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## Villages of the Witch Trials - Page 5



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**Salem Village** - Once people settled in [Salem Towne](#), they found the ground not very fertile so many settlers moved outside the "city" and numerous small communities emerged including [Salem Village](#), which was permanently settled in 1636. Located about five miles north of [Salem Towne](#), the settlement grew over the years and by the 1670's, the villagers were requesting the right to build their own church, which was granted in 1672. This was not only the beginning of some autonomy for the village; but, also the start of major infighting among the townsfolk, which would last over the next two decades. The dissension grew so bad over time that it would divide the community, making enemies of friends and family members. It was against this backdrop that the infamous Salem witch hunt and trials would begin in 1692. See Full Article [HERE](#).



**Salisbury** - Situated on the Atlantic Ocean north of Boston in Essex County, this area was once the territory of the Pentucket tribe of Pennacook [Indians](#). On September 6, 1638, the secretary of the [Massachusetts Bay Colony](#), Simon Bradstreet, was granted the right for him and eleven other men to begin a plantation north of the Merrimack River. This land grant included what are now the towns of Amesbury and Merrimack, [Massachusetts](#) as well as the New Hampshire towns of Seabrook, South Hampton, Newton, Hampstead, Plaistow and

Kingston. The settlement was first called Colchester, but when it was incorporated the next year, it was renamed Salisbury, after Salisbury in Wiltshire, England. The original residents were given one lot near the center of town, where they could build a house, plus a larger planting lot just outside the center for farming. Families also owned large sections of "sweepage lots" near the beach, where they harvested the salt marsh hay.

The original roads at the center of the town formed a compact semicircle, which allowed the residents to quickly reach the garrison house in case of [Indian](#) attacks. One of the two greatest fears at the time was the Naumkeag tribe of [Indians](#), thus the men of the town took turns standing watch against a surprise attack, especially at night. The Naumkeags, however, had been decimated by plague, and the threat was not what they thought it might be. The second threat came from wolves, which were plentiful, and would often kill the settlers' livestock.

One of the original founding families of the settlement were Richard and Ursula North, who had immigrated from England with their children. In 1639, they lived with the other settlers on plots along the "circular road" in the center of the village. Richard's daughter, by his first marriage, was Susanna North Martin, who would be accused and hanged for witchcraft during the hysteria of 1692. Though she lived in Amesbury at the time of her accusation, another Salisbury resident would play a key part in her trial.

Robert Pike, one of the founders of Salisbury and a prominent man who held a number of political positions over the years was responsible for recording much of the testimony against Susanna North Martin, who would be executed for witchcraft on July 19, 1692. However, Robert Pike would later become a vocal opponent to the entire affair when accusations were made against [Mary Perkins Bradbury](#), whose son was married to Pike's daughter. In August 1692, he wrote a forceful letter to Judge Jonathan Corwin attacking spectral evidence. As long as spectral evidence was admissible in court, he wrote, "the Devil is accuser and witness."

After the whole witch affair, Salisbury continued to grow, profiting from its upland farms, boat building, and its position on a major overland trade route to the north. Years later it would become a haven for vacationers. Today, Salisbury continues to be highly diverse geographically, encompassing sixteen square miles of farms, beach, marshlands and both residential and commercial space. Now supporting a neighborhood of restored antique homes and riverfront marine businesses, it is called home to about 8,000 people.

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**Topsfield** - Located in Essex County, the area had long been inhabited by the Agawam [Indian](#) tribe prior to English colonization in the early seventeenth century. Led by Chief Masconomet, the Agawam people claimed the land north of the Danvers River, the whole of Cape Ann, and from there, to the Merrimack River. However, the first European explorers had brought smallpox to New England, which would eventually decimate all the shore tribes. When the colonists first arrived they investigated the area of Agawam and met the people, but, they settled in Charlestown. However, in 1633, John the Younger took a group of men northward and he and several of them took up residence in Ipswich Harbor. Two others continued up the river to a large meadow, which they called New Meadows. It was this place that would later become Topsfield. By 1643, the area of New Meadows was permanently settled.



One of the first settlers was Robert Smith who arrived in 1638. His descendants extended through five generations in Topsfield. They were respected townspeople and members of Capen's Congregational Church. Joseph Smith, Sr. was born in Topsfield in 1771, and his son, Joseph Smith, Jr., who was born in Vermont after his family moved, would later found the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Virtually all of the early settlers were self supporting farmers with some involved in blacksmithing and saw and gristmill operations. The General Court of [Massachusetts](#) renamed the place Topsfield in 1648, after Toppesfield, England. In 1650, the town was incorporated. In 1684, the village hired the Reverend Joseph Capen, whose Parson Capen House still stands as the town's most notable historical landmark.

Like other [area villages](#), the [Salem witch trials](#) of 1692 touched Topsfield directly. The first of Topsfield's six accused witches was young Abigail Hobbs, who had a reputation for "rude" and blasphemous behavior. She was the arrested on April 18, 1692, and her parents, William and Deliverance were arrested three days later. Despite the circle of accusations in the family, all three Hobbs managed to avoid hanging. In July 1692, Rebecca Nurse of [Salem Village](#) was hanged at Gallows Hill in Salem. She was the daughter of William Towne of Topsfield. The same girls who had accused [Rebecca Towne Nurse](#) of witchcraft, also named her sisters [Sarah Towne Cloyce](#) and [Mary Towne Easty](#) who lived in Topsfield. Though [Sarah](#) was eventually set free, [Mary](#) was hanged in September. [Sarah Averill Wildes](#) and [Elizabeth Jackson Howe](#) from Topsfield were hanged along with Rebecca Nurse. Many other Topsfield residents were accused of witchcraft until the [hysteria](#) ended in May, 1693, when the governor of [Massachusetts](#) set free all of the remaining persons accused of witchcraft and issued a proclamation of general pardon.

Afterwards, Topsfield would move on and during the [American Revolution](#), many men of Topsfield were involved. By the 1800's shoe factories, stores and inns appeared in the community and by the beginning of the 20th century, the town's character had changed from a farming and shoe manufacturing community to a town of many large estates. Today, Topsfield is a small community of just about 6,000 people that enjoy a more rural atmosphere.



**Wenham** - Located in Essex County, Wenham, was originally home to [Native American](#) Algonquian peoples for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, they were reduced in great numbers due to smallpox in the early 17th century. It was first settled in 1635 and was part of Salem. In September, 1643, the General Court of [Massachusetts](#) granted that Wenham should be a town in its own right and the town was incorporated. The name is probably derived from two villages in England -- Great Wenham and Little Wenham. A church was formed in October, 1644 with John Fiske as pastor and seven families as members.

Wenham was fortunate during the [witch hysteria](#) of 1692, as there were no Wenham residents who were convicted of witchcraft. However, there were several people of Topsfield who were involved. Four were jurors in the trials including William Fisk, the foreman, and his son Thomas Fisk. One of the first three persons accused of witchcraft in the area was Sarah Solart Good, who had grown up in Wenham. However, when she married William Good, they moved to [Salem Village](#). She was hanged on July 19, 1692. Another woman named Sarah Bibber, began as an accuser, giving depositions against 16 people, many of who were later hanged. In the [hysteria](#), the tables were later turned on her and Bibber, herself, was accused of being involved in witchcraft. However, it doesn't appear that Sarah Bibber was ever indicted or tried.

Today, Wenham continues to retain much of its historic character and rural scenery. It is called home to almost 5,000 people.

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Also See:



[The Salem Witchcraft Hysteria](#) (main article)

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