

The Examination and Confession of Ann Foster at Salem Village

The Salem witchcraft trials have become one of the most infamous periods in American History and the language and nature of the trials have provided a context for many subsequent events. In this selection, the "testimony" of Ann Foster demonstrates the basis for the accusations and the hysteria and illuminates the mindset of the accusers and to a degree, the accused.

After a while Ann Foster confessed that the devil appeared to her in the shape of a bird at several times, such a bird as she never saw the like before; and that she had this gift of striking down the afflicted with her eye ever since and being asked why she thought the bird was the devil. She answered because he came white and vanished away black and the devil told her she should have this gift and that she must believe him and told her she should have prosperity and she said that he had appeared to her three times and was always as a bird, and the last time was about half a year since, and sat upon a table had two legs and great eyes and that it was the second time of his appearance that he promised her prosperity and that it was Carrier's wife about three weeks ago that came and persuaded her to hurt these people.

16 July 1692. Ann Foster examined confessed that it was Goody Carrier that made her a witch that she came to her in person about six years ago and told her if she would not be a witch the devil should tear her in pieces and carry her away in that which time she promised to serve the devil that she had bewitched a hog of John Loujoys to death and that she had hurt some persons in Salem Village, that Goody Carrier came to her and would have her bewitch two children of Andrew Alins and that she had then two popets made and stuck pins in them to bewitch the said children by which one of them died, the other very sick, that she was at the meeting of the witches at Salem Village, that Goody Carrier came and told her of the meeting and would have her go, so they got upon sticks and went said Jorynt and being there did see Mr Burroughs the minister who spoke to them all and this was about two months ago that there was then twenty five persons meet together that she tied a knot in a rag and threw it into the fire to hurt Tim. Swan and that she did hurt the rest yet complained of her by squeezing popets like them and so almost choked them.

18 July 1692. Ann Foster examined confessed yet the devil in shape of a man appeared to her with Goody Carrier about six years since they made her a witch and that she promised to serve the devil two years, upon which the devil promised her prosperity and many things but never performed it, that she and Martha Carrier did both ride on a stick when they went to the witch meeting at Salem Village and that the stick broke; as they were carried in the air above the tops of the trees and they fell but she did hang fast about the neck of Goody Carrier and were presently at the village, that she was then much hurt of her leg, she further saith that she heard some of the witches say that there was three hundred and five in the whole country and that they would ruin that place the village, also said there was present at that meeting two men besides Mr. Burroughs the minister and

one of them had gray haire. She saith that she formerly frequente the public meeting to worship God. But the devil had such power over her that she could not profit there and that was her undoing: she saith that about three or four years ago Martha Carier told her she would bewitch James Hobbs child to death and the child dyed in twenty four hours.

21 July 1692. Ann Foster examined. Accepted her former confession being read to her and further confessed that the discourse among the witches at the meeting at Salem Village was that they would afflict there to set up the Devil's Kingdom. This confession is true as wtness my hand.

Ann Foster Signed and owned the above examination and confession before me. Salem 10th September.

1. According to Ann Foster's testimony, in what ways was a witch thought to bring harm to other people?
2. How might a testimony such as Ann Foster's seem to make sense in light of actual events occurring in Salem Village?