

Salem Witch Trials as They Relate to Preppers

By Joseph Parish

When selecting a topic for today's discussion I decided to choose the subject of the Salem Witch Trials and the active persecution of those women who chose to live outside the norms of the society at that time. Gee people, does that sound a lot like survivalist and preppers? Perhaps we are the next group of people to be persecuted. As we approach this subject, we must remember that the original goal of the Puritans as they flocked to the New World was to establish a location where they could readily worship as they pleased. These are people who left the Church of England in pursuit of better religious guarantees. King James I was determined to rid his country of the puritans even to the extent of instilling the death penalty for them. Wow this is sounding more and more like us and a situation that could develop in the future for preppers.

We encounter two distinct groups of people who left England under these less than desirable circumstances. Some went to Holland and developed a simplistic life among the Dutch Calvinists while others wanted to maintain their English roots and decided to move to America. We too are divided among two different but similar groups - preppers and survivalists.

As the original settlers in the New World began to spread far and wide, we find a small group under the leadership of Roger Conant leaving the established Cape Ann fishing settlement in favor of a less stormy environment. Moving on Conant established the Salem settlement in 1629. In early 1692 both the daughter and the niece of Reverend Samuel Parris became dreadfully ill. The village doctor, William Griggs was consulted after the condition of the pair failed to improve. His diagnosis was bewitchment and his statements began a series of actions by the village elders which eventually resulting in nineteen men and women being subjected to a hanging death, one individual being crushed to death while countless others were imprisoned and died there.

We as logical people have to question why these individuals were subjected to this unusual and cruel persecution. First, we must understand the time in our history that all these events were taking place. In addition, add the daily stresses which were taking place in the Massachusetts Bay Colony along with the religious affiliations which strongly believed that the devil was active and extremely busy in their area of the colonies. Combine this rudimentary atmosphere with the onset of diseases such as smallpox and an occasional attack by local warring Indian tribes and we have an incubation of fear and distrust. Young girls who were anxious to experiment with sexual undertakings frequently used the witchcraft spells as an excuse to cover up their sexual preoccupation. With the local prisons growing greatly at the time these 150 men and women prisoners names were shouted out as the cause of all the young girl's pains and torment.

Eventually a special Court was established to hear the evidence in the various witchcraft complaints. What this amounted to was a gross injustice towards the legal system as one after the other innocent people were deemed guilty of impossible crimes.

Chief Justice William Stoughton ended up convicting and hanging thirteen women and five men as a result of these unproven accusations. In the years following the proceedings many apologies were extended and restitution often made to the victims' families however it still stands that these men and women in particular were the subject of cruel and indecent punishments due merely to having different beliefs. This so much sounds like preppers. Laws have recently been enacted to prevent preppers from being self-sufficient. Some places have forbidden the collection and use of rain water. The penalty in such cases could include jail time. I am starting to see a trend between these two ideologies.

With their legacy of horrible crimes against the alleged witches the city of Salem now grosses a fortune in revenue by flogging their previous crimes against those associated with witches. Every Halloween the city celebrates an event such as the Festival of the Dead, an official Witches' Ball, Psychic Fair, an event known as "Dinner with the Dead", and other eerie and spectral events. Most of the activities are centered upon the early Salem village's response to the alleged witches. All these events are presented by the "Witches of Salem" association. As can be readily seen the city makes a lot of money from their earlier days of indiscretion and hate.

In all reality the Salem witch trials were more of an economic persecution rather than being basically religious in nature. These are similar in nature as those that will descend upon the preppers. There was a sizeable amount of property seized from those accused of practicing witchcraft which tended to fill the coffers of those in higher positions. Additionally, it was an easy excuse to accuse others of sorcery and witchcraft when something went wrong rather than fess up to perhaps making a mistake or error in judgment. When one family member was accused of a crime than the accusations was quickly assigned to the remaining family members as well. Eventually all the possessions and property belonging to that specific family were forfeited. This ultimately provided the town with more land as a result. Can you not already see the connection here - prepper land being confiscated by the community.

The trial persecutors did not single out the alleged witches for religious reasons but merely because they were performing actions associated with witchcraft (i.e., herbal formulary, burning of candles, etc.). Think for a moment how many preppers do the same thing. We grow herbs along with our garden vegetables, we research into what herbs are medically fit to use and we make and even use the candles if we are off grid. Naturally these acts were viewed as illegal and who knows they may become such in our times as well. People developed a fear of these witches and in some cases this fear was so strong as to create hallucinations for the individual concerned. We plainly can see that these people and especially the women were being persecuted merely because they thought and acted differently than the rest of the local society. As the original question phrased it, these women were persecuted because they "lived outside the norm". Sounds a lot like us doesn't it?