

Chapter 2

Sarah Averill Wildes & the Salem Witch Trials

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In 1692, the Massachusetts Bay Colony executed 14 women, and 5 men and 2 dogs for the crime of witchcraft. One of them was Sarah Averill Wildes.

Sarah Wildes



Sarah Wildes' Memorial Marker

Born	Sarah Averill Bapt. March 16, 1627 Chipping Norton, England
Died	July 19, 1692 (aged 65) Salem Village, Province of Massachusetts Bay
Cause of death	Execution by hanging
Residence	Topsfield, Province of Massachusetts Bay
Nationality	English
Occupation	Housewife
Known for	Convicted of witchcraft in the Salem witch trials
Spouse(s)	John Wildes (died 14 May 1705)
Children	Ephraim Wildes
Parent(s)	William Averell (father) Abigail Hynton (mother)

-Wikipedia

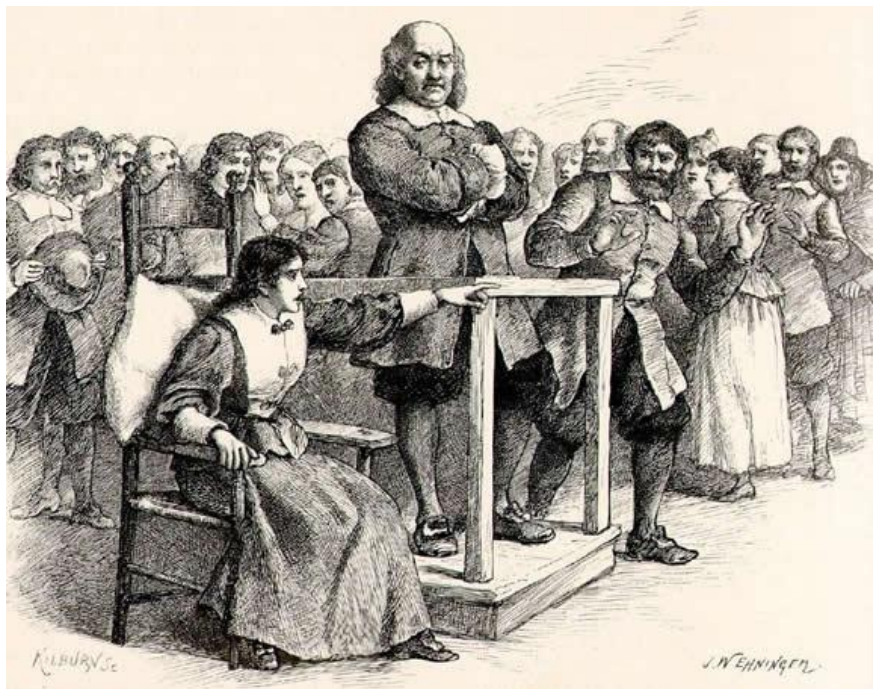
Sarah was the daughter of William and Abigail Averill, the Averill family ancestors who had been the first to immigrate to America more than 50 years prior, when Sarah was a youth.

Now, a lifetime later, William and Abigail were long-since dead and Sarah's older brother, William Averill, Jr, who had held prominent positions in Ipswich and Topsfield, had also died the year before Sarah's arrest. (It is not known where the other original Averill family members were and why they did not come to her defense.)

The Salem Witch Trials

The **Salem Witch Trials** were a series of hearings and prosecutions held between February 1692 and May 1693.

In those few months, approximately 200 people from Salem and 22 from surrounding communities were accused of **witchcraft**. Even though the frenzy was over in a little more than a year and all 19 convicted “witches” were exonerated within a year after the trials and executions, the effects of the wild accusations and the furies, pitting families and neighbors against one another, lingered for generations and became known as a painful, yet illuminating example of the harsh effects of group hysteria and sloppy justice.



At the time, Massachusetts was a colony gone adrift from the English motherland and struggling against Indians and the environment - “a remote, rocky, barren, bushy, wild-woody wilderness”, filled with political and religious tensions.

The swirl of anger and accusations that burst on the Salem scene in January 1692 had been brewing for years, amidst family feuds and neighborly misconduct.

How It All Began

One day, nine-year-old Elizabeth Parris, the daughter of Salem clergyman Reverend Samuel Parris, and eleven-year-old Abigail Williams began to exhibit fits and violent contortions and uncontrollable bursts of screaming. Then they began to point at others, accusing them of witchcraft.

While some people now attribute those first symptoms to the effects of a fungus on the local wheat, such symptoms to a 17th century mind clearly meant the devil's mayhem.

Belief in the supernatural - specifically in the devil's practice of giving witches the power to harm others - had emerged in Europe as early as the 14th century, and was widespread in colonial New England.

Oxford educated English writer, philosopher, and clergyman, John Glanvill, expressed the almost universal belief that witches existed when he generated the definition of a witch:

"A witch is one who can do or seems to do strange things, beyond the known power of ordinary nature, by virtue of a confederacy with evil spirits."

Also, the harsh realities of life in the rural Puritan community of Salem Village (*present-day Danvers, Massachusetts*) enhanced people's fears of the unknown. Stresses of the day included: the after-effects of a British war with France in the American colonies in 1689, a recent smallpox epidemic, as well as constant fear of attacks from neighboring Native American Indian tribes. The town also operated under a longstanding rivalry with its more affluent neighboring town of Salem.

Amid these simmering tensions, the Salem witch trials would be fueled by suspicions of both neighbors and outsiders, along with almost-overwhelming worries of all things unseen.

Everyone in and around Salem simply assumed that witches existed.

In consortium with the devil, witches were able to: fly on broomsticks, transform themselves into cats, dogs, wolves, hares or yellow birds and use charms and ointments to make magic. Witches were most often female and their companions included hogs, turtles, toads or weasels. Witches were thought to have signed agreements in blood with the devil, their cohorts, and their victims.

Symptoms of witchcraft included: bites, pinches, pricks, odd speech, self-strangulations, howls, writhing, twitching, snapping, shrieking, paralysis, frothing, jaws clamped shut, uncontrollable shaking, gnashing, hallucinations and more.

Since there was no university-trained physician in Salem, some men carried "medical kits" that included beetle's blood, fox lung, snails, the fat of roasted hedgehog and dried dolphin heart, burnt black cow-dung or frog-liver powder among other things...all in case of a witchcraft outbreak. Witchcraft was treatable, sometimes, by a brew of breast milk, saturated with the blood of an amputated tomcat ear.

The bewitched were "innocents" but the accused witches were presumed guilty. So, once accused, it was a fight for one's life to prove the right to be acquitted.

The methods of identifying a witch might include mixing urine into a rye-flour cake and feeding it to the family dog; if he reacted at all – clearly a witch was about.

Such a procedure was performed by Reverend Parris' Caribbean slave girl, Tituba, on behalf of the two girl victims at Salem, Elizabeth and Abigail. Inevitably, this resulted in proof that a witch was in the midst of the Parris household. The town doctor examined the girls and made the pronouncement: "bewitched".

Immediately, other girls discovered that they, too, were 'similarly afflicted'.

Others began exhibiting wild, uncontrollable symptoms and pointing fingers at people they were not fond of, accusing anyone that they happened to dislike or that their parents disliked, of being a witch.

In February 1692, arrest warrants were issued for the Parris family's slave, Tituba, along with two other women – the homeless beggar Sarah Good and the poor, elderly Sarah Osborne.

Shortly thereafter, as accusations continued to fly, Sarah Averill Wildes was hit by one of them and brought to jail for trial.

Sarah Is Accused

Why was Sarah accused of being a witch?

There may have been several reasons, including: non-conformity, personal dislike, family antagonism and revenge. Let's look at each one.

Non-conformity and Personal Dislike:

Years before, when Sarah was a young unmarried woman, she was considered 'too glamorous' for the Puritan community. In 1649, she was accused of "too great intimacy with Thomas Wardell" in nearby Ipswich. Several years later, in 1663, she was accused of the offense of "wearing a silk scarf".

It is true that Sarah could be gruff. She sometimes irritated people. One instance involved a young man, who, while cutting hay, broke his scythe. He and his brother, (John and Joseph Andrews), went over to the house of Sarah and her husband John Wildes to borrow another scythe.

Sarah told them she had no scythe available. A neighbor who was visiting told them that John Jr.'s (Sarah's stepson) scythe was hanging in the tree nearby and that they should just take it and speak with John Jr. later. They had not gone far when they were overtaken by Sarah's son, Ephraim. He said he was sent by his mother and that she said, "We had best bring the sith back again..." (*Quote from Sarah's witch trial court transcript*).

John Jr. subsequently gave his permission to the young men to use the tool. After the wagon was filled with their second load of the day, the six oxen could not budge the wagon. One of the wagon wheels sank almost up to the axle where they had to unload almost all the hay to move it. One young man said to the other he thought it was because 'Goody Wild' (Sarah) was spiritually in the cart. Once the wagon was free and reloaded, they came to a treacherous downhill grade in the trail. A small animal jumped near a stump, the oxen bolted and the wagon overturned at the bottom of the hill. They righted the cart, reloaded it, but could not get the ropes to bind tight. For all this, they blamed Sarah's witchcraft.



WITCHCRAFT AT SALEM VILLAGE

Family Antagonism & Revenge:

Sarah's husband, John Wildes, had been married before. His first marriage, in 1645, had been to a local woman, Priscilla Gould. Priscilla was the beloved daughter of a rich and prominent man of the community, Mr. Zaccheus Gould. Zaccheus Gould's children included Priscilla, her brother John Gould and her sister Mary Gould.

John Gould was later accused of treason - - by none other than John Wildes, Sarah Averill's future husband. Perhaps because of this harm to her brother, Mary Gould later attacked the Wildes family with accusations of witchcraft, not only accusing Sarah but also targeting several of the Wildes children.

In 1662, Priscilla Gould Wildes died and left John a widower, with seven young children. Inside of seven months, John married again, this time to Sarah Averill. Perhaps he married in haste so

as to manage the task of raising all those children, but this disturbed the Gould family and the Puritan community and added to people's suspicions of John and Sarah. This antagonism simmered in the community for years.

John's marriage to Sarah was successful. Sarah cared for Priscilla's seven children as they grew up and she also bore John another son – Ephraim, her only natural child.

One of Sarah's stepsons, Jonathan, was known for his strange behavior, which local ministers theorized could be mental distraction or possession by the devil, or fakery. Reverend John Hale related his concerns about Jonathan during Sarah's trial, considering it to be possible evidence of Sarah's own witchcraft.

How did Priscilla's brother, John Gould, come to be accused of treason by Sarah's husband?

In the early 17th century, the Puritans of Massachusetts held political and governmental control over the territory and only members of the Puritan establishment were allowed to vote.

But times were now changing and merchants were complaining that they did not have enough political voice. King James II of England was considering a change in the charter for Massachusetts to allow all property owners to vote. This would mean a substantial loss of power for the Puritans and the upper echelons of the Puritan organization were enraged at the prospect of such a change. John Gould, John Wilde's then brother-in-law, was quite vocal about his views against the crown's upcoming intervention in these local ways.

In 1685, James II appointed Edmund Andros, a colonial administrator, as the Royal Governor of Massachusetts. Because his regime conflicted with the interests of colonial **Puritan** leaders, Andros became a symbol of oppression. This led to significant unrest in the Colony. John Gould became deeply involved in the controversy, opposing the Governor and the King's position. As a result, John was accused of treason, by none other than John Wildes, Sarah's husband.

A Warrant was issued for Gould's arrest:

"Case of John Gould, charged with Treason Boston, Sc.

To the Keeper of his Majesty's Jail in Boston.

The President of his Majesty's Territory & Dominion of New England, with the Deputy President and others of his Majesty's Council, in Council assembled, the 5th day of August, 1686, having received information upon the oaths of ISAAC CUMMINGS, JOHN WILD (John Wildes), & JOHN HOW, of several treasonable and seditious words, spoken by JOHN GOULD of Topsfield, against our Soverign Lord the King, &c. These are, therefore in his Majesty's name to require you to take into your custody the body of the said JOHN GOULD, and him safely keep until he shall be delivered by due course of law, and for so doing this shall be your warrant, given at the Council House in Boston, the said 5th day of August, Anno Dom.1686...

Gould was found guilty of “uttering malicious treasonable and seditious speeches” in August 1686. After paying a fine, he was released. But he would never forgive his former brother-in-law, John Wildes.

Shortly afterward, Mary Gould Reddington, Priscilla’s sister, began to spread witchcraft rumors about Sarah. John Wildes then threatened to sue Mary’s husband, John Reddington, for slander. So, Mary denied her previous statements... but, for Sarah, the damage had been done.

When the accusations of witchcraft began to fly, most of John Wilde's children were also accused. Ironically, it was by order of the local marshal that Constable Ephraim Wildes, Sarah’s natural son and the half-brother of the Wildes children, was the one ordered to arrest his own siblings. John's daughter Sarah Wildes Bishop and her husband Edward Bishop were arrested but Edward's son paid off the Sheriff and they were allowed to escape from jail.

The local Marshall had pity on Ephraim and spared him from having to arrest his own mother.

The Arrest

On April 21, 1692, a warrant was issued for Sarah’s arrest based on a complaint made the same day by Thomas Putnam, Jr. of Salem Village.

Nine people were arrested for witchcraft that day: Nehemiah Abbot (*later released*), William and Deliverance Hobbs (*later released*), Sarah Wildes Bishop and Edward Bishop (*tavern-keepers - later escaped*), Mary Easty (*later hanged*), Mary Black (*a slave of African descent in the household of Nathaniel Putnam – later released*), Mary English (*married to a Frenchman and Episcopalian - later escaped*) and Sarah Averill Wildes (*later hanged*). Shortly thereafter, Wildes’ daughter Phoebe Wildes Day of Ipswich was also arrested.

Salem Village Marshal George Herrick took Sarah to Salem Village, where she was examined by Justices at the Salem Village meetinghouse. In this examination and later ones, she would be accused by the two girls and also by Miss Deliverance Hobbs, who had herself been accused and just happened to have been arrested by John and Sarah’s son, Ephraim Wildes, because of his position as Topsfield Constable. Miss Deliverance made a jailhouse confession to get leniency and then immediately accused Sarah Wildes of witchcraft, to get back at Ephraim for arresting her.

Deliverance Hobbs testified that Sarah had brought her the Devil’s book to sign, to which Sarah contested: *“I am not guilty, sir... I never saw the book in my life and I never saw these persons before.”*

Sarah’s husband and her son both argued Sarah’s innocence of all charges, but to no avail.



A "witch" being arrested in Salem, 1692

On 13 May 1692, Sarah was transferred to the Boston Jail in fetters and handcuffs to await trial. During her imprisonment, her husband John and their son Ephraim traveled back and forth to see that Sarah was fed and clothed and to give her some small comfort.

(In his later request for restitution, Ephraim said that he or his father made trips from Salem to Boston to visit her once or twice a week, at great personal expense.)

On 18 June, Sarah was transferred back to Salem.

The Trials

As the wave of hysteria continued to spread throughout the colony, a special court, albeit not legally formed, was convened in Salem to hear the cases. It was tolerated because the colonial government was preoccupied dealing with the 'Indian problem'.

The trials themselves were a sham. Defendants were not provided legal counsel and the court allowed the use of "spectral evidence" (spectral evidence means evidence based on 'dreams' and 'visions.')



Sarah was tried on 30 June 1692. Witnesses and accusers had the chance to give their "evidence" of witchcraft. Several people were brought to the stand, including John Gould and the Reverend John Hale, to tell stories against Sarah.

The old accusations by John's former sister-in-law, Mary Gould Reddington, resurfaced. Mary Gould Reddington had died by the time of the trial, but her brother John Gould and Reverend John Hale related her claims of witchcraft against Sarah and Sarah's stepsons.

Another of Sarah's accusers, Sarah Bibber, is named in court records as having had a fit, claiming to see Sarah's specter "upon the beam."

Ann Putnam, Jr. testified that she herself was tortured during Sarah's examination. Putnam said (*original spellings*):

*I have been afflicted ever sence the begi[n]ing of march with a woman that tould me hir name was willds and that she came from Topsfeild but on the 22 April 1692 **Sarah wild** did most greivously torment me dureing the time of hir Examination and then I saw that **Sarah willds** was that very woman that tould me hir name was willds and also on the day of hir Examination I saw **Sarah willds** or hir Apperince most greivously tortor and afflict mary walcott, Mircy lewes and Abigail willia [ms] and severall times sence **Sarah wilds** or hirs Apperance has most greivously tortured and afflicted me with variety of torturees as by pricking and pinching me and almost choaking me to death.^[2]*

Mary Walcott similarly claimed:

*in the begining of Appril 1692 there came to me a woman which I did not know and she did most greivously torment me by pricking and pinching me and she tould me that hir name was wilds and that she lived at Topsfeil and hurting me most greivously by times tell the day of hir Examination which was the 22 day of Appril 1692: and then I saw that **Sarah wildes** was that very same woman that tould me hir name was wildes and **sarah wilds** did most greivously torment me dureing the time of hir Examination for when ever she did but look upon me she would strick me down or almost Choak me to death: also on the day or hir Examination I saw **sarah Wilds** or hir Apperance most greivously torment and afflict mercy lewes [s] Abigaill Williams and Ann putnam Jun'r by striking them down and [almst] Choaking them to death. also severall times sence **Sarah willds** has most greivously tormented me with variety of tortor and I verily beleve she is a most dreadful wicth^[2]*

Nathaniel Ingersoll and Thomas Putnam stated that they witnessed attacks on all of the afflicted girls.

Elizabeth Simmons, along with her brothers, John and Joseph Andrews, attested that they had been victimized by Sarah. Humphrey Clark claimed that Sarah had once appeared in his bedroom at midnight.

During Deliverance Hobbs' own trial for witchcraft, she claimed that Sarah's apparition, along with that of Mercy Lewis, had previously "*tore [her] almost to peices [sic]*" as she lay in her bed. Deliverance continued, saying that Sarah recruited her to attend a black mass, and offered to cease tormenting her and reward her with clothing in return for her signing of the devil's book.

In her own defense, Sarah stated her innocence, going as far as to say she had never even seen her accusers before.

Then, John and Ephraim testified to the ulterior motives of the Hobbs, Gould, and Simmons families. Ephraim said he had never seen his mother even begin to harm anyone in word nor action, and that she had always instructed him well in the Christian religion.

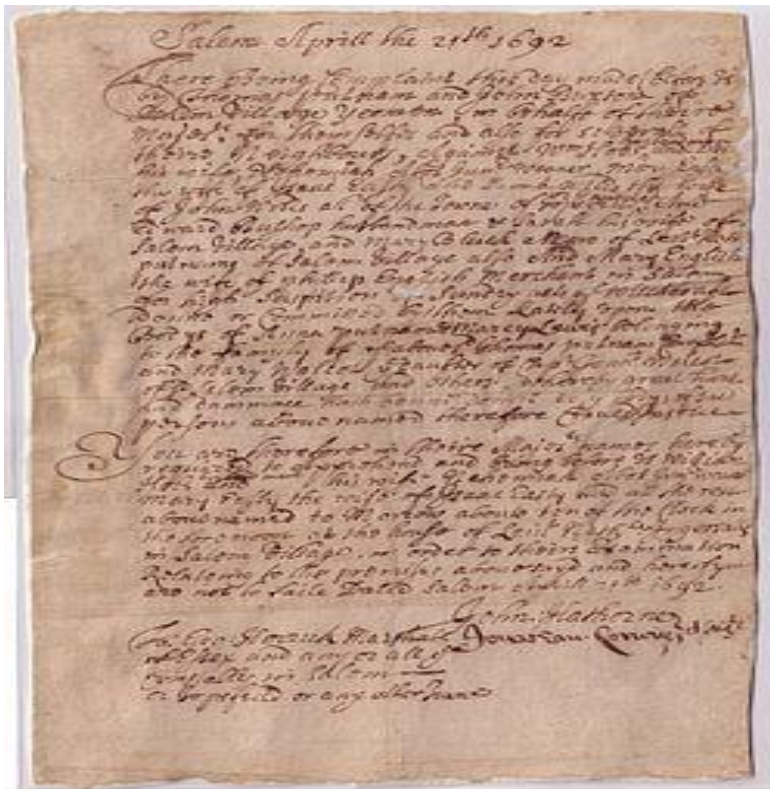
He stated:

as for my mother I never saw anie harm by har upon anie sutch a cout naither in word nor action as she is now a cused for she hath awlwais instructed me well in the cristian religion and the wais of god ever sence I was abell to take in structions: and so I leve it all to this honred cort to consider of it — Ephraim Wildes

Along with Sarah, several other women were tried for witchcraft at that same trial; they included: Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Sarah Good, and Elizabeth Howe. All were found guilty that day and all were sentenced to hang unto death by the Court of Essex County for the practice of witchcraft.

The Death Warrant

On 12 July 1692, William Stoughton signed the warrant for execution.



The death warrant for several witches includes Sarah’s name and reads as follows:

*“Whereas Sarah Good Wife of William Good of Salem Village, Rebecca Nurse wife of Francis Nurse of Salem Village, Susanna Martin of Amesbury, Elizabeth Howe widow of James How of Ipswich, **Sarah Wild (sic) wife of John Wild of Topsfield**, all of the County of Essex in their Majesty’s Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England.*

*At A Court held by Adjournment for Our Sovereign Lord & Lady Kind William & Queen Mary for the said County of Essex at Salem in the said County, on the 29th day of June [torn] were severally arraigned on Several Indictments for the horrible Crime of Witchcraft by them, practiced & Committed On Several persons and **pleading not guilty** did for their Trial put themselves on God & Their Country, whereupon they were Each of **them found & brought in Guilty** by the Jury that passed On them according to their respective Indictments, and **Sentence of death** did then pass upon them as the Law directs.” (Bold type was added for clarity and emphasis)*

Executions at Gallows Hill

During the same time that an additional 150 men, women and children were being accused and tried for witchcraft over the next several months, the first convicted victims began to die. Bridget Bishop, was hanged on June 2, 1692. Eighteen others followed Bridget to the location of the hangings, which came to be known as “Gallows Hill” (*Gallows Hill is located in Danvers, Massachusetts, which was then called ‘Salem Village’.*) Five women were hanged in July, then and additional five in August and eight more in September.

Sarah Averill Wildes was among them; Sarah was executed by hanging at Gallows Hill on July 19, 1692, at the age of 65.



It is likely that she was hanged from a tree, as there is no evidence of a gallows structure. Accompanying Sarah to Gallows Hill that day were Elizabeth Howe, Susannah Martin, Rebecca Nurse and the homeless Sarah Good. Before the executions, Reverend Noyes asked them to confess. Sarah Good's last words were, "You are a liar! I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life God will give you blood to drink."

In addition to the hangings, the Salem tragedy included seven other people who had been accused of witchcraft that died in jail and also the elderly Giles Corey, who was pressed to death by stones after he refused to enter a plea at his arraignment.

The names of those executed by Hanging:

- Bridget Bishop
- George Burroughs
- Martha Carrier
- Martha Corey
- Mary Eastey
- Sarah Good
- Elizabeth Howe
- George Jacobs Sr.
- Susannah Martin
- Rebecca Nurse
- Alice Parker
- Mary Ayer Parker
- John Proctor
- Ann Pudeator
- Wilmot Redd
- Margaret Scott
- Samuel Wardwell
- Sarah Averill Wildes
- John Willard

Restitution

The victims of this mania were pardoned in 1694 by the same jurors who had convicted them just a year before.

Declaration of Regret - Salem Jurors

*We whose names are underwritten, being in the year 1692 called to serve as **jurors in court at Salem**, on trial of many who were by some suspected guilty of doing acts of witchcraft upon the bodies of sundry persons, we confess that we ourselves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand, the mysterious delusions of the powers of darkness and Prince of the air, but were, for want of knowledge in ourselves and better information from others, prevailed with to take with such evidence against the accused, as, on further consideration and better information, we justly fear was insufficient for the touching the lives of any (Deut. xvii) whereby we fear we have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon ourselves and this people of the Lord the guilt of innocent blood; which sin the Lord saith in Scripture he would not pardon (2 Kings xxiv.4) - that is, we suppose, in regard to his temporal judgments. We do therefore hereby signify to all in general, and to the surviving sufferers in special, our deep sense of, **and sorrow for, our errors in acting on such evidence to the condemning of any person; and do hereby declare, that we justly fear that we were sadly deluded and mistaken** - for which we are much disquieted and distressed in our minds, and do therefore humbly beg forgiveness, first of God, for Christ's sake, for this our **error**, and pray that God would impute the guilt of it to ourselves nor others, and we also pray that we may be considered candidly and aright by the living sufferers, as being then under a strong and general delusion, utterly unacquainted with, and not experienced in, matters of that nature. We do **hereby ask forgiveness of you all**, whom we have justly offended, and do declare, according to our present minds, we would none of us do such things again, on such grounds, for the whole world - praying you to accept of this in way of satisfaction for our offense, and that you would bless the inheritance of the Lord, that he may be entreated for the land. (Signed by Salem Jurors)*

In 1711, the Massachusetts Colony passed legislation and the Massachusetts General Court exonerated and offered financial restitution to most of the executed victims, including Sarah.

Her son, Ephraim, was awarded 14 pounds as restitution.

He responded that, "*the los of so dere a frind ... cannot be mede up*".

Aftermath

On 26 June 1693, the newly widowed John Wildes married again.

This time, he chose Mary Jacobs, the widow of George Jacobs, Sr., who had himself been executed for witchcraft.

In the book, Wonders of the Invisible World, Cotton Mather attempted to defend his participation in the Salem Witch trials, laying out what he considered to be the strongest cases for genuine witchcraft. He did not include Sarah as a bonafide witch.

Sarah's husband, John Wildes, died on 14 May 1705, in Topsfield.

The town of Salem Village felt so bad about the executions that it changed its name to Danvers (and missed out on the later tourism bonanza enjoyed by nearby Salem).

In 1953, American playwright Arthur Miller, produced his famous classic play, "The Crucible", based on the Salem Witch Trials. He used these events as an allegory for the anti-Communist "witch hunts" led by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s.

In 1957, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts officially apologized for the Salem Witch Trials.

On October 31, 2001, Massachusetts State Representative Paul Tirone was instrumental in clearing the last victims by an act of the state Legislature on Halloween.

"These people were victims of hysteria, and they paid deeply with their lives," said Mr. Tirone, whose wife, Sharon, is a descendant of Sarah Averill Wildes, exonerated in 1711.

Memorials

Salem Village Witchcraft Victims' Memorial – Danvers, MA

In May of 1992, the city of Danvers (originally Salem Village) acknowledged its place in the history of the Salem witch trials by erecting the “Salem Village Witchcraft Victims' Memorial”, situating the memorial just across the street from the Salem Village Meeting House, where the examinations of witches first took place.

The monument is a large, granite slab pulpit, reminiscent of a sarcophagus, backed by a series of vertical slabs incised with the names of all 25 victims, along with some moving quotes by victims maintaining their innocence. The pulpit is topped by a granite slant-top box and book in which is engraved with the phrase, “The Book of Life,” and which has, on either side, hand-forged metal chains and manacles.



Salem Witch Trials Memorial Park - Salem, MA.

On August 5, 1992 the town of Salem, Massachusetts finally opened its long-time coming “Witch Trials Memorial Park” in remembrance of the innocents executed in the hysteria.

The Memorial was dedicated by Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel. As part of the Salem Witch Trials Tercentenary (300th anniversary), Playwright Arthur Miller also spoke at the dedication.

The Washington Post wrote of Wiesel’s speech:

“The Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate had come before the markers of the witch memorial to do for the victims of the trials what Lincoln did for the Civil War dead at Gettysburg: to consecrate and remember, to explain their legacy in American life.

‘If I can’t stop all of the hate all over the world in all of the people, I can stop it in one place within me,’ he said. He spoke of the Los Angeles riots and the ethnic violence in the Balkans, acknowledging that ‘we still have our Salems.’”



The Salem Witch Trials Memorial Park in Salem

The Memorial sits on a 5,400 square foot plot of land next to the Old Burying Point cemetery and consists of 20 granite benches cantilevered from a low stone wall surrounding an area adjoining the Old Burying Point.

The benches are inscribed with the name of the accused and the means and date of execution.



-Memorial bench for Sarah Wildes at the Salem Witch Trials Memorial Park in Salem

According to the book **The Best of Cutler Anderson Architects**, the theme of the memorial is injustice:

“The Salem Witch Trials Tercentenary Memorial attempts to give form to concepts of injustice...The designers approached the idea of injustice through four words: Silence, Deafness, Persecution and Memory. To represent silence, they graded and organized the site to emphasize the surrounding tombstones as mute watchers looking into the memorial. For deafness, they inscribed the historical protests of innocence on the entry threshold and had them slide under the stone wall in mid-sentence. For persecution, they planted black locust trees, from which the accused believed to have been hanged. For memory, they inscribed the names, dates, and manners of death on stone slabs, which were then cantilevered from the stone wall as benches.”

The stone slabs in the entryway to the memorial are inscribed with the victim’s protests, which were taken directly from the court records.

There is a sign at the Memorial Park describing the reason for the Memorial:

It says that the memorial was “...created to remind us of the enduring lessons of human rights learned from the tragedy of the witch trials.”

It also states: “Nearly 200 people in the Salem area were accused of witchcraft, then considered a crime. 20 were tried and executed – victims of fear, superstition, and a court system that failed to protect them.”

Words of the Executed...

"I am an innocent person. I never had to do with witchcraft since I was born. I am a Gosple woman."

-Martha Cory (March 21, 1692; from the Rev. Parris account of the examination at Salem Village Meeting House.)

The lord above knows my Innocencye ... as att the great day win be known to men and Angells. I Petition to your honours not for my own life for I know I must die, and my appointed time is sett but the Lord he knowes it is that if it be possible no more Innocent blood may be shed ..."

-Mary Esty (September 1692; written while in prison awaiting execution.)

"If it was the last moment I was to live, God knows I am innocent ..."

-Elizabeth How (May 31, 1692; from the Rev. Parris account of the examination at Salem Village.)

"Well! burn me, or hang me, I will stand in the truth of Christ ..."

-George Jacobs, Sr. (May 10, 1692; from the Rev. Parris account of the examination at Salem.)

"Amen. Amen. A false tongue will never make a guilty person."

-Susannah Martin (May 2, 1692; from the Rev. Parris account of the examination at Salem Village Meeting House.)

"I can say before my Eternal father I am innocent, & God will clear my innocency."

-Rebecca Nurse (March 24, 1692, Rev. Parris' account of the examination at Salem Village Meeting House.)

"The Magistrates, Ministers, Jewries, and all the People in general, being so much enraged and incensed against us by the Delusion of the Devil, which we can term no other, by reason we know in our own Consciences, we are all Innocent Persons."

-John Procter, Sr. (July 23, 1692; written while in Salem Prison.)

"... I fear not but the Lord in his due time will make me as white as snow."

-John Willard, (May 18, 1692; from the Rev. Parris account of the examination at Salem Village.)

Clara Avery's book on Averill genealogy says it this way:

Sarah (Averell) Wildes was arrested on April 22, 1692. She found herself in an elect company and proved herself by her patience, fortitude, and Christian virtues quite worthy of her companions, she at no time weakening or retracting her first denial of guilt and affirmation of innocence, and meeting her dreadful end in a way that elicited no hostile public comments from those who were only too willing to see evil in all the accused. Despite her husband's, brother's, and son's (the Constable of Topsfield) pleading efforts trying to save her, she was executed on July 19, 1692. She claimed her innocence and displayed dignity to the end.

The website for Salem, Massachusetts states:

"To this day, the events of 1692 are used as a yardstick to measure the depth of civility and due process in our society."