the prison in Ipswich. Likewise, John Tarbell, Rebecca Nurse's son-in-law claimed he was 'ill,' and Samuel Nurse opted to avoid the sermons, but still attended the public meetings.¹⁶ In his sermon book, Parris often spoke to the parish about his mistrust for those who "doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully," and of the "rotten-hearted" who he felt betrayed him.¹⁷ Even before the trials, attendance in the parish had tapered off due to the unpopularity of Parris's ministry. Samuel Parris had originally organized the parish under an older version of the Puritan Covenant in order to

¹³ The two family members being the sisters Mary Towne Easty died Sept. 22, 1692 and Rebecca Towne Nurse (var. spelled Nourse) died July 19, 1692, *Ibid.*, 658 & 469. The third sister, Sarah Towne Cloyse was also an accused witch, but survived the trials (var. spelled Cloyes, Cloyse, Clayes).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 844-5. Sarah Towne's second husband, Peter Cloyse, who would play a significant role in the post-trial story, was originally from Wells, Maine, having fled to Salem after the Wabanaki raided several settlements in and around Falmouth. Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 74, 130.

¹⁵ Quote from Samuel Parris' book of record August 14th, 1692. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, v 2, 485-6.

¹⁶ Samuel Parris' book of record August 31st, 1692. – *Ibid.*, 486. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft: a Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* (Boston: Northeastern, 1993), 148-9.

¹⁷ Quoted from Samuel Parris' *Sermon Notebook*. Ray, "Satan's War Against the Covenant in Salem Village, 1692," 79-80.

maintain what he believed to be a “pure church.”¹⁸ The Halfway Covenant, which had been in place in the nearby Salem Town parish, and in the surrounding parishes of Beverly, Lynn, and Rowley was a commonly adopted doctrine by the time Parris became minister in Salem Village.¹⁹ For the first few decades in the New England Puritan settlements, a members were asked to recount a “conversion experience,” usually in the form of a written or verbal statement of religious awakening to the church leaders. This prerequisite account signified the new member’s righteousness and distinguished him or her as one of God’s chosen saints who would one day join him in heaven. As members of the early generations began to die and the parishes needed to ensure the loyalty and continued support of the second and third generations who were excluded from full membership, since many of them were raised Puritans and so did not convert. Through the Halfway Covenant, the Puritan theologians at the Church Synod of 1657 sought to remedy the systematic exclusion of second and third generation churchgoers from the privileges of full church membership such as the right to receive communion. In Salem Village, Samuel Parris gathered enough initial support to discontinue this liberal church policy in the new parish, but not without resistance. The parish’s conservative membership qualifications subsequently excluded nearly four hundred churchgoers from the benefits of communion and baptism, both privileges reserved for full members in the Covenant.²⁰ On the eve of the witch trials, Parris invited churchgoers who did not recount their religious awakening through a “conversion experience” into limited membership alongside the Covenanters.²¹ After an initial increase of twenty-seven members in 1690, however, the numbers of new initiates, including baptisms, fell dramatically.²² This trend continued even after the trials ended in 1693, while Parris “continued to equate his enemies with the forces of Satan,” bent on the dissolution of the Salem Covenant.²³

On February 7th John Tarbell and Samuel Nurse accompanied by Thomas Wilkins, scion of a predominantly pro-Parris family, met with Samuel Parris to voice their desire to see him resign and leave Salem Village. According to Parris’ records, Tarbell promptly castigated Parris for his role in the trials, even going so far as to accuse him of idolatry. Likewise, Tarbell blamed Parris for his mother Rebecca Nurse’s execution and said that he “had been the great prosecutor.” The pastor’s account reveals these men’s vehemence in their objections regarding Parris’s influence during the trials:

¹⁸ Larry Gragg, *A Quest for Security: the Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 68. Quoted in Ray, “Satan’s War Against the Covenant in Salem Village, 1692,” 74.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

²¹ Lewis Milton Robinson (1964), *A History of the Half-way Covenant*, Abstract, 484.

²² Benjamin C. Ray, “Satan’s War Against the Covenant in Salem Village, 1692,” 76.

²³ *Ibid.*, 93.

[Tarbell claimed] that others wise and learned who had been as forward as myself were sorry for what they had done, and saw their error, and 'til I did so too, he could not join (in communion). His brother Sam: Nurse, for about an hour's time has the same objections.²⁴

The day after Parris received this barrage of complaints, Peter Cloyse returned from Boston, presumably where his wife was then held prisoner, to deliver a similar speech to the pastor. Their accusations of idolatry not only reflected fervent belief in Parris's culpability for the deaths of their loved ones, but also their frustration over the marginalization of their entire family in Salem society. The descendants of accused witches who were excommunicated were also barred from obtaining the full privileges of Covenanted membership, thus negating the inclusive membership policy adopted just before the trials. The prohibitive consequence of this policy on church membership was not rectified in most parishes for several years. Thus, the witch trial victims and their families considered Parris, not only the great prosecutor, but also the artificer of their collective damnation.²⁵ At a meeting with Samuel Parris in early February of 1693, his opponents Thomas Wilkins, John Tarbell, and Samuel Nurse formally accused the minister of wrongdoing and in order to make amends they required "satisfaction from him."²⁶ The conflict came to a head in March 1693, when the Salem Village Church entered a complaint at a "General Session of the Peace" in Ipswich against the Salem-Village Committee then headed by Rebecca Nurse's son-in-law Thomas Preston, John Tarbell, and three others. The complaint was entered on behalf of the Reverend Parris who had yet to receive the funds required for his maintenance from his opponents. Parris and his supporters attempted to force taxation on those who refused to pay his salary in December, by threat of recourse to legal suasion by the constables. In response to this threat, Peter Cloyse and several of his compatriots drafted a letter to the Parish Elders from the surrounding communities summoning them to hear their grievances and adjudicate between themselves and Parris.²⁷

In the succeeding months the tension between the Reverend Samuel Parris and the allies of the Nurse family deteriorated into a protracted quarrel through petitions and lists of grievances presented to the parish and surrounding communities. By early October 1693, Reverend John Higginson sent word to Salem Village that a Council of the Elders in Boston would be summoned to settle any disputes within the parish.²⁸ When the time came to deliberate, however, Samuel Parris would not grant the "dissenting brethren" an opportunity

²⁴ Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 282-3.

²⁵ Lewis Milton Robinson (1964), *A History of the Half-way Covenant*, Abstract, 484.

²⁶ Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 281-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 257-8, 283-4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 287.

to undermine his authority. In his letter to the ministers, John Hale of Beverly, John Higginson, and Nicholas Noyes of Salem Town, Parris said he would not permit the testimony of non-parish members from Salem Town or elsewhere to be heard in the Council. Parris believed Salem Village was an isolated parish community, and his atomistic methods for conflict resolution typified his conservative mentality. He refused to allow any Council to form unless an official list of complaints was presented to him and the parish, even though the “dissenting brethren” refused to supply the list unless a Council was called to read them. The preacher who in 1692 wrongly indicted men and women for witchcraft was under the scrutiny of his parishioners and struggled to retain the upper hand.

Throughout this civil disorder in Salem Village, Peter Cloyse removed to Boston to care for his imprisoned wife Sarah. He was therefore unable to help his obstinate comrades in the parish meetings; however, he continued as best he could to deliver petitions to the Reverend Parris and the parish. These visits were of course short as he was “haste to be gone,” presumably so he could return to Boston. In one of the petitions he signed and delivered along with John Tarbell and Samuel Nurse to Parris, an attempt was made to give the latter the opportunity to reconsider summoning a council by offering a concession:

That we agree together for a Council chosen by the General Court; who may have full power to hear and determine all differences, real and imaginable, which hath arisen amongst us; which if obtained, then we do promise to give unto you our Pastor the particulars of our grievances, in writing, thirty days before the said Council shall meet, to consider thereof.²⁹

The villagers were willing to look to outside authorities to settle their differences. This offer was promptly turned down in a response approved by Parris’ allies in the Village parish November 26th, 1693.³⁰ Historians of the Salem witchcraft in recent historiography have debated whether blame for the spiraling effect of the trial accusations should be attributed primarily to the Massachusetts Church authorities or to local political struggles.³¹ The petitions issued by the Cloyeses and Nurses indicate they recognized the judicial and spiritual authority of the Church leaders, despite their involvement in the witch trials. At Deacon Ingersoll’s Inn, Parris and about twenty of the “dissenting brethren” (the number grew as months passed by) consulted letters of advice from the ministers of nearby towns in the hopes of finally reaching a settlement. The dissenting brethren said their offense was not with the church as an institution in Salem Village, but with

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 289-90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 291.

³¹ Ernest W. King and Franklin G. Mixon Jr. et al., “Religiosity and the political economy of the Salem witch trials,” (*The Social Science Journal* 47: 678-88), *ScienceDirect*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2012).

Samuel Parris' ministry.³² The Salem villagers refused to forsake their church despite the prominent role that its leadership played in the witch trials.

Massachusetts at the turn of the eighteenth century was a theocratic society and therefore, as Mary Beth Norton articulates in her monograph, "*It must always be remembered that the judges of the Court of Oyer and Terminer were the very men who led the colony both politically and militarily.*"³³ The strategic blunders of King William's War have been attributed to several of the men who also presided over the Court of Oyer and Terminer in 1692-3 including the Reverend John Hathorne, Jonathan Corwin, Samuel Sewall, and William Stoughton.³⁴ Due perhaps to the ongoing conflict of King William's War (1689-97) against the Native Americans and the French or their desire to further disassociate themselves with the witchcraft scandal, these men stayed detached from the residual conflicts in Salem.³⁵ This left the church leaders to oversee the dispute between Parris and his opponents. The ministers who intervened were concerned about the social unrest in Salem Village and "the sad effects likely to follow on the continuance of this fire of contention."³⁶ On June 14th, 1694, the neighboring ministers, John Hale, John Higginson, and Samuel Willard who among others participated in the sentencing of witches two years prior, wrote to the Salem Village church with their advice: "We beseech you to study those things which make for peace and edification, Eph. 4: 1-3."³⁷ Samuel Parris and his supporters finally offered conciliatory overtures to the dissenters in the town meetings by 1694, in an effort to salvage Parris' ministry and his ownership of the parsonage.³⁸ Those who opposed him at every turn, did so with the consent of the Puritan community at large, and made sure of this by inviting other church leaders to adjudicate their conflict with Parris.

³² Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 288.

³³ Original emphasis. Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 299.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

³⁵ Many colonists felt the Salem Witch Trials were a miscarriage of justice and too much credence had been given to the delusions of young girls. Governor Phips was recalled to England by the British Crown, and several of those involved in the witch trial proceedings lamented their role, such as Samuel Sewall who later made an official apology, and John Hale wrote his famous account of the trials, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft* in which he argued that the Court of Oyer and Terminer followed dubious methods of prosecution. *Ibid.*, 309-12.

³⁶ *SALEM VILLAGE CHURCH RECORD BOOK*, Transcribed by W.M. Thaddeus Harris Esq. (University of Virginia: The New England Historical and Genealogical Register). Retrieved from <http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/villgchurchrcrd.html> (hence: *SVCR*) Entry d. June 14. 1694.

³⁷ Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 292.

³⁸ *SALEM VILLAGE RECORD BOOK [For Years 1672 - 1713] Transcription Published in Installments in The Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society, 1924-1931*. (University of Virginia: The Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society, 1924-1931, 2002), accessed October, 18, 2013, http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/texts/tei/SaVRec?div_id=d1e5864, [62] 15th September 1694. (Hereafter *SVRB*).

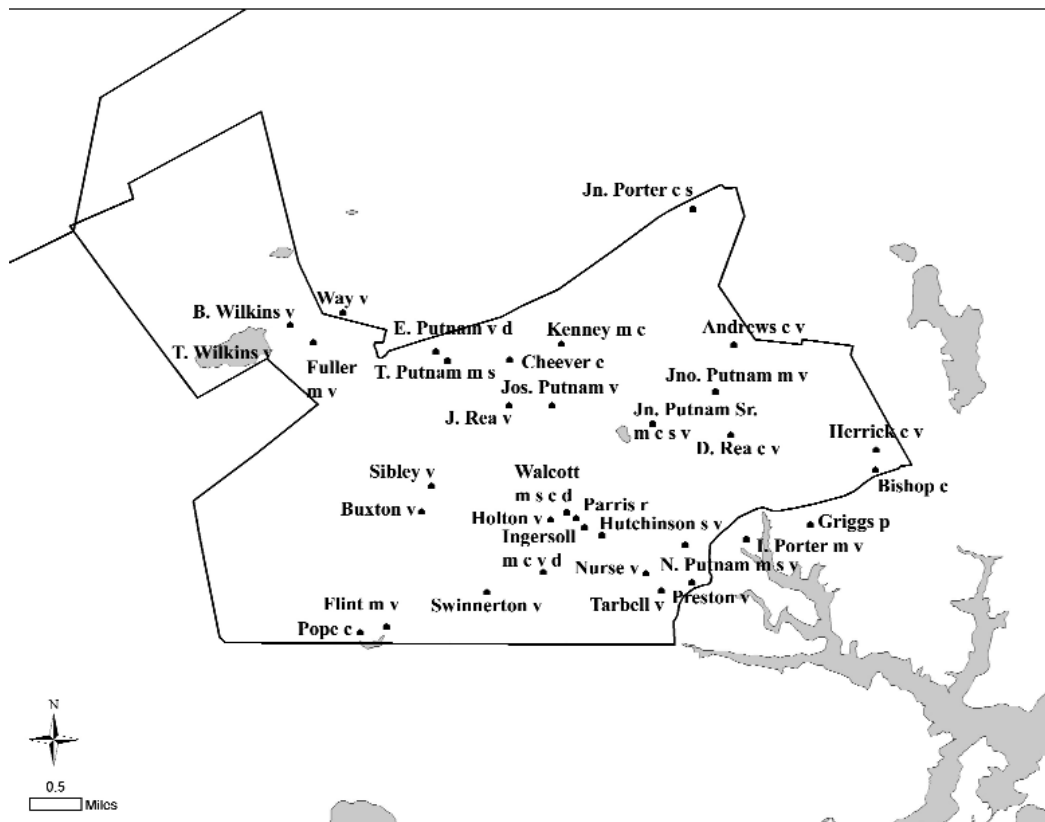


Figure 2. Benjamin Ray's map of the male heads of Salem Village households their respective careers or responsibilities.

"Salem Village leadership, 1680–92, with the following abbreviations: c = constable, d = deacon in the village church, m = officer in the militia, p = physician, r = village minister, s = Salem Town selectman, and v = village committee," courtesy of Benjamin Ray, "The Geography of Witchcraft Accusations in 1692 Salem Village," *WMQ* 65, no. 3, 473.

The Nurses and their allies were also involved in an ongoing dispute with several Parris supporters in the Village over land bordering Topsfield along the Ipswich Road. Benjamin Ray's map depicts the locations of many of the actors in this dispute in Salem Village along with other leaders and involved parties in the Salem Village conflicts before and after 1692 [Fig. 2]. Members of the Putnam family and their allies including Thomas Flint and Nathaniel Ingersoll were given authority by the town committee to pursue legal action against these members of the Nurse and Towne families.³⁹ At the same meeting, Francis and Samuel Nurse, John Tarbell, and Thomas Preston entered their names into the Village Record Book in opposition to the vote against them.⁴⁰ In the aftermath of the trials this persistent land conflict added insult to injury to the

³⁹ Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 148–50.

⁴⁰ *SVRB*, [63] 30, November 1694. Also, see Boyer and Nissenbaum, "The Ipswich Road: An Anti-Parris Paradigm," in *Salem Possessed*, 96–7.

families of the trial victims. Likewise, Samuel Parris continued, at least tacitly, to support his allies' land claims.

The opposing factions reached an impasse until Parris finally relinquished his hold on the parish property in 1696. In the meantime, his opponents continued to demand redress for "his persisting in these principles and justifying his practices, not rendering any satisfaction to us when regularly desired, but rather farther offending and dissatisfying ourselves."⁴¹ The Reverend may have used the fervor of the witch trials to unite members of the parish against a common foe, i.e. the devil and his servants, but after the excitement abated, his nexus with community solidarity dissipated. The members of the Salem Village parish could no longer identify with the apocalyptic message of war against the devil that Parris advocated in his sermons. Parris's refusal to hear the advice of his church colleagues may have further diminished his credibility as a minister. The Reverend's authority soon crumbled under a swelling number of Salem Villagers who wanted both retribution and the stability, which would result from legitimate leadership.

II. By the year 1695, the progress toward resolution between the Parris and Nurse factions stalled.⁴² In 1695, after Peter Cloyse procured a deed to property on Thomas Danforth's Farms (named for the owner and famous witchcraft judge Thomas Danforth), he paid one last visit to the Salem pastor and requested a letter of recommendation so he and his family could join a new parish.⁴³ The Reverend Parris wrote a letter of dismissal for Peter and his wife Sarah Cloyse to the Church of Marlborough. Peter returned it promptly after expressing his disappointment it was not the letter of recommendation he anticipated.⁴⁴ According to Parris' letter, both Peter and his family left Salem and had "now become near neighbors [to Marlborough]."⁴⁵ After years of beleaguered exertion against the political stagnation in Salem Village, Peter Cloyse and his family failed in their efforts to resolve the conflicts in their Puritan community, and so from the "fire of contention" emerged a new community and parish in Framingham.⁴⁶ Although the establishment of new settlements in the eastern half of Massachusetts counties including Essex and Middlesex plateaued during the first half of the eighteenth century, the subdivision of many of these communities increased from 22% from the years 1661-

⁴¹ Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 297.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 292-309.

⁴³ Thomas Danforth, who was the judge that presided over Sarah Cloyse's trial in 1692, had been a critic, albeit a silent one, of the trials towards the end, according to the empirical writings of the Boston Minister Thomas Brattle. Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 283; Josiah Howard Temple, *History of Framingham, Massachusetts, Early Known as Danforth's Farms, 1640-1880; With a Genealogical Register* (Framingham: The Town of Framingham, 1887), 124-5.

⁴⁴ Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 311.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁴⁶ SVCR, Entry d. June 14. 1694.

1700 to approximately 48% over the succeeding 40 years.⁴⁷ This statistical increase includes the early division of Andover and Salem, both towns that were caught up in the witch trials. As the historian Kenneth Lockridge argued, the process of community division before and after 1692 was due to the failure of these communities to reach a consensus with regards to their internal disagreements and conflicts.⁴⁸ The Salem narrative is consistent with this process of creative destruction in the formation of new communities in colonial New England.

In 1692, the Framingham Township had not yet been established. The area instead consisted of swaths of wilderness territory sparsely occupied by a few settlers.⁴⁹ The inhabitants of “those Remote lands scittuate and lyeing betweene Sudbury, Concord, Marlbury, Natick and Sherborne” petitioned the General Court to allow them to form a township.⁵⁰ After the first failed, they petitioned again in 1692-3 to incorporate Framingham Township. The petition reveals the anxiety they experienced transitioning to their new life in frontier territory:

...By reason of the present distressed condition of those that dwell in these ffrontier Towns, divers are meditating to remove themselves into such place, where they have not hitherto beene concerned in the present war and desolations...⁵¹

The early settlers in Framingham sent their petition to the General Court with hopes of not only easing the transition from their settled albeit turbulent existence in Salem but also of obtaining “some easement in our taxes that wee may be the better bee enabled to carry on our publick Town charges.”⁵² The Framingham settlers were at loggerheads with members of Sherborne Township who laid claim to the lands of seventeen families and the right to tax them as residents.⁵³ Peter Cloyse and the Salem End settlers entered into the foray of the community’s conflict with Sherborne Township by drafting a petition to the General Court on behalf of the Framingham families whose lands were in dispute. In their petition they asked to definitively establish their separate township, both to accommodate the increased population from “200 souls to 350” due to the

⁴⁷ Douglas Lamar Jones, “The Strolling Poor: Transiency in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,” (*Journal Of Social History*: no. 3, 1975, 28), 31. See Table 2.

⁴⁸ There is an extensive historiographical debate on the nature of community development in seventeenth and eighteenth century New England. See Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (ACLS History E-Book Project, 1899); Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: the First Hundred Years*.

⁴⁹ Temple, *History of Framingham, Massachusetts*, 126.

⁵⁰ Their initial attempt failed possibly due to opposition from the areas wealthiest landowner, the infamous witch trials judge Thomas Danforth. *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵² *Ibid.* Faced with both the Essex County witchcraft outbreak and the threat of renewed hostilities with the Wabanaki in Maine, the General Court may have tabled the Framingham request. The conflict with Wabanaki in the northern territory (today’s Maine) had left the political leaders of Massachusetts to contemplate “an awfull frowne of Providence, under which we have cause to be humbled.” Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare.*, 110.

⁵³ Temple, *History of Framingham, Massachusetts*, 142.

recent migrations from Essex County towns, and so all members of the community could travel less distance to attend church on Sabbath.⁵⁴ Finally, Peter Cloyse and the other signers pled, “We petition neither for silver nor gold, nor any such worldly interest; but that we may have the worship of God upheld among us and our children.”⁵⁵ Thus, Framingham became one of many new communities to evolve from the dissolution of communities like Salem Village after 1692.⁵⁶

The surviving records from Framingham’s foundation indicate several members of the Salem families participated in the governance of their newly adopted township.⁵⁷ At the first official town meeting after the town’s incorporation, John Towne and Peter Cloyse were made selectmen and given responsibilities for the governance of the town, while Benjamin Bridges, Sarah Cloyse’ son, was appointed assessor.⁵⁸ These first settlers in Framingham were presented with the unfavorable challenge of living in the wilderness. Peter Cloyse, a one-time refugee from frontier territory in Maine, undoubtedly calculated the risks of moving so close to Indian lands before choosing to leave Salem Village. In order to mitigate the potential risk of Indian attack, the town constructed a fort with a watchtower near the Salem End settlement and provisioned it to defend the inhabitants from enemies.⁵⁹ Some family members, including Samuel Nurse, remained in the Village on their father Francis Nurse’s estate. The two brothers John and Benjamin Nurse migrated to Framingham with their families despite their equal share in the inheritance of their fathers’ estate, however, complications may have arisen over the attainder fixed to their deceased mother’s name and the names of her descendants. Samuel Nurse continued to petition for the removal of Samuel Parris from office and eventually participated in the selection of his successor.⁶⁰

Although the installation of the Reverend Thomas Green as minister signaled the return of the status quo after years of civil strife, he came too late to prevent the migration of these Salem families. Green

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 134-5.

⁵⁵ William Barry, *A history of Framingham, Massachusetts, including the Plantation, from 1640 to the present time, with an appendix, containing a notice of Sudbury and its first proprietors* (Boston: J. Monroe & Company, 1847), 39-41.

⁵⁶ Peter Cloyse, Benjamin and Caleb Bridges and Benjamin Nurse laid the foundation for the Meeting House and designated a minister, the Reverend Smith who joined the first Framingham Parish Covenant in 1701. *Records of the First Church of Framingham typescript* (Framingham October 8th, 1701). Henceforth abbr., *FCR*, unpublished.

⁵⁷ Benjamin Bridges, a blacksmith by training was perhaps the earliest settler of what became the Salem End Colony in the spring of 1693, followed by his brother Caleb a bricklayer in 1697. According to Temple, Peter Cloyse and his son by the same name arrived in Framingham in 1693 with their wives Mary Preston (daughter of Rebecca Nurse) and Sarah Cloyse (the accused witch) and their families. The two younger sons of Francis and Rebecca Nurse, Benjamin and John both moved to Framingham in 1693 and 1696-7 respectively. Temple, *Genealogical Register in History of Framingham, Massachusetts*, 483, 507, 653.

⁵⁸ The August 5th 1700 Town Meeting. *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁹ Temple, *History of Framingham, Massachusetts*, 153-4. The resettlement of these Salem families in the Framingham wilderness, far from the bustling center of trade near the Salem Town wharfs, seems to discredit Boyer and Nissenbaum’s thesis, that agricultural families of the Village Proper were caught in a dialectical economic struggle with the allies of a merchant capitalist elite in Salem Town.

⁶⁰ Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 153-54.

delivered sermons to the Village parish against the use of divination perhaps concerned this type of magic was detrimental to the community's recovery from witchcraft.⁶¹ After one of his many attempts to minimize disagreements at a village meeting, Green wrote in his diary that the villagers, "dealt so unkindly [with him, that he] purposed never to be present again at a Town meeting if [he could] avoid it."⁶² He also suggested in a sermon that the judgment be reversed on Martha Corey, one of the victims of the witch trials.⁶³ Neither he nor the other Essex County ministers could prevent the eventual split of the Salem Village parish at the start of the eighteenth century. The establishment of new parishes became such a county-wide concern that on May 31st, 1711, the ministers of several towns held a meeting in which it was determined that, "about ye multiplication of Parishes, that care should be taken that such needless multiplications might be prevented."⁶⁴ The conflicts experienced in Salem Village were reflected in the other communities caught up in the witch trials fervor. As Richard Latner indicates, the town of Andover, which had the largest number of accused witches of any town in Essex County, also split following the death of the Reverend Francis Dane in 1697. Dane's successor, the Reverend Barnard, led the campaign in 1705 to build a new meetinghouse in the South End of Town in anticipation of the 1709 General Court decision to split the community into two precincts.⁶⁵ The Salem Village parish eventually recovered its population numbers after extending membership through the Halfway Covenant in 1700.⁶⁶ The inclusiveness of membership in Salem and other communities, as Benjamin Ray maintains, may have produced a "more liberal church" subject to the support of all its members.⁶⁷ Historians failed to construe this "liberalization" of membership in the Salem Village Covenant in the context of the out-migration of families from and splintering of the parish after the witch trials.

Conclusion

In 1703, Peter Cloyse along with the Nurses, Proctors, and others signed a petition to clear the records of the trial victims, so that "the Names and memory of those who have Suffered as aforesaid, that none of their Surviving Relations, nor their Posterity may Suffer reproach upon that account."⁶⁸ The authors of the dozens of petitions for restitution continued to struggle to clear the names of their relatives well into the

⁶¹ See entry for July 12, 1702 and again in November. "Diary of Rev. Joseph Green of Salem Village," ed. S.P. Fowler in *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute*, vol. 8 (Salem, MA: Essex Institute Press, 1866), 221.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* In *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute*, vol. 10 (Salem, MA: Essex Institute Press, 1866), 90.

⁶⁵ Richard Latner, "'Here Are No Newtens': Witchcraft and Religious Discord in Salem Village and Andover," 117.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁷ Ray, "Satan's War against the Covenant in Salem Village, 1692," 94.

⁶⁸ Doc. 876, "Petition of Francis Faulkner et al. to Clear the Records of Rebecca Nurse, Mary Easty, Abigail Faulkner Sr., Mary Parker, John Proctor, Elizabeth Proctor, Elizabeth How, Samuel Wardwell, & Sarah Wardwell," *RSWH*, 848-9.

eighteenth century. The Reverend Green initiated reforms to pacify the civil strife in Salem Village but could no longer rely on a static membership as the expanding local population either migrated or joined derivative parishes. The Cloyse, Bridges, and Nurse families migrated, not due to a change in their religious sentiments, but because of the futility of their efforts to preserve their “City upon a Hill.”⁶⁹ The petitions that Peter Cloyse helped draft reveal an abiding sense of regret vis-à-vis the failure of reconciliation with the Salem Villagers. For all their efforts including their requests for mediation from neighboring parishes, the process of reconciliation was never completed. The historian Kenneth Lockridge aptly referred to this phenomenon of New England town development: “It is a peculiar, frustrating story, for the continuities of the period nearly balanced the changes, while the changes themselves were often elusively evolutionary.”⁷⁰ Although, the sorrows and afflictions caused by the religious upheaval of 1692 became one of the catalyzing events for community transformation, the religious revivals in the 1730s attest to the elusiveness of this shift toward a democratically oriented colonial society. Nevertheless, the narrative of post-1692 Salem should not merely be discounted as an extreme case of religious radicalism, but instead, should be considered representative of this gradual process toward significant social and political change in Colonial Massachusetts. The inability of the leaders of the Puritan churches in the 1690s to prevent the movement of their members to new settlements caused them to become less autocratic and more accountable to each individual and family in their respective communities. The Salem families therefore contributed to these geo-political transformations in anticipation of the shift in political power away from the ministry as an institution. The collective impact these families had on the historical development of Massachusetts was not, nor should be misconstrued as intentional, for theirs’ was a “doomed effort to restore the homogeneity of the [Puritan] past,” which ushered in the expansion of New England towns in the eighteenth century.⁷¹

⁶⁹ This phrase is taken from John Winthrop’s sermon written aboard the *Arabella* in 1630, “A Model of Christian Charity,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, #7 (OGB: eBook, 2012).

⁷⁰ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town*, 91.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

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