Gender Roles and the Salem Witch Trials: Women’s Newfound Power in Salem, 1692

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Abstract

This capstone is meant to analyze the changing levels of power that women encountered during the events of the Salem witch trials. The background and necessary information will be presented related to the trials, and women’s expected roles during this time period will be explored, with the overall intention of discussing how women overstepped their intended spheres, and what repercussions that had. Women were meant to have a specific place in their life, with a miniscule amount of power. However, the Salem witch trials was a shifting time when women were stepping out of those bounds and given more power than before. This event left a mark on history and women’s roles in a Puritan lifestyle.
Introduction

In the year 1692, Sarah Good, resident of Salem, Massachusetts, was accused of witchcraft. She was one of the first three women to be accused of being a witch. Throughout that year, young girls were falling into hysterical fits, doing things that they had no control over, discovering themselves to be mysteriously injured, and being taunted to join the side of the Devil. They claimed that witches had plagued Salem and were now spreading chaos. Accusations arose all over, names were thrown out, fingers pointed, and many fell prey to the delusions and panic that swept through the town and village. Sarah Good was one of the victims of the historically notorious Salem witch trials.

A warrant for arrest was issued on February 29, 1692 for Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba, and Good was then arrested on March 1, where she and the other women were subjected to examinations over the course of several days.¹ During those days, Sarah Good underwent examinations and questions by the judges that had been brought in to oversee this event. Question after question, it was continued to be wholeheartedly believed that Good and the others were witches and had been practicing witchcraft, along with harming the young girls and causing other peril throughout the town and village.

Focusing once more on Sarah Good, if there was not the spectacle of hunting down witches, if for any reason Sarah Good spoke up against authority, would she have been treated in a similar manner and thought of as she was seen during her examination? A woman was meant to be subservient, yet here she was, doing the opposite, in a way, because she was speaking up for herself. During the examination there was a shift in a woman’s role that was seen as unacceptable and as a great disruption to the order of life in Salem. Some of the people truly felt

that the difference in Sarah Good – the difference in how she was meant and expected to behave as a woman in the community versus how she was actually acting during the trial – had made her “an enemy to all good.”²

These women – Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba – all took to the stand and gave their accounts, their stories, and their heartfelt conviction that they were not witches. One would break and admit to witchcraft; one would prevail in claiming her utmost sense of innocence; and one would ultimately turn the accusations to the other accused. The indicted women each had a unique part to play within the hearing and within the entire event of the witch trials in general. Their roles as women also approached a very different and exclusive situation as well.

Women, within a small organized religious community such as Salem in the late 17th century, had no defining sense of power or equality preceding the events of the witch trials. This historical event was a time in which women’s previous roles were deviating from the normal or supposed natural course in that particular society. The gravity of the witch hunts seemed to open up new and enticing roles that women could be privy to, and some took full advantage of that, whereas others used it in differing ways, or some women were a casualty of the new power that others gained or even due to their own follies of stepping out of the patriarchal bounds.

With the following research, the typical roles that women had within this time period will be looked at, and will be analyzed and discussed how those roles changed specifically within the event of the Salem witch trials. Why those roles shifted, and how they shifted will be examined. In such a structured religious society, how did women take a step further than acceptable out of their everyday stereotypical roles during the witch hunts and trials? There were opportunities for women to gain ground in the way of more power, and some women seemed to abuse this

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newfound power that they acquired. It is my goal to look at specifically how women’s degrees of power were elevated whilst the hysteria of witches began and through the events of the trials themselves.

It is a fascinating and curious thing as to how some women, who had never before had the opportunity nor were even given the initial opportunity, were standing up in court and testifying for themselves. What is even more curious is that some were listened to and their word was true – these women, who might not normally have been listened to in such a situation and to such an extent, were having their words acted upon, and in some cases others would be harmed or killed because of this. This was a time when women would not normally dare speak up for themselves or fight for various rights, but now, with the witch hunts carrying on, women were defiantly standing up in court and proclaiming their innocence. On the other hand, however, women were also abusing their new power by accusing others that they felt deserved to be tried. It was a very remarkable time of twisting and, in some cases, of misusing this new power that women gained.
Historiography

The Salem witch trials are one of the more macabre stories of history – suspicion, witchcraft and the supernatural, accusations being tossed around, judging and sentences to jail, hangings, death. It is also a story which has never been told the same way twice. There is not a clear cut argument that has yet been proved to be the true and main reason as to why these events ever happened in the first place. There has been an onslaught of theories as to what led to the trials of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692, and how 20 people died because of the threat of supposed witches and warlocks. Historians have offered an interesting spectrum of studies and theses as to the outbreak of the events of the trials, and although there can be a certain amount of common ground with some arguments, there is still a large diversity of ideas and reasoning for the great witch hunt.

As mentioned, there is a unique spectrum of studies that historians have done as to why the Salem witch trials unfolded as they did. These secondary sources provided by historians tend to lean towards either a general history type approach – along with usually including a basic or even in-depth discussion as to the events – or an approach which focuses on a specific belief and argument as to why the events happened in the first place. Historians, when discussing and focusing on this particular topic, have directed their research towards looking at a specific concentration and reason for the trials occurring.

Some of the main or common ideas as to why this event happened that are usually posed by historians and researchers include religious conflicts and or social conflicts. Researchers have deduced and reasoned, based on the way of life during this specific time period and the type of community that Salem was at this time, that religion played a huge role in the events of the witch
trials. Religion is believed to be one of the primary reasons as to the explosion in the witch hunts, since the Puritan religion was such a vital part of everyday life for the residents in Salem.

Besides historians looking at causes for the Salem witch trials, there is another portion of historians who have been dissecting the more intricate web of social conflicts that were arising within Salem and its people during this event. There are some that look at gender, specifically women and how it tended to be reoccurring types of women who were accused of witchcraft, tried, and eventually hung. Author Carol F. Karlsen is an example of the interpretation of gender and the Salem witch trials. Karlsen studies the similarity or pattern as to those who were accused, and how they tended to be females who were older, married women. She discusses the idea of younger women wanting to gain some type of control over these older women who were yet another type of dominant figure who added to the gender strains that they were under. It is also looked at how these women violated the religious or economic or social structure and hierarchy, and how that might have impacted their being accused.³

I believe that my own research as to women’s shifting roles of power in the religious and political realms of Salem during the witch trials will contribute to this particular field of study. I want to greatly focus on women’s roles and how various women were stepping out of these norms and the impact of them doing so, but also the greater power that some women received during this time – the young girls who initially started the first accusations, for example. I believe that by looking at the women of Salem and their roles and then the divergence of these roles will be an insightful look at this topic. Although there has been previous research about women’s roles during this time period, and various aspects of the patriarchy during this era and specific event, I want my research to take a slightly different approach with what it focuses on.

When it comes to women’s history and the Salem witch trials, historians tend to focus on the subservient role of women and their way of life, and how that carried on during this time period. I hope to look at the event of the trials themselves and how women’s roles really became a sort of anomaly in that singular moment and event, and how that had an impact later on, or if it did not have an impact and only occurred during the specific event of the hunt and trials. History can be lacking in women’s history, and I believe that I can contribute to the growing and expanding look at women’s roles throughout history, be they good or bad, but important nonetheless.
Historical Background – Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch to Live

Stories of witches tend to take place in wooded forests, the darkness pulling unsuspecting victims into its trap, with cloudy skies looking on from overhead, an ominous rumbling of thunder rolling through the clouds. That fictional setting is not how the events of the Salem witch trials occurred. Instead, it was in the early months of the year 1692 in Salem village where two young girls – the local reverend’s nine year old daughter, Betty Parris, and eleven year old niece, Abigail Williams – were overcome with fits from an unknown invisible assailant. Their afflictions did not appear to be from any normal sickness, and instead the chilling notion that this work might be caused by witches began to circulate within the community and its inhabitants.

A series of events began to unfold in the following months. With the girls’ ailments of screaming, throwing things, crawling around, being pinched and pricked with pins continuing and even beginning to afflict others, accusations were now pointed to specific culprits. Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba were the first three women to be accused of witchcraft in Salem. These women each had different yet stereotypical qualities of being a witch: Sarah Good was a homeless woman, often found begging for food and shelter from neighbors, even antagonizing those who offered help to her; Sarah Osborne had caused a scandal by remarrying an indentured servant, along with attempting to gain control over her son’s inheritance from her first marriage; Tituba was the black or Indian slave of the Parris household – her race has been and continues to be disputed – who brought her own different background and beliefs to this community. One of these compromising folk beliefs had involved Tituba baking a witch cake. Meant to detect a witch’s identity, the young afflicted girls had encouraged the slave to make a

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witch cake, which was a baked loaf of rye bread, mixed with urine from the afflicted individuals. It was then fed to the family dog, which would ultimately point out the witch. These women were accused and arrested, with eventual examinations before the local magistrates.

Through the process of these examinations of Good, Osborne, and Tituba, it was stated by Tituba that there were more witches within Salem. The next woman to be accused by the young girls was Martha Corey. Not a poor woman, Corey was a woman who attended the church on a regular basis, yet the accusations against her were believed to be accurate, and she too was arrested in March of 1692. The accusations continued – nobody of Salem village or the town was free from the terror of witches. The four year old daughter of Sarah Good was accused, as was a seventy-one year old woman, Rebecca Nurse, and even men were accused, such as John Proctor and Giles Gorey, husband of Martha Corey. 185 individuals were accused of witchcraft in Salem.

The judges who presided over the examinations included John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin – both local magistrates – later along with Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth and assistants Samuel Sewall, Samuel Appleton, James Russell and Isaac Addington. Hathorne and Corwin were experienced judges who had a substantial number of cases under their belts. Although there was a great deal of previous experience, a critical decision was made that differed from other trials. Suspects were questioned in a public manner, rather than interrogating them in private beforehand, which was how it had been done in the past, and a meticulous transcription of the examinations was to be conducted throughout the entire process, done by Ezekiel

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8 Ibid., 51.
The examinations took place at the meetinghouse, which was the largest building in the village, which offered the chance for the people to pile in and listen and view the spectacle.

From the beginning, Hathorne seemed to believe that the accused he and Corwin questioned were guilty. When interrogating, his questions were formed in a way that would lead them to admit their guilt, rather than being impartial. During the first examination of Sarah Good, Hathorne asked what her familiar was, if she had made a contract with the Devil, and why she was hurting the children. Norton describes the dynamics of the courtroom as, “Four distinct elements combined to create an unstable, often explosive mixture: the magistrates, assuming guilt; the accused, struggling to respond to the charges; the afflicted, demonstrating their torments; and the audience, actively involving themselves in the exchanges by offering information and commentaries.” This combination of ‘elements’ greatly impacted the hearings and official decisions. The odds – the entire atmosphere of the hearings – were against the accused that stood trial.

The examinations of numerous individuals, both men and women, continued throughout the months and into May of 1692. At this point there were an overwhelming number of people being held in the jail, and a proper Court of Justices had not yet been appointed, so on May 27 Governor William Phipps ordered the establishment of a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer – the French legal terminology meaning, “to hear and determine” – for several counties. This was meant to aid in the handling of the witch trials. Nine judges, who were also councilors, were named to the court and brought in: William Stoughton, John Hathorne, Jonathan Corwin, Samuel

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12 Ibid., 169.
Sewall, Bartholomew Gedney, John Richards, Nathaniel Saltonstall, Waitstill Winthrop, and Peter Sergeant. The first case that was brought to the grand jury was Bridget Bishop’s, a woman described as not living a Puritan lifestyle. She was taken to trial on June 2, 1692 and convicted of witchcraft the same day after a physical examination of her body was done, to which they discovered what they believed to be a witch’s teat – this was a mole or blemish that was insensitive to touch and the Devil or a witch’s familiar would suck on the teat. She was sentenced to death and hanged at Gallows Hill on June 10, the first execution of the Salem witch trials. Further death was had as others were tried, found guilty, and hanged. There were a few exceptions, such as the temporary case of Elizabeth Proctor, who was pregnant, and Mary Bradbury who had escaped. Some died in prison, and one man, Giles Corey, was pressed to death with stones for refusing to be agreed to be tried.

The legal process throughout the events of the infamous Salem witch hunts followed in a peculiar manner. Someone might accuse a person of witchcraft and this complaint was given to the local magistrates. If a complaint was felt to be sound, then the accused would be arrested, brought in for examination, and, if the complaint was substantiated, the accused would continue to be dealt with by a superior court, such as the Court of Oyer and Terminer – once it was established. Witnesses were brought in and gave their testament against the accused. Once a person was indicted for witchcraft, the accused was sent to trial and tried.

The type of evidence that was mainly procured and used was spectral evidence. This form of evidence, based on dreams and visions, would oftentimes be used as testimony that the accused was seen or came to someone in a dream or vision, as either their witch’s self or their

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familiar would do so. This type of testimony was taken as a primary source of evidence, but it was Reverend Cotton Mathers that warned of not basing the entire trials and cases on this type of evidence alone. Another form of evidence gathered and acknowledged as the truth was the form of a touch test. If someone were struggling from a fit and an accused witch touched the victim and the fit stopped, then it was believed that the accused truly was a witch and the culprit of the fits. Other forms of evidence used during trials and examinations included confessions by the accused, testimony from accusers and the public, poppets that might be found on an accused person or within their home, certain books or ointments that they might possess, or a witch’s teat found on the body of the accused.

As the trials hurtled onward throughout 1692, the support for them began to dwindle, and Cotton Mather’s father, Increase Mather, was also speaking up about spectral evidence not being a conducive form of evidence against the numerous accused. He argued that the standards of evidence for witchcraft needed to be equal to those of any other crime, to keep things fair. Governor Phips decided to dissolve the Court of Oyer and Terminer in October of 1692 – it was instructed that any successor would discount spectral evidence as a type of legal testimony and evidence.16

By May of 1693, Phips had pardoned and released the rest of the accused who were in prison for witchcraft. It was not until the beginning of 1697 when the Massachusetts General Court declared a day of fasting for the tragedy of what happened with the Salem witch trials. The trials were judged unlawful by the court, and leading justice Samuel Sewall made a public apology for his own role in the events that had occurred with the trials. The trials were declared unlawful in 1702. Legislation was later passed that restored the names of those who had been

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condemned, and financial restitution was given to the heirs of the condemned in 1711.\textsuperscript{17} Massachusetts formally apologized for the Salem witch trials of 1692 in 1957. 20 people were executed in the Salem witch trials.

Life for Puritan Women – Wickedness of a Woman

The Salem witch trials were an outlier within the timeline of the New England colonies and their history. A remarkable and frightening shift within the social, political, gender, and religious confines of this Puritan society, the witch trials was something new that had not been experienced nor anticipated. In order to further the discussion of what changing levels of power were occurring during the Salem witch trials, the description of the gender roles that women had needs to be analyzed. The roles and rights of women in a Puritan community will assist in establishing a basis for where women were at prior to the events of the Salem witch trials.

Women were the subservient and inferior gender in this type of community. They were treated harshly, viewed as saints and sinners in a religious context, secondary subjects to their husbands and second-class citizens.18 From what was preached at services, women were sometimes associated with evil, and the Devil held a fascination to their unstable souls.19 These beliefs stemmed from the biblical figure of Eve and her temptation into sin within the Garden of Eden, as written in the Old Testament of the Bible. It was believed that women had a special relationship with the Devil.

Although there was a harsher look towards women, their roles tended to center around aspects of caretaking and caregiving. One of the most important roles that women took on was being a mother. The act of giving birth was dangerous during this time period, and many women were young when they were having children – many children, in most cases, as well. Infant mortality rates were high, and childbirth held the potential and chance of death for both mother and child. Women would take care of the children while home and guide and mentor them, in

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19 Ibid.
usually strict ways, based on the Puritan beliefs. Besides caring for the children, women were tasked with many other chores, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, sewing, food preservation, caring for livestock, tending to the garden, and more.\(^\text{20}\) There was also the potential for women to be able to become the breadwinners of the family due to selling of any goods they produced or animals that they raised.

In women’s roles within the religious realm, in 1636, Puritan women were officially not allowed to speak in church, having to be silent throughout the service.\(^\text{21}\) Women were also not allowed to lead discussions on topics such as theology, unless there was a strictly all female prayer group. However, with the Puritan views on education being a bit more progressive in certain areas of religion, women were allowed to read scriptures in church. They believed that everyone and anyone should be able to read from the Bible, and so included women. The Puritan community and faith held the strong notion of community and family helped to strengthen their religious foundations, and the work that an individual might do via cooperating with others could only help promote growth and connection within the community as a whole.\(^\text{22}\) Thus, women were able to be a part of that aspect, and feel that she was serving God.

Turning now to look at the rights that women had, there were many legal rights that were not available to women. In a majority of cases, men were the dominate gender. Women living in a Puritan community such as Salem did not have the right to vote, nor were they able to be a part of a public office or serve on juries. Marital status would oftentimes play a crucial part in what women were allowed, legally, to do. Widowed and unmarried women were able to create a will, buy or sell property, act as a guardian, sue or be sued, and a widow was able to receive up to a


\(^{22}\) Ibid.
certain interest in her deceased husband’s personal property.\footnote{Ann M. Little, “Men on Top? The Farmer, the Minister, and Marriage in Early New England.” 1997, page 125.} When a woman was married, essentially her entire legal identity that she might possess would be gone. Any property, goods, livestock, and money that might be left to the wife in the will were owned by the husband, and the husband owned anything that belonged to the wife, besides certain personal items. Children were mixed in the legal process as well, and considered legally belonging to the father. Although it might sound odd, married women had fewer legal rights than unmarried women or widows. Married women were not able to make a will without the consent of her husband, could not buy property, could not make a contract, and could not sue or be sued in court.\footnote{Ibid, 126.}

Overall, women had some basic legal rights – depending on their marriage status, however – but generally women were thought to be lesser than men in many situations and positions. The lack of rights, the absence of respect and acceptance to a certain degree, the lack of equality, and the stifling atmosphere of the patriarchy on many women had an impact on them. As the events began to unfold related to the Salem witch trials, this stifling environment was continuously pressing down on them. Women were seen as vile and evil beings, as lesser than others and were lacking intelligence and honor. From being told ‘no’ over and over again, suddenly there were situations unraveling where people were losing their grip on reality versus the unknown and mysticism of religion, and people were pointing fingers and accusing others, and certain women were filled with an outburst and a need to speak out and voice their frustrations, regardless if they were illogical, unnecessary, or a downright lie.
Changing Levels of Power – Handmaidens of the Devil

Typically when historians and others discuss and analyze early American history and gender, focusing on women, the tendency is to believe that women held little power in general, and they had their very distinct sphere to stay within. This is indeed true, and women were meant to have their specific roles and stay within a confined binding as a supposedly inferior sex. However, a different perspective to take when looking at the Salem witch trials in particular is to look at how the levels of power for women elevated and expanded for them during this event in history. Although this new power was not always used in a righteous and beneficial way, there was still a newfound power that was captured within women’s hands.

Power can hold a plethora of meanings, ranging from economic, social, judicial, academic, leadership, and more. The power that will be analyzed here in relation to women is both the power that an individual believes they personally have – to which they might not legitimately hold power, but they believe so – and a legal power, in the case of the trials. The personal idea and belief that a person held more power than they previously had comes into play with the Salem witch trials, along with the actuality of having more legal power as well, such as in the court systems.

During the events of the outbreak of the belief that witches were assaulting the area, women within Salem were discovering that the levels of power within the community were changing, and that they were gaining power. This power appeared to gain traction as the young girls began accusing other women of being witches. With these accusations, women were being brought into the meetinghouse, questioned, held in prison in some cases, and even put to death.

By speaking out and accusing people of being a witch, some women were finding that they had more power than ever before. Whereas they previously might not have been taken
seriously, the Puritan religion greatly believed that witches should not live and that the Devil and his minion’s work needed to be put to a stop, so laws dealt with this religious information to handle it.\textsuperscript{25} Blame has been pointed towards all angles, from the young girls who initially began naming names, to even the ministers themselves for attempting to gain more followers and worshippers in the church.\textsuperscript{26} The gravity of the situation of witches allowed these women to gain power.

Women were pointing fingers and being listened to and trusted. In many cases prior to the Salem witch trials, women were not listened to in the legal or religious realms. Now, however, if a woman claimed that someone was a witch, actions came about from what they said – someone might be taken into custody and examined and found guilty. Tension that had been growing from such a stifling environment was reaching a breaking point, and the hysteria of witches brought out mistrust and misguided and abusive ways of using a new power that women were discovering. Women had this new power to point fingers and get other people in trouble – potentially people that they did not care for, people who owned land that they desired for themselves, people who had previously wronged them in some manner, and so on. Historians have speculated, analyzed, and even pointed out various patterns about those who accused others, and then also those who were ultimately accused of being a witch.

The Salem witch trials was a time when women were very prevalent in the court, both in matters of public attendance, taking to the stand and undergoing examination, and to witnessing and testifying. This was a new capacity to which women were in many of the areas of the court. Besides the power of women being able to throw accusations around and essentially get others into trouble, there was also the element of women gaining power by being accused. Women


\textsuperscript{26} Robert Detweiler, “Shifting Perspectives on the Salem Witches.” 1975, 598-599.
undergoing examination by the judges were being honest, upfront, and speaking their mind to these men, and even to the larger public. Previous to the witch scare, women would take the stand for various disputes, such as issues with neighbors on their official property.\footnote{Dallett Hemphill, “Women in Court: Sex-Role Differentiation in Salem, Massachusetts, 1636-1683.” 1982, page 168.} The difference between a case such as that and the witch trials however, is that there was a lot more known and documented information that could be provided and seen as clear cut evidence and a solid truth. When it came to the story-like testimony by women about spectral beings entering their dreams or being poked and prodded by invisible spirits, that was not evidence that would be considered strong or even noteworthy in a court system of the 21st century. The judges listened wholeheartedly to this spectral evidence though, and took it as the cold hard fact. These accusing women were trusted in this case, whereas if the events of the witch hysteria was not occurring and there was a problem between neighbors, the judges would most assuredly desire documentation of properties and other paperwork, or better information than everything being hearsay.

During the process of the examinations, women were taking to the stand and, in some cases, speaking their mind. Considering the high stakes during these trials, women were feeling the tension and the taking note of the seriousness of what was occurring. Although women were meant to be collected and not questioning authority, women who were facing charges of being a witch were doing just the opposite. Women gained a sense of power and believed that they had more than they previously did. With this individual power that they felt they had, women questioned authority and questioned the events. They did not go quietly into the night with the charges and accusations made against them. Instead, they spoke up and overstepped their more traditional roles and appearance. Such is the case with Bridget Bishop, the first to be hanged.
During her examination, Judge Hathorne questions, “How can you know, you are no Witch, & yet not know what a Witch is”, to which Bishop answers, “I am clear. If I were any such person you should know it.” Hathorne, noting her retaliation, comments, “You may threaten, but you can do no more than you are permitted.” Bishop once again stands her ground in another examination when she states that, “I am not come here to say I am a witch to take away my life.” Bishop is aware and notes some of the absurdity that is occurring in the trial.

Another fascinating aspect of the power that women were gaining was, besides using it as some did to accuse people of being a witch, or using it as a tool when being assumed that they are a witch and standing their ground against the judges and the public’s opinion, some accused women even used this power to begin putting the blame and suspicion upon others. Some examples include Sarah Good during her examination when she mentions that Sarah Osborne is a witch, and even Bridget Bishop when on to claim that someone else was a witch, rather than her. These women possibly noted that their attempt to answer the questions honestly was not going to save their life, and the internal power that they believed they felt and had only put them into a worse light, given that they spoke up against authority in a negative manner. Twisting that power that she felt they possessed, they used it to at least bring someone else down with them, by accusing others of being a witch. The vicious cycle continued.

Fear, the unknown, and death are troubling presences. For Puritan men and women, those troubling thoughts and feelings, mixed with the strong religious beliefs that they held, only added into the swirling cluster that toppled across a growing tension within the setting of Salem. Historians have described several concerning situations leading up to the outbreak of the Salem witch trials – the fear and battles between the Native American tribes in the area, disease that had

been causing sickness among people, a new environment and establishment that Salem was a part of during this time. With the social, political, and religious climate all strained, issues arose. When fear came knocking on people’s doors, they answered the call and fell victim to it. Men and women fell victim to the hysteria and concern of witches within the community. Although women had previously held minimal power in certain situations outside the home and family, a horrible situation was offering something new that women did not have previously – power. With religion as a main focus, previous legalities were not utilized as they should have been during this time. When much of the pressure came down to invisible evidence and the accusatory declarations, women needed to get a hold of this power that they believed was there in order to get them out of some of these terrifying situations for them. Power was a tool for them, and in a matter of life and death, they had to use that tool in whatever manner they saw best that would end up with them saving their life. Unfortunately, many were using their power in subtly different ways, and people were bound to hurt one another.
Conclusion

Women’s history is ever-shifting, and historians are continuously discovering more about the role that women had and played throughout history. The many struggles that the female gender has had to trudge through is remarkable, and the change that occurs is very evident throughout time. Women have been provided tools and ways to rise up, and sometimes they have had to search for and create their own tools to rise up. Women’s history is intricate and is still being looked at and discussed.

Women in early colonial America struggled greatly, given the religious beliefs about women and their temptation for sin and to be easily swayed by the Devil. With managing an entire household and its numerous elements, women still were not given power or respect in the male-dominated society. Tensions would arise, but there was so little that could be done for women’s situations. Women had a place in the world, and a specific sphere where they were meant to do their tasks. Outliers would appear, but generally during this early period, women accepted and stayed within their confines.

The Salem witch trials was an entirely new event which threw many for a loop. With evidence and testimony being taken that was not usual for these trials and judges, and with women being the primary focus in most cases of the fearful witch hunts, women were looking to survive. When survival begins to play into a crucial role, one does what they must and what they believe will benefit them and keep them alive. Women were discovering that this power that was absent in their lives before was now capable of being used to their benefit. However, it was not always used to others benefits.

Women were accusing others of practicing witchcraft and being familiar with the Devil, and people – men, especially – were listening to these accusations and taking them to heart. They
saw this as the truth and they believed many of the accusations and cries. For once, some women were feeling that they were being listened to, accepted, believed, and they were seeing action based on what they said and described. There was an element of power that was now at their disposal, and, especially for very young girls – Betty Parris and Abigail Williams, for instance – their word was being listened to and accepted as the truth. The power that women discovered did get out of hand, as accusations continued to fly across tall ceilings in the midst of trials and an endless and deadly cycle caused many to turn on one another.

Women were finding power in themselves, and they were discovering the potential to stand up and say what they desired to say or finally take a stand and not allow them to be dismissed so easily as a witch. In the form of giving testimony as a witness, or proclaiming innocence, or pointing a finger at someone else, women’s levels of power had increased during the events of the Salem witch trials. In the aftermath of the Salem witch trials and the eventual formal apologies by jury members and accusers, the power that women had gained during the trials did not seem to stick. It appears that there was no women’s rights revolution or change during the aftermath and later years within that area.

Although all that is available is the transcripts of what was said by all individuals during the trials in 1692 and 1693, of course there is speculation as to the inner workings of these women’s minds. However, saying that women only lost power during the Salem witch trials and there was not another end to the spectrum is not entirely accurate to say. It needs to be looked at from multiple ends and angles, and further studied. The Salem witch trials offered a different dynamic of women’s levels of power, and further analyzations of the power that women latched onto could be important to look at and research. Women’s history can always be added to, and looking at various angles of an incident in history is beneficial for historians alike.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

- An archive and transcription project of the court records from the Salem Witch Trials, consisting of materials such as letters, court records, record books, sermons, diaries, and maps and pictures. A plentiful resource of primary sources that I was able to look at and read the procedure of the trials and get a feel for the language and atmosphere of the trials. Available online at Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project (http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/home.html).

Secondary Sources

- This source examines the numerous factors leading up to the trials in Salem, such as political, war, religious and other conflicts. It looks at how and why the events unfolded as they did and when they did. This was one of my main sources when it came to researching the essence of the trials, and being able to look at it in a deeper sense.

- This article looks at the many theories revolving around the trials and how they came about and the social factors, along with who is to blame, be it the religious figures, the religion itself, or even the accusers who began the event. I utilized this when it came to discussing certain theories related to where blame was being put by historians.

- This text focuses on folk magic by men and women in early New England and relates the relationship between magical beliefs and religious beliefs. It dissects the differences between the beliefs and how they came into conflict with one another and contributed to the Salem Witch Trials. This was one of my main sources in the earlier portions when I was looking at the interlocking ideas of religion folk magic and beliefs.

- This article focuses on the Salem women and changes in gender roles, based on findings from the Essex County, Massachusetts, Quarterly Court records from the years 1636-
1683. I used this to see what the norm was for women in the court, and how that differed from the situations during the Salem witch trials.


- This is a particular chapter from the book A Companion to American Women’s History, focusing on women and religion in colonial America. It examines the roles women played in religion and what was expected of them, and how religion perceived women and their roles on this earth, and I utilized that information when analyzing women’s roles.


- This book dissects the social constructions and roles of witchcraft in colonial New England. It takes a look at the larger picture of gender roles and relations within the religious society, analyzes and explains the sexual structure that was prevalent in the community. Being one of my main sources in the earlier portions, I analyzed this for getting a sense of the larger picture of the Salem witch trials.


- This article describes the chronological events of the Salem Witch Trials, taking a major look at geography and its role in the hunt and trials. It pulls evidence in from resources such as scholarships of early collective violence. This was a good sort of summary of events where I could find out dates and follow the timeline of events.


- This looks at marriage and family life from the perspective of men and having men at the center of the debate, rather than women. It examines the gendered hierarchy and institution which involved both men and women. It also discusses the gender history of colonial America. This was good for when I needed to look at the gender roles and those differing factors.


- This book focuses on a chronological look of the role of women from as early as 1607 up until the War of 1812. It looks at the many responsibilities that women had during this time frame, along with many other aspects of life, such as birth, isolation, superstitions, and raising families. Was a good source to read about the various freedoms that women actually had, while being able to also look at what was typical for women during a specific period in time.

- This book tells the story of the events of Salem, but examines the many players within the trials, such as accusers and judges. It explores the demographics of the accusers and the accused and searches for the pattern behind this. Another main source, this helped me understand better about power and what roles people had during the events of the trials.


- This article examines the sex roles that men and women had, along with the social roles that they had within early American history during the colonial period. It discusses the various roles that women had and how those roles differed from the roles and ideas about women before then but also after that time period, and I was able to use this for more of my discussion of women’s roles and such.