

## Witchcraft in Colonial New England

The witchcraft outbreak in colonial New England was not entirely centered on Salem, Massachusetts; The Colony of New Haven was also involved with what was referred to as “the great excitement”. Most of these incidents took place in the early 1660s. The following is an excerpt from *Connecticut Historical Collections* by John Warner Barber, 1836:

“The following incidents were related by an aged lady who is now living in the town of East Haven. They are said to have taken place at the time of the great excitement about witchcraft. These events were related to the lady by her father, who is now dead, and was an eyewitness of these occurrences. The relation may be considered as a fair sample of *Witch stories*, which in ancient times were generally believed.”

“The old gentleman referred to above was riding on one bright moonlight evening in a very lonely place called the *Dark Hollow*, (a by-road which leads from East Haven to Fair Haven,) when he saw two females at the head of his horse, very earnestly (apparently) engaged in conversation, and keeping pace with his horse. He was considerably excited and his feelings of fear were aroused, as he had no doubt that these were the famous hags that were disturbing the peace of the land. He had, however, courage enough to speak to them in these words, - ‘*In the name of God, I beseech you to tell me who you are.*’ When wonderful to behold, they immediately vanished. He got off from his horse to look for them, but could find nothing but a riding hood, which lay where they disappeared.”

“A short time after this event, the same gentleman was riding, as he says, past one of his orchards, and there appeared to him to be someone shaking one of his apple trees: a considerable quantity were falling to the ground. He went up to the tree; but there was no one to be seen – all was still as the grave.”

“The following is still more mysterious, - there was an old woman that lived not far from the neighborhood of this gentleman, who was suspected by the neighbors of being one of these tormentors of mankind. Their hogs would run about on their hind legs and squeal as though they were possessed by legions of unclean spirits; their children would be taken sick and crying out that someone was sticking pins in them.’ A member of one of the families, would roll about the floor with great rapidity, as though urged forward by some invisible power; and the members of the family had to keep a eagle’s eye on the rolling gentleman, lest he should roll into the fire. When the neighbors made their bread it was full of hairs, and their soap would run over their kettles and fly about the floor like burning lava from the crater of Mt. Etna. In the night large stones would tumble down their chimneys and break their cooking utensils, setting the whole family in an uproar. It appeared as though the powers of darkness had been let loose from Pandemonium to torment these neighbors. But not long after these difficulties all ceased in the following manner: One of the neighbor’s pigs was running about on its hind legs as described, and the man who was noticing it, jumped over into the pen and cut off one of its ears, and the old woman mentioned always afterwards had one of her ears muffled. The neighbors were now satisfied that this woman was the cause of all their troubles. However, they thought they would say nothing or do nothing for the present, but see how these things continued; and a short time after this one of the neighbors was making potash beside the river, and it began to fly out and run about so that they could do nothing

with it. They held a conversation and concluded that they would shoot into it with a rifle, accordingly, they did; and immediately there was a calm, and they were enabled to go on with their work and finish it. In the morning the neighbors went to the place where this woman resided, and they found her dead, and thus their troubles ended.

But it appears this woman was not the only suspected witch in the place; for in an old lonely house that stood on the road leading to New Haven, lights were seen in the night; the sound of the violin, and the noise of persons dancing was heard by the inhabitants of the place and around it until they went to work day after day, pulling its clapboards off, until the house was completely destroyed, to the joy of the inhabitants of the town, and nothing more of any consequence was heard of witches from that time. The house which stands on the east side of the Episcopal Church in East Haven was built on the foundations of this house.”