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## **Winifred King Benham**

Winifred Benham is frequently referred to as the Witch of Wallingford. Winifred was the daughter of Mary Williams King Hale, also an accused witch. She was born Winifred King (or Lyng) about 1639 (based on her age in a court record). She married in Boston Joseph Benham 15 January 1656/57. Joseph Benham died 1703 in Wallingford.

The Benham's lived in New Haven until their move to Wallingford in 1670, raising a large family there. Sadly, several of the children died young.

Winifred was first accused of witchcraft 25 July 1692. She returned to court in November 1692 and was cleared, but warned to reflect on the suspicions and allegations and that she could be brought to trial if evidence against her came to light.

Three teenage girls testified 31 August 1697 that they had been afflicted in their bodies by Winifred Benham and her daughter, Winifred Junior, age 13. Joseph posted bond to keep them from jail.

On 7 October 1697 the jury returned the verdict of ignoramus (not proven).

Afterward, Joseph and Winifred left for New York. There is no death information for Winifred; perhaps she died on Staten Island, where two of her daughters lived with their husbands and families.

## Rebecca Chamberlain

In the *History of Middlesex County*, Samuel Adams Drake writes “Rebecca, the wife of William Chamberlain and John Durrant, both of Billerica, died in prison in Cambridge where they were incarcerated for witchcraft.” Rev. Henry Hazen, in the *History of Billerica*, states that Rebecca Chamberlain “died in prison at Cambridge, 1692, Sept. 26, possibly charged with witchcraft.” These were the two articles that got my daughter, Lauri’s attention when we were researching at NEGHS. She took this information and told Kim Nagy about it, of course that is when Kim told her about joining ADEAW! We now have three generations as members, as well as a niece and great-niece.

William Chamberlain came to Massachusetts Bay Colony and took a deed of a house and lot in Boston on October 30, 1647. There it is assumed he met Rebecca (Shelley or Addington). They were married about: January 4, 1646 in Woburn, MA.

There is confusion over her last name. Sarah Shelley of Boston, in her will says Rebecca is her “Sister”, yet others think Sarah was an Addington because of their mention in her will too, but as “Cousins”.

Rebecca and William resided in Boston for a short time. The Boston property was sold on January 4, 1649 and two days later admitted to Woburn where the first four children were born. They then moved to Billerica in 1652 where William bought land from Thomas Hamons. He bought more land and probably owned about 200 acres.

No court evidence has been found, as of now, about Rebecca being put in prison. **The Chamberlain Society** has been searching, as well as those of us who are descendants. Perhaps someday someone will ‘stumble up’ some evidence hidden or shelved improperly and give us information of what Rebecca was accused.

Twelve of the children lived to adulthood and ten of them had children. Here is a list of their children:

|                        |                 |                          |
|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1-Timothy Chamberlain  | b. 13 Aug 1649  | Woburn, Middlesex, MA    |
| 2-Isaac Chamberlain    | b. 1 Oct 1650   | Woburn, Middlesex, MA    |
| 3-William Chamberlain  | b. 9 April 1652 | Woburn, Middlesex, MA    |
| 4-John Chamberlain     | b. 22 Jan 1654  | Woburn, Middlesex, MA    |
| 5-Sarah Chamberlain    | b. 20 May 1655  | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 6-Jacob Chamberlain    | b. 18 Jan 1657  | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 7-Thomas Chamberlain   | b. 20 Feb 1659  | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 8-Edmund Chamberlain   | b.15 Jul 1660   | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 9-Rebecca Chamberlain  | b. 25 Feb 1662  | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 10-Abraham Chamberlain | b. 6 Jan 1664   | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 11-Ann Chamberlain     | b. 3 Mar 1666   | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 12-Clement Chamberlain | b. 30 May 1669  | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |
| 13-Daniel Chamberlain  | b. 27 Sep 1671  | Billerica, Middlesex, MA |

## Elizabeth (Periment) Clawson

Stamford, Connecticut

Possibly the witch trials in Connecticut were not as well-known as those in Massachusetts, but still just as devastating to families and communities. In 1642 Connecticut passed a law which stated, in part, that if anybody was found to be a witch, "they were to be put to death." There were over 40 Connecticut residents accused of witchcraft. Elizabeth Clawson was one of them.

Elizabeth Clawson spent her entire life in Stamford, Connecticut, from birth to death. She was married to Stephen Clawson in 1654, was a well-respected person in the community, and was still accused of witchcraft because of the hysteria of an indentured teenager, named Catherine, employed by the Daniel Westcott family. This teenager, who probably had epilepsy, began having seizures and then 'visions.' One of these visions was of Elizabeth Clawson sitting on a spinning wheel or a back of a chair. Catherine was sure Elizabeth must be a witch because only a witch could do that. She knew her employer the Westcott family and the Clawson family had had disagreements. Was this to ingratiate her to the Westcott family? Maybe. Was this for attention? Probably. Many people in the Fairfield area did not believe Catherine was telling the truth. Mrs. Westcott thought Catherine was lying and nobody should believe a word she said. Unfortunately, Mr. Westcott believed her and wanted those she was accusing to be prosecuted. Because of Catherine, charges were brought against Elizabeth Clawson and others.

Elizabeth was questioned by magistrates. She testified she and Mrs. Westcott had argued years earlier, so there was a link between her and the Westcott family. She was subjected to a thorough body search by five women, which only turned up a mole on her arm. A second body search by seven women was performed and nothing suspicious was found, except the statement her body was "made differently." She was jailed.

Another accused at the same time as Elizabeth was Mercy Disborough. On June 1, 1692, Mercy requested she be tried by the water test. The powers that be decided to also give Elizabeth the water test. Elizabeth failed the water test (you sink to prove your innocence) and floated. Some present tried to push her under, but she still floated.

Some people testified at the trial they had heard Catherine state Elizabeth's name when she was asked who she had seen, after one of her seizures. Two of Elizabeth's neighbors testified on her behalf, testifying she was a "woman of peace." This was so unheard of at the time because frequently if you supported someone accused of witchcraft, you were then considered to possibly be a witch. This testifies to Elizabeth's character. During the trial, several testified against Catherine, Elizabeth's accuser, again not believing her fits/seizures were real. In addition, 75 Stamford residents signed a petition supporting Elizabeth. Her husband also defended her. Elizabeth's trial was held in September 1692. The jury could not reach a verdict, so the guidance of the General Court was sought. On October 28, 1692, the court acquitted Elizabeth. She was released from jail after paying for her jail expenses.

Elizabeth went on and lived the remainder of her life with her husband and children in Stamford, Connecticut. She lived to be 83, dying in 1714. The petition still exists and can be seen at the Stamford, CT Historical Society. One must wonder if it had not been for that document if she would have been found guilty of witchcraft on the false accusations of a teenager.

Elizabeth had eight children. They were Jonathan, Stephen Jr., David, Rebecca, Elizabeth, Samuel, Daniel, and Mary.

## Thomas Farrar

Thomas Farrar was baptized 29 January 1614/15 at Burnley, St. Peter, Lancashire, England; the son of Thomas Farrar and his second wife Athelred. Records show that Thomas Sr. was a Supervisor of Highways, Constable, and Church Warden in Burnley. In a Letter of Attorney dated 2 (11) 1645 .. "Thomas Farrar of Boston, husbandman," .. gave "his brother Henry Farrar, mariner, the power to sell, let, lease or make sale of any house or lands to him due by his inheritance." A burial record is not found for his father, but a burial record for Athelred the wife of Thomas Farrar living in Saxifield, Lancashire, England is dated 30 March 1650.

Thomas Farrar (hereafter referred to as Sr.) is in Massachusetts Bay Colony by 1639 and married first to Elizabeth \_\_\_\_\_ by 1640, possibly in Lynn or Boston. Thomas and Elizabeth have eight children: Hannah (m. Thadeus Berry), Elizabeth (d. 1677), Sarah (m. Melatiah Lothrop), Thomas, Jr. (m. Elizabeth Hood), Susanna (m. Joseph Newhall), twins Peleg and Mehitabel (both d. 1660), and Elizabeth (m. Robert Buffam). The births of only three of their children are found in the Lynn records. Elizabeth (\_\_\_\_\_) Farrar died 8 January 1680/81 in Lynn.

Thomas Farrar, Sr. is found several times in the court records, serving in juries from 1651 to 1661, and in a grand jury and jury of inquest in 1673. He was a Selectman of Lynn in 1664 and again in 1672. On the negative side, he was brought into court and fined for "throwing down Benjamin Smith and dragging him by the heels out of the barn" on 26 February 1649/50. In June 1680 Thomas was again taken to court for threatening abuse on Mary Robbinson and William Sweatland, when he forced their mare backward on the highway, resulting in them being thrown off the horse.

Thomas Farrar, Sr. married second on 3 March 1680/81, Abigail (Johnson) Collins, the daughter of Richard and Alice Johnson and widow of John Collins. Although records do not name Thomas Farrar as a Quaker, several children of his second wife Abigail, by her first marriage, are documented as being Quakers. The History of Lynn 1629-1864 states: "The first Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, in Lynn, was held at the house of Samuel Collins, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July [1690]. There were but five Lynn men present." The book also includes a reference to Thomas Farrar, Jr. and his brother-in-law John Hood: "This year [1696], two Quakers, whose names are Thomas Farrar and John Hood, for refusing to pay parish taxes, suffered nearly one month's imprisonment at Salem." The connection of the Farrar and Collins family to the Society of Friends is possibly a contributing factor in Thomas Farrar, Sr. being accused of witchcraft.

In a deposition dated 16 May 1692, "Ann Putnam who testifieth and saith that on the: 8th of May 1692 : there appeard before me the Apperishtion of an old gray-head man with a great nose which tortured me and almost Choaked me and urged me to writ in his book: and I asked him what was his name and from whence he came for I would complaine of him:" In these records he is referred to as "Old Pharoah" or "Faraoh." (Essex County Court Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 2 no. 114. )

He was taken into custody on 17 May 1692 along with Rebecca Jacobs, Sarah Buckley, Mary Witheredge, and Elizabeth Hart. He was imprisoned in Boston on 16 May 1692 and released on 2 Dec 1692. (Suffolk Court Records Files vol. 31, docket 2667 p. 149 )

Thomas Farrar, Sr. signed his will on 22 Jun 1793 in Lynn. He left bequests to his wife Abigail and his four daughters Hannah Berry, Sarah Lothrop, Susannah Newhall, and Elizabeth Farrar. The bequest of a cow to each of his daughters Hannah and Susannah would indicate that he had previously provided for them when they married. He left Sarah twenty pounds and youngest daughter Elizabeth fifty pounds. He leaves “.. My Whole Effate bothe of houfing & Lands & all of My Effate Unto My fone Thomas ffarrar ..” who is also named Executor. The will was witnessed by William Bassett (husband of Sarah (Hood) Bassett, another accused witch) and Richard Hood (husband of his granddaughter Hannah (Berry) Hood). It should be noted that Thomas Farrar, Jr. and his wife had no children, and he leaves his property to these two men and their family members.

He died on 23 February 1693/94 at Lynn. The inventory of the estate was taken on 29 March 1694. The contents of the inventory include four cows and one heifer, one mare and one colt, thirty three sheep, and five swine. His property included his house, orchard, and thirty two acres of land. The value of the estate was 304 : 19 : 0 when proved on 3 April 1694.

## **Ann Alcock Foster**

Ann Alcock Foster was an elderly widow, when she was accused of witchcraft with her daughter, Mary Foster Lacey and Granddaughter. Her story begins tragically with her husband dying and her eldest daughter murdered by her husband in a drunken rage. He was later hanged. Witchhunters were notorious for picking their victims because of family tragedy.

Two young “afflicted” girls were brought to Andover in 1692, accusing the Foster women of witchcraft, when, a neighbor named Ballard died. Her husband brought charges against the Fosters stating, they had caused his wife’s illness and death, demanding their arrest.

All were arrested, Ann was interrogated by the Magistrates for 4 days in July of 1692. She admitted to flying on a “stick broom” to attend meetings and trying to establish a “devil’s kingdom”. She confessed to the devil appearing to her in the form of birds and various animals. All 3 were convicted.

Many thought it was her age and senility that made her confess or hoped to save her daughter and granddaughter? All were placed in the Salem Jail. The conditions were brutal for inhabitants—dark, dismal, and infested with vermin. Prisoners were chained to walls, for fear of flying away. Most of the time, the convicted stayed several days before hanging. The daughter and granddaughter were released within a month. Ann spent close to 5 months before finally succumbing to the harsh exposure. She died in December of 1692. One of her sons claimed the body for a fee of a little over 2 shillings. Her burial site is unknown. Shortly after-- the witch trials came to an end, but not soon enough to save Ann Alcock Foster.



## Lydia Gilbert

In 1651 Lydia and her husband, Thomas Gilbert, were living with Henry Stiles in Windsor, Connecticut. Henry was boarding with the Gilberts and there appeared to be some animosity between the families. The land the Gilberts lived on once belonged to Frances Stiles, Henry's father.

In the fall of that year, an accident took place while the local militia men were performing training exercises. Thomas Allyn of Windsor was carrying his musket in a cocked position and inadvertently hit it against a tree, causing the musket to fire. Henry Stiles was mortally wounded in the accident.

An inquest was held, and Thomas Allyn was indicted. At his trial, the jury found him guilty of "homicide by misadventure," and he was fined 20 pounds for his "sinful neglect and careless carriage."

His sentence was to be "bound to his good behavior for a twelve-month period and that he shall not bear arms for the same term." Thomas Allyn's father paid a bond of 10 pounds, and Thomas was remanded into his father's custody for the probationary period.

Three years later, the death of Henry Stiles inexplicably reemerged and Lydia was accused of his murder. Some speculate it was Thomas Allyn trying to clear his name and some speculate it was the animosity between the Gilberts and the Stiles that caused the incident to resurface again.

In November 1654, Lydia heard these words, "Ye party above mentioned is found guilty of witchcraft by the Jury."

Her fate is not known, but most historians believe that she was hanged at Hartford, Connecticut, in 1655. She may well have gone to her death in the jail yard in Hartford, but more likely she was hanged on the lot at the corner of Albany Avenue and Vine Street in Hartford, where the public gallows are known to have existed.

Shortly after the verdict, Thomas and the rest of the family left Windsor and swore never to set foot in the town again.

## **Rebecca (X) Elsing Mudge Greensmith**

(c. 1629(?) - 1662)

Rebecca first married Abraham Elson/Elsing, probably in England, and they had three daughters, Sarah, Hannah, and Mariah - who died young. After Abraham died (1648), she married Jarvis Mudge and they had two sons, Micah and Moses. There were no children in her third marriage (after 1653) to Nathaniel Greensmith.

Nathaniel was known to be "thrifty by divergent and economical methods," since he was credited in the records with stealing a bushel and a half of wheat, of stealing a hoe, of lying to the court, and of battery.

In 1661, Rebecca's minister accused her of being "a lewd, ignorant, and considerably aged woman." Soon the rumors started that she had been seen cavorting in the woods with the devil and Ann Cole accused her of witchcraft.

These facts soon put both under suspicion by their neighbors and culminated in indictments in late 1661. Rebecca and Nathaniel were convicted and hanged in January 1662 on "Gallows Hill," a bluff a little north of where Trinity College now stands in Hartford, Connecticut

(Note: Her origin and age have not been proved, nor has George Steel been proven as her father.)

## Hannah / Anna Wolcott Griswold

(CA 1625)

Hannah/Anna Wolcott was born ca 1625 in Somerset, England, to Henry Wolcott and Elizabeth Saunders. Hannah's name is not listed with her parents and brothers who came on the *Mary and John* in May 1630, landing in Nantasket Point, MA. She might have been left off the compiled list or came on a later ship. The family moved to Windsor, CT, where Mr. Wolcott became one of the first 12 men elected to the General Assembly in 1637, a member of the House of Magistrates, and a producer of hard cider.

Hannah married Matthew Griswold (Sr.) 16 October 1646 and they had 5 children: Sarah, Matthew, John, Elizabeth, and Anna. The son of George Griswold, Matthew was born ca 1617 in Kenilworth, England, arrived in MA ca 1639, and then moved to Windsor, CT. He was an agent for Lord Governor Fenwick and received a land grant from him in 1645 in Saybrook, CT, naming the property "Black Hall Estate."

Hannah received 12 acres of meadow-land in Windsor, CT, as an inheritance from her brother, Christopher. In a deed dated 23 April 1663, Matthew granted this parcel of land to his wife "to remain to her and to her children and their dispose forever." It was unusual for the times for a woman with a husband living to have property in her own right.

In 1667, John Tillerson, a neighbor, accused Hannah of witchcraft and convinced others to suspect her of witchcraft. A counter-charge of slander was filed by the Griswolds and the cases went to court. The court decided Hannah was not a witch, that Mr. Tillerson had no cause to be jealous of her, and that he had greatly sinned in harboring such jealousy against so good a neighbor who had done him many favors. To compensate Hannah for the wrong and to clear her of all suspicions of the offense, the Court ordered that their opinion be published by the constables of Saybrook and Lyme at public meetings. The Court did not make Mr. Tillerson pay monetary damages to the Griswolds as he was poor but ordered him to pay 7 shillings for the express warrant and 5 shillings for the constable.

Matthew's older brother Edward served on two witchcraft juries in 1662 in Hartford, CT; both women were convicted. A Wolcott/Walcott family from a different part of England than Hannah was involved in the 1692 Salem, MA, trials.

Matthew continued to serve as a Deputy to the General Court and Commissioner in East Saybrook, aka Lyme, CT. He died 27 September 1698, leaving a multi-page will and large estate. Hannah and her son-in-law Abraham Bronson (m. Anna) were summoned to the New London, CT, court in September 1700 regarding the estate but only Abraham was summoned in May 1701. Hannah probably died between those dates.

In 2011, the descendants of Matthew and Hannah presented a check to the Cypress Cemetery Association (aka Old Saybrook Cemetery) to re-imburse the Cemetery for the costs of repairing Lady Fenwick's gravesite. Original documents show that Matthew Griswold and his descendants

were “obliged to keep (the tomb) in Repair and Considern of Black Hall Estate.” Family members indicated Hannah and Matthew may be buried under College Street which runs in front of the cemetery, not too far from Lady Fenwick. The Griswolds kept their church membership in Saybrook rather than moving it to Lyme so it is plausible they were interred near their benefactors of 1645. No tombstones have been found.

## **Mary Williams King Hale**

Mary Williams was born in England circa 1606/1608. She has been identified as the sister of Hugh and John Williams of Boston and Block Island and possibly Nathaniel Williams.

Mary was first married by 1639, but her husband's name is unknown. Her second husband's name is also unknown except that he was a Mr. Hale. Hale died before 28 August 1654 as that is when she was admitted to live in the town of Boston.

She was accused of witchcraft in Boston. It seems that one of her boarders claimed he was poisoned by her after his romance with her granddaughter ended. She was acquitted in 1681 and there is no further record of her. Perhaps she left Connecticut with her daughter and family.

## Sarah Noyes Hale

Sarah Noyes was born in 1656 to Rev. James and Sarah (Brown) Noyes of Newbury. Sarah married Rev. John Hale, 20 years her senior, in 1684. Sarah and John had three children between 1685 and 1689.

When the Salem trials began in 1692, Rev. John Hale was an early and active believer in the need to prosecute alleged witches. He was joined in this belief by many others, including Rev. Nicholas Noye, who was Sarah's uncle. Primary records remain to document their strong opinions and involvement. Throughout the trials, which resulted in the executions of twenty persons, and the incarceration of dozens more, Rev. John Hale did not publicly waver from these beliefs. But while the Court of Oyer and Terminer, established to conduct the Salem witchcraft trials, was formally adjourned on 29 October 1692, the accusations continued. Just two weeks after the trials ended Mary Herrick, a teenager from nearby Wenham approached Rev. John Hale and his fellow clergyman, Rev. Joseph Gerrish of Wenham, to give a surprising statement. She complained that she had been afflicted by two apparitions. One was of Mary Easty, who had been hanged on 22 September, in the final execution of alleged witches. The other was none other than Sarah Noyes Hale. Mary accused Sarah of "pinching, pricking, and choking" her. She further related that in this apparition, Mrs. Hale asked her, "Do you think I am a witch?" to which Mary said she replied, "No! You be the Devil!"

In November of 1692, Sarah was thirty-six years old and in the final weeks of her fourth pregnancy (son John would be born on Christmas Eve.) The daughter and wife of clergymen, she was surely well respected in the community. Rev. Hale was no doubt stunned to hear about this report from Mary Herrick. It caused him to reflect on the whole trial madness, in which he had been such an active participant. He knew, of course, that his wife was innocent of any such charges. But if her specter could appear to Mary, if evidence could have been presented to the Court against her, was it not possible that others had been wrongfully condemned? While he may have had his doubts before, Rev. Hale now resolved that the use of spectral evidence had been wrong. Sarah Noyes Hale died in May 1697 at the age of only forty-one, leaving four young children under the age of twelve.

Sarah was the last woman accused of witchcraft in 1692, after the Salem trials ended.

"Such was the darkness of that day, the tortures and lamentations of the afflicted, and the power of former precedents that we walked in the clouds and could not see our way." The Reverend John Hale, 1636-1700 These words come from a book Rev. Hale wrote in 1697, just after the death of his wife Sarah, called *A Modest Inquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft*.

References: Brian F. LeBeau, *The Story of the Salem Witch Trials*. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1998). Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002). Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem witch trials: a day-by-day chronicle of a community under siege* (Lanham, Maryland: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004).

## Frances Alcock Hutchins

Frances Alcock Hutchins was born about 1612, probably in Hampshire, England. She is believed to have voyaged to Massachusetts in 1638 on the ship *Bevis*, whose passenger list includes a listing for "Alcocke Francis 26, servant." Immediately preceding her on the manifest is "Huthcinson John 30, carpenter, servant." Both were servants to Richard Dummer of Southampton.

Frances married John Hutchins and the couple had eight children. They lived initially at Newbury, and later removed to Haverhill. In addition to his carpentry work, John also fished, farmed, and had an interest in a sawmill. He held several positions of civic responsibility, being a Selectman in 1669-70 and a Constable in 1663-4. The family had at least two servants, Elizabeth Shaw and an Indian named Hopewell. The family was comfortably situated and, apparently, well regarded in the local community.

On 17 September 1653, Frances was arrested for wearing a silk hood, which was in violation of a town law forbidding the wearing of finery by a person of "meane condition," this being a person whose property was valued at under £200. However, "upon testimony of her being brought up above the ordinary way," she was discharged.

Frances was arrested a second time on 19 August 1692, when she was a widow about eighty years of age, on a complaint of witchcraft made by Timothy Swan of Andover and Ann Putnam, Jr., and Mary Walcott of Salem Village. She was held in goal until December 21, when her son Samuel and Joseph Kingsberry posted a £200 bond to satisfy the accusers and gain her release. There is no record of her having been brought to trial.

Frances lived on in Haverhill until her death on 5 April 1694.

## Susannah (North) Martin

SUSANNAH NORTH was baptized in Olney, England on September 30, 1621. She was the daughter of Richard and Joan North. While a young girl, her mother died. Her father remarried a woman named Ursula. Susannah had 2 sisters; Sarah and Mary. Susannah came to America with her father, stepmother and sister, Mary.

Susannah married George Martin/Martyn, a blacksmith, on August 11, 1646 in Salisbury, Mass., as his second wife. George was born in Ramsey, England in 1618. He came to America as a servant of Samuel Winsley about the time Salisbury was first settled. He had previously been married to a woman named Hannah. George and Hannah had a daughter named Hannah.

Susannah and George had 8 children; Richard, George, John, Esther, Jane, Abigail, William and Samuel. Susannah's name appeared twice on the public records before 1699. Once she was fined 20 shillings for an unknown offense and the second time, in 1667, her husband had objected to her seat placement in the meeting house as he felt it was below her station.

Susannah was a short and slightly plump woman who was well developed in her figure. She was active and of remarkable personal neatness. She wore her simple hood and scarf with an air and carried herself pertly, with a trimness about her. She was said to be outspoken, a strong-minded woman, defiant and she had little respect for authority.

Testimony against Susannah in 1692, suggests that she had been accused of witchcraft as early as 1660 or 1661.

On April 13, 1669, at Salisbury Quarterly Court, "Susannah Martyn, wife of George Martyn, was ordered to be committed to prison unless she gave bond for her appearance at the next Court of Assistants upon suspicions of witchcraft."

In 1685 George Martin died, leaving Susannah an impoverished widow. Six years later, on April 30, 1692, a Warrant for her Arrest was issued on the charge of witchcraft. Inhabitants of Salem had named her a witch and stated she had attempted to recruit them into witchcraft. Susannah was sent to prison.

On May 2, 1692, Susannah underwent the indignity of a physical examination at the Salem Village Meeting House by Magistrates John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin. On June 26, 1692, her trial began. At her trial, held in Salem, Massachusetts, Susannah pleaded not guilty. She was convicted and was hanged on Gallows Hill on July 19, 1692, with four others that were tried at the same time: Sarah Good, Elizabeth How, Sarah Wildes and Rebecca Nurse. The women were taken from jail, placed in a wooden cart, and driven up a rocky road to Gallows Hill. Rebecca Nurse prayed all the way to her death.

In 1998 it was realized that 5 "witches" had still not been exonerated. Ann Pudeator was absolved in 1957. A petition was filed in 1999 in which steps were taken to have them absolved. Finally, on October 31, 2001, by the pen of Acting Governor Jane Swift, Susannah and the 4 others (Bridget Bishop, Alice Parker, Margaret Scott and Wilmot Redd) were absolved of their crime of being a



“witch.” Honorary President General Shari Worrell was part of the committee to get five absolved of the crime of witchcraft.

On June 9, 2002, a Memorial Service, in honor of those last five to be absolved, was held at The First Church in Salem. Descendants from all over the country came to celebrate our victory. The descendants gathered together in remembrance and prayer, knowing that after 300 years could finally rest in peace as the Christian Martyrs they truly were!

## **Rebecca Towne Nurse**

Rebecca Towne was baptized on February 21, 1621 to William and Joanna Blessing Towne in St. Nicholas, Great Yarmouth, England. William Towne was the emigrant ancestor of the Towne family who lived in Topsfield. Rebecca was the first of seven children born to William and Joanna- the baptismal dates are John, 1623; Susannah, 1625; Edmund, 1628; Jacob, 1632; Mary, 1634; Sarah, 1648; and Joseph, 1648. The first six were born in St. Nicholas; Sarah and Joseph were born in Salem. It was said that William Towne arrived in New England sometime in the year 1640.

Rebecca married Francis Nourse/Nurse in 1645 in Salem and for the next 30 years they farmed an area that was sparsely settled in the area. Nurse came into possession of the Bishop land in 1678 and the chain of title was convoluted from the beginning. This controversy is said to have contributed to the unrest regarding the witch controversy and Rebecca Towne Nurse. At more or less the same time another controversy in the area of the Nurse farm occurred and this brought great interest to the proceedings causing jealousy to manifest itself and against Nurse, Towne, Esty families. In 1692 the cloud of witchcraft appeared in Salem Village and quickly spread and concentrated on the Towne family. Rebecca was the first in the Towne family to be executed for witchcraft on July 19, 1692. Her sister Mary was executed on September 22, 1692 and her sister Sarah was accused in 1692, but escaped execution.

Tradition has it that Francis and his four sons and 4 sons-in law came to the execution site after dark and removed Rebecca's body from where it had been left, took the body and buried it in consecrated ground. No one is quite sure where that is. The story of Rebecca Nurse is well told in MASSACHUSETTS and MAINE FAMILIES by Walter Goodwin David. It includes the Towne and Nurse ancestry histories with an excellent recollection of the witchcraft delusion. This book is recommended for the vital statistics provided.

Massachusetts and Maine Families in the Ancestry f Walter Goodwin Davis, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., Baltimore, Maryland, 1996 pages 62 and pages 484.

## Mary Bliss Parsons

Mary Bliss was born in England about 1626, the daughter of Thomas Bliss and Margaret Hulins. They were a Puritan family and emigrated to New England in 1639. She married Cornet Joseph Parsons on 26 November 1646 in Hartford, CT. He was a merchant and political figure and they first settled in Springfield, MA. By 1654, they had moved upriver to Northampton. It was there, in September 1656 that Mary and Joseph brought defamation charges against their neighbor Sarah Bridgman. Sarah blamed Mary for the death of her infant son and accused her of witchcraft.

Mary Bliss Parsons was described as a proud and nervous woman, haughty in demeanor. She belonged to the aristocracy and considered herself a dame of considerable importance. She was a woman of forcible speech and domineering ways and felt that her neighbors should have the benefit of her opinions. She was not well liked in Springfield and this dislike followed her to Northampton.

The problem started when Goody Branch came from Springfield to visit Goody Hannum and several women gathered to visit. The conversation began with the usual gossip, then turned to a discussion of personalities and then to witchcraft. The insinuation that Mary Parsons was a witch was amplified and enlarged upon until all present believed that it simply must be true. It was then repeated and embellished upon to other neighbors who added their own "evidence". When Joseph Parsons heard the accusations, he enlisted the aid of the law to clear his wife's name.

After hearing all of the testimony, the decision of the court was that "the defendant hath without just ground raised a great scandal and reproach upon the plaintiffs wife" and "the defendant shall make acknowledgment before the inhabitants of the places where the said parties dwell ... Northampton and also Springfield ... at some public meeting." The Bridgmans were ordered to pay damages of 10 pounds and court costs of 7 pounds, 1 shilling and 8 pence.

But the story does not end there. Eighteen years later, in September 1674, charges of witchcraft were formally brought against Mary, again by the Bridgmans and their son-in-law Samuel Bartlett. They blamed Mary for the death of their daughter Mary Bartlett.

Because witchcraft was a capital crime, it could not be tried in the county courts. That lower level court simply determined if enough evidence existed to warrant the attention of a higher court. This was apparently the case because it was forwarded to the Court of Assistants in Boston. Mary's husband Joseph posted bond of 50 pounds. Mary was indicted by a grand jury in March 1675 based on evidence sent from the County Court. She was tried for "not having the fear of God before her eyes and ... at one or other of times ... entered into familiarity with the devil and committed several acts of witchcraft". She pled not guilty. They jury found her not guilty of witchcraft and she was discharged in May 1675.

Mary and Joseph spent their later years in Springfield. They had a total of 12 children, four of whom reached adulthood. Joseph died on 9 October 1683 in Springfield at the age of 63. Mary outlived him, dying on 29 Jan 1712 in Springfield.

## Welthian Loring Richards

Welthian Loring was born between about 1599 and 1604, probably in Dorchester, Dorset, England. By 1620 she was married to Thomas Richards. The couple had nine children; the eldest six were baptized in Pitminster, Somersetshire and the last three were born after the family came to Massachusetts in 1633. The family lived originally in Dorchesber but, about 1639, removed to Weymouth.

Welthian Richards had a reputation as an outspoken woman. In about 1640 she was recorded as describing fellow citizens as “cozeners & cheaters.” In a letter to John Winthrop, one of the parties so described said she behaved in a fashion “unbeseeming a modest woman’s carriage.” [WP 4:310]

Thomas Richards died in 1650/51, after which his widow moved to Boston, where she lived comfortably. In 1653 she was threatened with a charge of witchcraft as, when she was very angry, she threatened that terrible things would happen to those who angered her and they would suffer terrible fates. However, acquaintances from Weymouth wrote that she took Christian care of her children and “God hath so blessed [them] that five or six of them have approved themselves to one church or other, and been readily entertained into their fellowship...” [WP 6:362] The case was ultimately not brought forward.

She died on 3 Jul 1679 in Boston.

## **Judith Varlet**

Daughter of Casper Varlet and Judith Tentenier was baptized in Holland in 1629. She emigrated to New Amsterdam with her parents and siblings on the ship Fortuyne arriving in 1651.

While living with her parents in Hartford County CT, she was accused of 'witchcraft' by a neighbor, was arrested and acquitted in 1662-1663.

A neighbor provided the accusation, apparently after his daughter took ill and, in her delirium, accused Judith of being a witch and a cause of her illness.

Her brother Nicholas had married Anna Stuyvesant Bayard, the sister of Peter Stuyvesant in New Amsterdam. Peter Stuyvesant sent a letter of support to Hartford court, in support of this young woman which seemed to have an impact on the acquittal.

Upon her release, she was able to travel from Connecticut to New Amsterdam eventually marrying Nicholas Bayard, son of Anna Stuyvesant Bayard Varlet in 1666.

She died in NYC in 1711.

## **Mary Williams**

Mary Williams was born in England circa 1606/1608. She has been identified as the sister of Hugh and John Williams of Boston and Block Island and possibly Nathaniel Williams.

Mary was first married by 1639, but her husband's name is unknown. Her second husband's name is also unknown except that he was a Mr. Hale. Hale died before 28 August 1654 as that is when she was admitted to live in the town of Boston.

She was accused of witchcraft in Boston. It seems that one of her boarders claimed he was poisoned by her after his romance with her granddaughter ended. She was acquitted in 1681 and there is no further record of her. Perhaps she left Connecticut with her daughter and family.

## **Else (Alice) Young**

**Windsor, Connecticut**

Else Young is the first person on record in the colonies to be hanged for witchcraft.

She was hanged on May 26, 1647 in Meeting House Square in Hartford, Connecticut – more than 20 years before the hysteria that hit Salem, Massachusetts.

Unfortunately, there is not much known about that charges brought against Else. Her hanging was recorded in the journal of Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop, where he mentions "One... of Windsor arraigned and executed at Hartford for a witch." A second entry was recorded by town clerk of Windsor, Matthew Grant, which confirms her execution with the May 26, 1647, diary entry, "Else Young was hanged."

Else was the wife of John Young and together they had a daughter Alice (Young) Beamon, who was also accused of witchcraft. She was verbally accused as a widow in 1684 but was never indicted.

Every year on May 26, a small ceremony is held in Windsor, Connecticut to honor Else and another woman hanged for witchcraft – Lydia Gilbert.

In February 2017, The Town of Windsor exonerated Else Young and Lydia Gilbert of witchcraft. There is a room in town hall named in their honor.

Connecticut still has not exonerated those hanged for witchcraft in the state.

Please consider reading a wonderful historical fiction book called One of Windsor by Beth Caruso, which gives a glimpse into what Else's life may have been like up until the time of her death.

### **Sources:**

John Winthrop, Journal : 1630-49, ed. James K. Hosmer (New York, 1908), II, 323.

Connecticut State Library, State Archives, RG 000 Classified Archives, 974.62 W76gra

<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/else-young-witch/>