

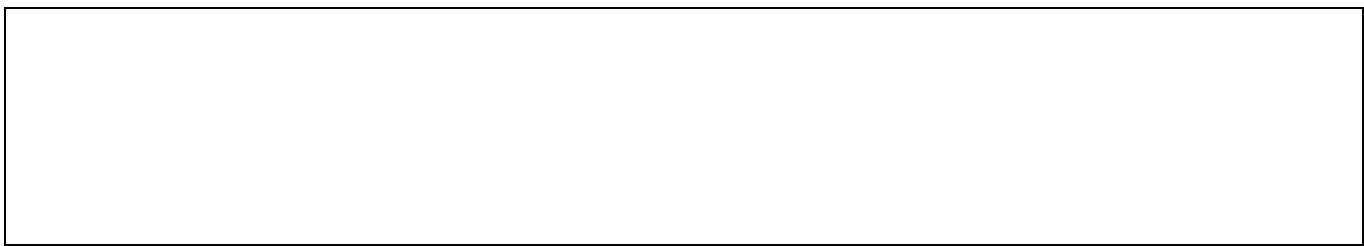
Witch Trials in Colonial New England

Do Now: Examine the painting “The Trial of George Jacobs, August 5, 1692” by T. H. Matteson (1855). In your opinion, what is taking place?

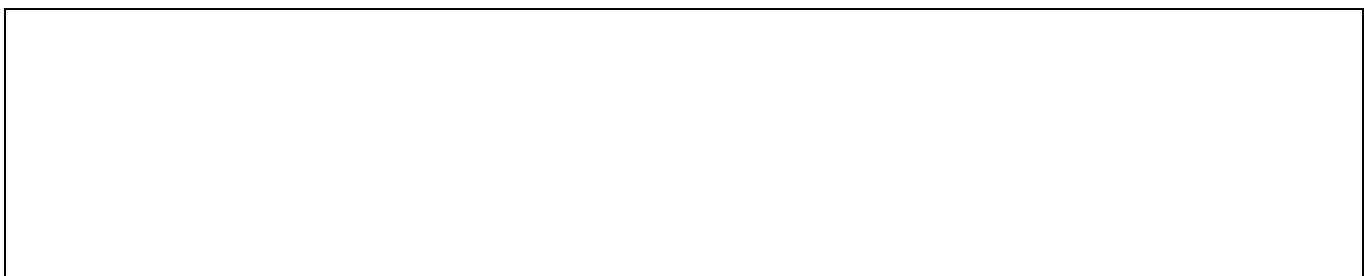


Increase Mather (1639-1723) was a Puritan minister and an early president of Harvard University. In 1679, he demanded that the Puritan Church appoint a special court to investigate what evils had “provoked the Lord to bring His Judgments on New-England” and what could be done “so these Evils may be Reformed.” He believed that war with native people, small-pox, and two great fires were decisions by God to punish the colony because of “the decay of piety.” In a book published in 1684, Mather documented witchcraft in the New England colony. Using your own words, explain what is happening in each of these passages. After reading the passages, explain what you learn about life in colonial New England from the book by Increase Mather and the painting.

A. “Ann Cole of Hartford was and is accounted a person of real Piety and Integrity. Nevertheless, in the Year 1662, then living in her Fathers House (who has likewise been esteemed a godly Man) She was taken with very strange Fits, wherein her Tongue was improved by a Demon to express things which she her self knew nothing of. Sometimes the Discourse would hold for a considerable time. The general purpose of which was, that such and such persons (who were named in the Discourse which passed from her) were consulting how they might carry on mischievous designs against her and several others, mentioning sundry wayes they should take for that end, particularly that they would afflict her Body, spoil her Name, etc. . . . The event was that one of the persons (whose name was Greensmith) being a lewd and ignorant Woman, and then in prison on suspicion for Witchcraft, was by the Magistrate sent for; Mr. Whiting and Mr. Haines read what they had written; and the Woman being astonished, confessed those things to be true, and that she and other persons named in this preternatural Discourse, had had familiarity with the Devil. Other persons accused in the Discourse made their escape. After the suspected Witches were either executed or fled, Ann Cole was restored to health, and has continued well for many years, approving her self a serious Christian.”



B. "Another thing which caused a noise in the country, and wherein Satan had undoubtedly a great influence, was that which hapned at Groton. There was a maid in that Town (one Elizabeth Knap) [36] who in the Month of October, 1671, was taken after a very strange manner, sometimes weeping, sometimes laughing, sometimes roaring hideously, with violent motions and agitations of her body, crying out Money, Money, etc. Six Men were scarce able to hold her in some of her fits, but she would skip about the House yelling and looking with a most frightful aspect. She cried out in some of her Fits, that a Woman, (one of her Neighbours) appeared to her, and was the cause of her Affliction. The Person thus accused was a very sincere, holy Woman, who did hereupon with the Advice of Friends visit the poor Wretch; and though she was in one of her Fits, having her Eyes shut, when the innocent person impeached by her came in ; yet could she (so powerful were Satans Operations upon her) declare who was there, and could tell the touch of that Woman from any ones else. But the gracious Party thus accused and abused by a malicious Devil, Prayed earnestly with and for the Possessed creature; after which she confessed that Satan had deluded her, making her believe evil of her good Neighbour without any cause.



C. In the Year 1679, the House of William Morse in Newberry, was strangely disquieted by a Demon. After those troubles began, he did by the Advice of Friends write down the particulars of those unusual Accidents. On December 3, in the night time, he and his Wife heard a noise upon the roof of their House, as if Sticks and Stones had been thrown against it with great violence. Locking the Doors fast, he returned to Bed again. About midnight they heard an Hog making a great noise in the House, so that the Man rose again, and found a great Hog in the house, the door being shut, but upon the opening of the door it ran out. At another time an Iron Crook that was hanged on a Nail violently flew up and down, also a Chair flew about, and at last lighted on the Table. For one while they could not eat their Suppers quietly, but had the Ashes on the Hearth thrown into their eyes. Their Light was beaten out, and they being laid in their Bed with their little Boy between them, a great stone (from the floor) weighing above three pounds was thrown upon the man's stomach, and he turning it down upon the floor, it was once more thrown upon him. A Box and a Board were likewise thrown upon them all. In another Evening, when they sat by the fire, the Ashes were so whirled at them, that they could neither eat their Meat, nor endure the House.

