The Salem Witch Trials: A Microhistory

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The Salem witch trials have captured our nation's collective imagination, terrifying, disgusting, and mesmerizing us for centuries. Moreover, they puzzle us. What happened in Salem to allow for the wild accusations of a handful of villagers, mostly young women, to lead to over two-dozen deaths and over a hundred imprisonments? I believe that by looking closely into the lives of two accusers, Ann Putnam, Jr. and Mercy Lewis, we can gain a better understanding of the motivations for and nature of the witchcraft accusations.

In mid-January of 1692 the largest American witch-hunt began. Although not originally unique in substance or size, it soon escalated to a scale heretofore absent in the New World. The scare began with the afflictions of Elizabeth Parris and Abigail Williams, the young daughter and niece of the Reverend Samuel Parris. The girls were in fits and complained of torments. After several weeks a physician, most likely the village doctor William Griggs, concluded that the girls had been bewitched. Shortly after this diagnosis Elizabeth and Abigail named the Parris' slave, Tituba as their tormentor. From here the craze began to grow, as other girls and young women joined the ranks of the accusers. At first the accused people fit the profile of a typical alleged witch: poor, elderly, and female.[1] As the crisis grew though, accusers began to point fingers at respected members of the community, including ministers, church members, and political figures. The crisis spread from Salem Village into the neighboring cities and towns, most notably the nearby town of Andover. The hunt began to lose steam in October of 1692 and by November the crisis had ended. One hundred and forty-four people had been

[1] Richard A. Horsley, "Who Were the Witches? The Social Roles of the Accused in the European Witch Trials," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 9, no. 4 (Spring, 1979): 689.

accused of witchcraft, twenty had been executed, and four had died in jail.[2] While these basic facts on the witch hunt at Salem have been known for hundreds of years, it is the question of why the hunt happened the continues to puzzle historians today.

The literature on this topic is rich and diverse. Most notably perhaps is the work of Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. In *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* the authors argue that the witch crisis was caused by divisions created by geography, wealth, social leadership, church membership, and dependence on Salem Town.[3] They argued that the divisions in the town between agrarian villagers and villagers more closely tied to capitalism and Salem Town spurred on the trials, which reflect Salem's divisions.[4] Boyer and Nissenbaum's work was groundbreaking and introduced the idea that economic and geographic factors may have played a major role in the trials.

Mary Beth Norton's recent work on the subject has also been very important. Her controversial book, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692*, claims that the Indian wars on the northern frontier played an integral role in driving the

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[2] Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Frances Hill, *The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Da Capo, 2002); Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Mary Beth Norton, "Essex County Witchcraft," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (July): 483-488; Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 3-4, 19-21; Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Marilynne K Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials* (Lanham, Maryland: Taylor Trade Publishing: 2004); Marion L. Starkey, The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials (New York: Doubleday, 1989).
[3] Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).
[4] Ibid., 105-107.

accusations.[5] Although this has been considered before, no one has given the Indian wars so much credit for their role in provoking accusations. Norton argues that while there was an initial wave of accusations that were unrelated to the frontier, the second and more violent phase was driven largely by colonists' fear of Native American attacks.[6]

Another approach literature on the Salem trials has taken has been to look at the extent of the accusers' guilt. Are they to be held accountable for their actions or were they influenced by illness, hysteria, legitimate fear, or, especially in the cases of the younger accusers, their families? Some historians, such as Marilynne Roach in *The Salem Witch Trials*, argue that the accusers believed that what they reported was the truth. In this case the majority of accusers would be innocent of malicious action.[7] Mary Kilbourne Matossian argues in *Poisons of the Past: Molds, Epidemics, and History* that the bewitched were innocent for other reasons.[8] She believes that their experiences were hallucinations and convulsions brought on by food poisoning and that they were reporting what they thought to be true.

There is also a body of literature that disagrees with this and argues that the accusers were fully aware of what they were doing. One such historian is Bernard Rosenthal. In *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* he argues that the accusations were intentional and pre-meditated and the idea of the accusers as a ring of

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[5] Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 12.
[6] Ibid., 81.
[7] Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials* (Lanham, Maryland: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004), xvi.
[8] Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *Poisons of the Past: Molds, Epidemics, and History* (Yale University Press, 1991).

hysterical girls is a myth.[9] He focuses on the motivations of the individuals involved and less on the overarching conflicts and tensions within Salem.

Finally, there is a subset of this literature that looks at how gender influenced the trials. Carol Karlsen argues in *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* that New Englanders' fear of female sexuality contributed to the hunts.[10] Similar to the work that has been done on European witch-hunts, her work looks at the impact of religion and traditional beliefs on people's attitudes toward women and witchcraft. In *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials*, Peter Charles Hoffer looks at gender from a different angle, arguing that gender played an important role in the lives of the accusers.[11] Not only does he suggest that some of the driving accusers were sexually abused, he also suggests that the young women's repression may have caused their behavior.

Keeping in mind this body of literature, I believe I have added to it by conducting a close study of the lives and accusations of Ann Putnam, Jr. and Mercy Lewis. As part of the Putnam clan that Boyer and Nissenbaum argue was so instrumental in village dissension and later witchcraft accusation, a study of Ann Putnam's influences and accusations reveals the extent of political, geographic, and economic influences. I believe that Ann's accusations reveal family influences that were motivated by the divisions mentioned in Boyer and Nissenbaum's work. Her parents' roles in the trials show that the family was involved and possibly influencing her actions. This is

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[9] Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36, 38.
[10] Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of Woman*: *Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987).
[11] Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

reinforced by the accusations made by her mother, who named many of the same women that Ann named. There is also a strong correlation between the families politically opposed to the Putnams and those accused of witchcraft by Ann, which again supports the case of familial influence. Ann is a prime candidate for this study because of the prominence of her family and the many accusations that she made.

In addition to Ann Putnam, I will be looking closely at the influences on and accusations of Mercy Lewis. Because she came from the northern frontier and experienced the Indian wars she is an excellent accuser to study in order to evaluate the effect of the Indian wars on the trials. I believe that her accusations draw on the Indian wars and were influenced by her experience on the frontier.[12] I would also like to argue that Mercy impacted Ann's accustions. As a young woman working and living in the Putnam household, Mercy had close contact with Ann Jr. Her influence is visible in the younger girl's accusations, which also reflect the violence in the north.[13]

I believe my paper will be a valuable addition to the work already done on the Salem witch trials because it takes a close and focused look at two important accusers. By examining their influences and accusations in detail we can see the importance of inter-family politics, discussed by Boyer and Nissenbaum, and the Indian wars, discussed by Mary Beth Norton. These two key factors did not spur on the trials alone; I believe it was a mixture of these two contributors that caused the trials. This mixture can be seen in the lives and accusations of Ann Putnam, Jr. and Mercy Lewis. While Ann was primarily influenced by family ties and Mercy by her experience on the frontier, I believe

[12] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 48.
[13] Ibid.,122.

that their close proximity to one another resulted in both factors showing up in both of their accusations.

The majority of the sources I will be using for this microhistory are the trial records from the witch-hunt. These records shed light on the accusations made by Ann, Mercy, and the rest of the Putnam clan. This information can be separated into two categories. On the one hand, the records reveal who accused whom. By examining this we can see the relationship between those accused by Ann and Mercy and those accused by the rest of the Putnam clan. By looking at the trial records through the lens of the Indian wars in the North, we can see the extent of their influence on the two girls. Beyond the correlation they reveal between people involved in these wars and those accused by Ann and Mercy, the records show that the language the girls used in their accusations are closely related to language used to describe the Indian attacks on the frontier. By a close examination of these records it is possible to gain a better understanding of what drove the accusations of Ann Putnam and Mercy Lewis.

This microhistory will begin with a close look at the life and family of Ann Putnam Jr. To understand her accusations we must look at her family background and their role in the trials, as well as signs of Mercy's influence. Once Ann has been examined we will turn to the life of Mercy Lewis. Both her life in Salem and her life before it greatly impacted the accusations she made in 1692. Finally, with our foundation being the study of Ann and Mercy, we will turn to how their accusations reflected the group of accusers as a whole and what Ann and Mercy's actions say about the intentionality of their accusations.

In order to understand the accusations made by Ann Putnam Jr. in 1692, we must first understand the family to which she belonged. The Putnam family may be seen as an agrarian clan in Salem Village. Although Joseph Putnam, who arrived in Salem in the early 1640's, was a large landowner, his land was on the interior of the settlement and land-locked.[14] In addition, much of this land consisted of hills and swampy meadows, which are not conducive to farming.[15] As his family began to expand, the Putnam lands were broken down into smaller and smaller tracts. By 1695, the land that had belonged to only three-second generation Putnams was split between eleven descendents.[16] This family, ever growing and accustomed to a high standard of living, must have keenly felt the effects of their dwindling holdings. This was reflected in the trials, as many third-generation Putnams, those who were most affected by the constricted nature of their family's lands, took an active role in persecuting alleged witches.[17]

It is not only the Putnam's dwindling agrarian resources that are worth mentioning, but also their declining role in town politics. Nathaniel and Captain John Putnam, both second-generation Putnams, played an important role in Salem Town between 1665 and 1673.[18] The brothers were both elected as Town selectmen for seven terms, which was a notable honor. During the 1670's Salem Town began to change and began to see a consolidation of merchant power.[19] As this new power base formed, the agrarian Putnams based in the Village became less important. Because of their geographic position and anti-merchant attitudes, the family formed few ties with the

[14] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*, 123.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.,126.
[17] Ibid., 128.
[18] Ibid.,129.
[19] Ibid., 128.

emerging merchant class.[20] The result was a sharp decrease in influence, which can be seen in the case of John and Nathaniel Putnam. The brothers lost their ground in Town politics and between 1674 and 1692 they only served five terms, all of which were widely spaced.[21]

The bitterness which, very likely, naturally existed within the Putnam clan over their decreasing role was only exacerbated by the death of Thomas Putnam Sr. In his will he left all of his remaining land to his widow, Mary Veren Putnam, and his youngest son Joseph.[22] The two older sons by Thomas Putnam Sr.'s first marriage greatly resented this, for although they had inherited land from their father at marriage it was unequal to that inherited by their brother Joseph.[23] In fact, by the age of eighteen Joseph Putnam was one of the wealthiest landowners in Salem.[24] Two year later he became even wealthier when he married Elizabeth Porter. Not only were the Porters traditionally enemies of the Putnams, but this connection brought Joseph into the merchant class that governed Salem Town, the very group that his older brothers were unable to gain access to.[25] Instead of bringing the rest of the Putnam clan closer to the Town, Joseph's inheritance and marriage further alienated them from Town politics and very likely increased their resentment towards the group he belonged to.[26]

Ann Putnam's accusations strongly echo the Putnam politics and allegiances discussed above. It is little wonder that this is the case, for a girl raised in the hot bed of

[20] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 136.
[21] Ibid., 129.
[22] Ibid., 136.
[23] Ibid., 137.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 142-143.

family machinations. We can analyze the extent of her family's influence on her actions during the trial by noting which side of the "Parris division" her victims fall on, the actions taken by her family against these same people, and the benefits that the Putnam clan derives as a result of her accusations.

First let us examine some of the prominent cases between Ann and those belonging to the anti-Parris party. One of the cases that reflects the Putnams' politics most strongly is the case of Rebecca Nurse. Rebecca Nurse was not the typical victim of a witchcraft accusation. Unlike most of the women accused before her, Nurse was a member of Salem Town church, married to a substantial landowner, and an upstanding figure in the community.[27] Although Goody Nurse's mother had been accused of witchcraft years earlier, the charge had come to nothing and lay dormant for years, which indicates that this was not likely to have been the main cause of Ann's accusation.[28]

Although her station was respectable and did not lend itself to witchcraft charges, her position in relation to the Putnam family put her at risk. Boyer and Nissenbaum argue that she was in danger from the Putnams on two fronts.[29] The first, they argue, was from redirected rage. They claim that the Putnams, and Ann Sr. specifically, persecuted Nurse and other older women to vent their anger at Mary Veren Putnam, whose marriage with Thomas Putnam Sr. deprived her family of so much wealth.[30] I believe that this is too difficult to prove and travels too far into the realm of speculation. I find Boyer and Nissenbuam's second line of thinking is more likely. They argue that there were several factors which set Rebecca against the Putnams and provided motivation for them to

[27] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 147.
[28] Ibid., 149.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

accuse and prosecute her. First, Nurse was originally a resident of Topsfield, a town that had been claiming part of the Putnam's lands for years.[31] Second, the Nurses and Putnams had debated over several land and boundary issues in the past.[32] Third, and most importantly, the Nurses sided with the anti-Parris, pro-Town faction that the Putnams opposed. Indeed, Francis Nurse had been elected to the anti-Parris village committee that took power in the winter of 1691.[33] He was thus aligned with Salem Town, the Porter family, and Joseph Putnam, all of whom the Putnam family had cause to resent. These factors suggest that the Putnams took part in the accusation and trial of Rebecca Nurse for their own benefit.

It was Ann Jr. who first accused Rebecca Nurse of witchcraft, though it is very likely that she was influenced by her family to do so. On March 13, Ann Putnam, "said she saw the apparition of a pale faced woman that sat in her grandmother's seat but did not know her name."[34] Although Ann did not immediately name this woman it was only twenty-four hours before she proclaimed her to be Goody Nurse.[35] The role of her family seems clear in this instance. It is very likely that Ann would have heard Rebecca Nurse mentioned by her family, especially in regard to land disputes. Ann did not just parrot this accusation though: the testimony of John Tarbell points to direct intervention from her family.[36] He attested that, after asking who it was that told Ann that Goody Nurse was the woman in her apparition, Mercy Lewis said that, "it was Goody Putnam that said

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[31] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 149.
[32] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 47.
[33] Ibid.
[34] "Statement f Samuel Nurse and John Tarbell for Rebecca Nurse," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt.* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 165.
[35] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 47.
[36] "Statement of Samuel Nurse and John Tarbell for Rebecca Nurse," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt,* 165.

it was Goody Nurse; Goody Putnam said it [was] Mercy Lewis that told her; thus they turned it upon another saying it was you and it was you that told her."[37] Perhaps the most relevant piece of information to be gleaned from this testimony is that neither of the older women denied that one of them had fed Ann the name. Given the fact that Ann Sr. complained against Goody Nurse later that week, it seems safe to say that, whether or not Ann Sr. told her daughter the apparition was Nurse, she was in full support of the accusation.[38]

Another indication that Ann Jr. was influenced by her family is that many family members accused or helped prosecute the same people she accused. The person who most obviously did this was her mother, Ann Sr. Both mother and daughter accused many of the same people. A case which illustrates the involvement of many members of the Putnam clan was that of Martha Cory. It began on March 7 when Ann Jr. told her family that, "Goody Cory did often appear to her and torture her by pinching and other ways."[39] She repeated this claim again on March 12. Her family was concerned enough that her uncle Edward Putnam and church member Ezekiel Cheever went to Goody Cory to confront her in regard to Ann's accusations. Instead of being assured of Cory's innocence, the two men went away convinced that Ann was telling the truth and Cory lying.[40] Martha Cory, then aware that the Putnam family believed her guilty of witchcraft, visited the home of Thomas Putnam on March 14 in order to assail that fear.

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[37] "Statement of Samuel Nurse and John Tarbell for Rebecca Nurse," Rosenthal, Bernard. *Records of the Salem witch-hunt,* 165.
[38] "Deposition of Ann Putnam Sr. v. Martha Cory and Rebecca Nurse, and Testimony of Ann Putnam Jr. v. Rebecca Nurse, Martha Cory, and Sarah Cloyce," Rosenthal. *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 160.
[39] "Deposition of Ezekiel Cheever and Edward Putnam v. Martha Cory," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 149.
[40] Ibid., 149-151.

Instead of improving matters, the entire household was soon involved. As soon as Cory entered the house Ann, " fell into grievous fits of choking blinding feet and hands twisted in a most grievous manner, and told Martha Cory to her face that she did it." She then reported that she saw "a spit at the fire with a man upon it and Goody Cory you be aturning of it." Mercy Lewis then got involved, striking at the spit with a stick, and eventually falling into a fit herself. [41]

Only five days after this fiasco, Ann Sr. joined her daughter and maidservant in naming Martha Cory a witch. After tending to her "poor afflicted child and maid," Ann Sr. laid down to rest. It was then that she "was almost prest and chocaked to death…and presently I saw the apperishtion of Martha Cory who did tortor me so."[42] It is interesting to note that Ann Sr. accused Martha Cory after, not before, her daughter did. Either there was a complete reversal of roles in the household and the mother began taking her cues from the daughter, or the idea had already been given to Ann to accuse Cory and her mother held her accusation until later. Ann Sr. often left her accusations until after those of her daughter; this was true in regard to Rebecca Nurse as well. In any case, their accusations were intertwined and depended on one another in many aspects. Ann Jr. claimed that she was in the room with her mother when Ann Sr. was afflicted. The daughter stated that she saw Martha Cory, Sarah Cloyce, and Rebecca Nurse when they appeared to her mother.[43]

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[41] "Deposition of Edward Putnam v. Martha Cory," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 152.
[42] "Deposition of Ann Putnam Sr. v. Martha Cory & Rebecca Nurse, and Testimony of Ann Putnam Jr. v. Rebecca Nurse, Martha Cory, & Sarah Cloyce," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt.*, 160.
[43] Ibid.

In the face of so much action taken by the Putnam family against Martha Cory, and eventually Giles Gory as well, it is necessary to look at the two families in relation to one another. Unlike the case of Rebecca Nurse, there was no long standing bitterness or disputes between the two families. At first glance, Cory seems an unlikely candidate for witchcraft. She was married to a well-to-do farmer and landowner and was a member of the Salem Village church.[44] What must have been equally well known to the community was that before she married Giles Cory she had given birth to an illegitimate, mulatto, child who was still living in the Cory household.[45] This may have been enough to set the Putnam family against her, but there was one more straw. Before marrying Giles Cory she had been married to a man from Salem Town. Therefore, although she lived in the village she was strongly associated with the Town.[46] To a family struggling so much from its lack of ties to Town, this, coupled with her church membership despite past behavior, may have been enough to cultivate resentment.

Although Thomas Putnam has been absent from this discussion so far, he took no minor role in his household's accusations. Although he did not accuse people himself, he facilitated the accusations of his family and neighbors. In this role he became a sort of sponsor for the witch-hunt; he was responsible for over ten percent of all the warrants identifying an accuser.[47] One such deposition was the one made against Daniel Andrew, George Jacobs Jr., Rebecca Jacobs, Sarah Buckley, Mary Whittredge, Elizabeth Hart, Thomas Ferrar Sr., Elizabeth Colson, and Bethiah Carter Jr. In one deposition, made

[44] Frances Hill, *The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Da Capo, 2002), 70.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 146.
[47] Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692*, 15.

alongside Nathaniel Ingersoll, Putnam accused nine people of acts of witchcraft performed against Ann Jr., Mercy Lewis, Mary Walcott, and Abigail Williams.[48]

In addition to submitting complaints, Putnam was in close contact with the magistrates. A letter written by Putnam to John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin suggests that the men were working closely together and were in agreement in regard to the events of the trials.[49] In it Putnam said he, "thought it our duty to inform Your Honors of what we conceive you have not heard…of a wheel within a wheel, at which our ears do tingle."[50] It is largely believed that Putnam was here referencing an accusation against the minister George Burroughs.[51] This correspondence indicates two things: Thomas Putnam was involved to some extent in the behind-the-scenes work of the judges, and he supported the accusations made by the females living with him.

The involvement of so many Putnams in the prosecution of alleged witches indicates that the Putnam clan had something to gain in at least some of these cases. By accusing witches that were connected to Salem Town, especially those who were influential in that vicinity, the Putnams were increasing their own importance and making it more likely that they would return to a state of importance. As has already been established, the Putnams had lost much of their influence in town by 1692, although they were still very important in the Village.[52]

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[48] "Complaint of Nathaniel Ingersoll &Thomas Putnam v. Daniel Andrew, George Jacobs Jr., Rebecca Jacobs, Sarah Buckley, Mary Whittredge, Elizabeth Hart, Thomas Farrar Sr., Elizabeth Colson, & Bethiah Carter Jr.," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 270.
[49] "Letter of Thomas Putnam to John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 204.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 204.
[51] "Letter of Thomas Putnam to John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 204.
[52] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 128-129.

Three of Ann's witchcraft accusations clearly benefited the Putnams in this respect: those against Daniel Andrew and Phillip and Mary English. Boyer and Nissenbaum discuss this case at length and argue that accusing Andrew and Phillips was a move for power in Town.[53] Both Daniel Andrew and Phillip English were prominent Townsmen. Daniel Andrew was related to Israel Porter, a long time enemy of the Putnams. In 1689, when Nathaniel and John Putnam were finally reelected as selectmen in Town, Porter, Andrew, and several others resigned in protest. In 1692 Porter and Andrew were reelected, Phillip English was added to their number, and the Putnam brothers were absent yet again. It is suspicious then that only weeks later a warrant was issued against Daniel Andrew and Phillip and Mary English. On April 21 Thomas Putnam and John Buxton submitted a complain against Mary English on behalf of Ann Jr., Mercy Lewis, and Mary Walcott, Thomas Putnam's niece.[54] Nine days later Putnam and his brother-in-law Jonathan Walcott submitted a complaint against Philip English; this was followed up by a complaint against Andrews on May 14.[55] Although none of them were executed, both men had been removed from their posts as selectmen. In July a special election was held, moderated by Captain John Putnam, where Andrew, English, and three others were voted and five new men voted in.

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[53] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 131-132.
[54] "Warrant for the Apprehension of William Hobbs, Deliverance Hobbs, Nehemiah Abbott Jr., Mary Esty, Sarah Wilds, Edward Bishop Jr., Sarah Bishop, Mary Black, and Mary English," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 200.
[55] "Complaint of Jonathan Walcott and Thomas Putnam v. George Burroughs, Lydia Dustin, Susannah Martin, Dorcas Hoar, Sarah Morey, and Philip English," Rosenthal. *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 220; and "Complaint of Nathaniel Ingersoll and Thomas Putnam v. Daniel Andrew, George Jacobs Jr., Rebecca Jacobs, Sarah Buckley, Mary Whittredge, Elizabeth Hart, Thomas Farrar Sr., Elizabeth Colson, and Bethiah Carter Jr.," Rosenthal., *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 270.

This is an interesting case because it clearly links Ann's actions with her family's interests. Because of the accusations made by Ann, Mercy, and Mary Walcott, the Putnams' rivals in town were removed from power and new selectmen had taken their place. Boyer and Nissenbaum point out that following the July meeting it appeared that Salem might once again be a place that valued the Putnams.[56] The correlation in this case is so strong that it is a clear indication that Ann was acting in the interest of her family. What is unclear, and may always be so, is the extent to which she was aware of this, how much was merely suggested to her, and how much was forced.

There is a substantial body of proof that Ann was influenced by her family, enough that it seems unreasonable to claim that they had no affect on the young girl's accusations. Still, there remains another factor to be considered: the influence of the Indian wars to the North. More specifically, the Putnam's maidservant Mercy Lewis, who experienced these wars and will be discussed in depth later, must have influenced the younger girl's actions during this time. One of the cases that this is most noticeable in is that of George Burroughs. George Burroughs, once the minister of Salem Village, had moved to Falmouth, Maine and had been involved in Indian attacks.[57]

Although Ann was the first to accuse George Burroughs, it is unlikely that she was the one who initiated the idea. On April 20 she saw the apparition of a minister, who she named as George Burroughs, a man who had once been the minister in Salem. Ann claimed that, "I was tortured by him being racked and almost choked by him, and he tempted me to write in his book which I but told him that it was a dreadful thing." When she refused he "tore her all to pieces" and told her his name, that he had killed his three

[56] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 131-132.
[57] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 124-131.

wives, and that, "he had bewitched a great many soldiers to death at the eastward when Sir Edmon was there."[58] As Mary Beth Norton points out in *In the Devil's Snare*, these are details that Ann could not have possibly known for herself. He had left Salem Village when she was only four years old and she did not know him personally. Norton argues that she must have gleaned this knowledge from the conversations of those around her, which would have consisted of her family and Mercy Lewis. Ann's emphasis on Burrough's actions in Maine and his bewitchment of Sir Edmond Andros's troops indicate that Lewis had a substantial effect on Ann's accusation of the minister.[59]

This suspicion is confirmed further by the girls' later accusations of Burroughs. On May 7, Mercy Lewis saw an apparition of the minister and echoed many of Ann's claims. Like the younger girl, Mercy claimed that Burroughs, "tortured me and urged me to write in his book," and spoke to her of his wives.[60] The next night Ann saw Burroughs again. This time she did not accuse him of bewitching the soldiers, but instead focused on the murder of his wives.[61] Ann was very detailed, stating that "one told me that she was his first wife and he stabbed her under the left arm and put a piece of sealing wax on the wound…and the other told me that Mr. Burroughs and that wife which he hath now killed her, in the vessel as she was coming to see her friends, because they would have one another."[62] Her focus on their deaths and the details that she enters into indicate that people around her had talked about Burroughs at great length and once again points to the

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[58] "Deposition of Ann Putnam Jr. v. George Burroughs" Rosenthal. *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 245; "Statement of Thomas Putnam, Peter Prescott, Robert Morey, and Ezekiel Cheever v. George Burroughs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 505.
[59] Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692*, 122-123.
[60] "Deposition of Mercy Lewis v. George Burroughs, and Statement of Thomas Putnam and Edward Putnam v. George Burroughs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch-hunt*, 244-245.
[61] "Deposition of Ann Putnam Jr. v. George Burroughs, and Statement of Thomas Putnam and Edward Putnam v. George Burroughs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch-hunt*, 245-246.
[62] Ibid., 246.

involvement of Mercy.[63] This was not the last time that Mercy would influence Ann's accusations, though it may have been the most blatant case. Mercy's leadership role in the accusations and her effect on Ann and other accusers will be examined in greater depth at a later point. For now it is sufficient to note that Ann was not only influenced by her family, but by Mercy Lewis as well.

Where the records for Ann Putnam's family and background are clear and easily followed, the life of Mercy Lewis is not so easily traced. Despite this, Norton has done research into the Casco Bay-area and has brought to light some of Mercy's life before Salem Village. In 1676, at the age of three, Mercy was living with her parents in Falmouth, in Casco Bay, Maine. It was at this time that she experienced her first Indian attack, and it proved to be devastating to her family. On August 11 the Wabanakis moved through the area killing those who resisted and taking women and children captive. At the end of the day two of her uncles by marriage, one aunt, and both of her paternal grandparents had been killed, one aunt had been captured, and many of her cousins had been either murdered or taken as well. In addition, another aunt and uncle were to die later in the war, and one uncle died in the following months of a wound sustained in the fighting. The Wabanakis had completely devastated her father's family. Despite these losses Philip Lewis, Mercy's father, escaped to an island with his family, along with the other villagers who had not been killed in the attack. From there they traveled down to Salem Town, where they lived temporarily. By the time Mercy was ten they had returned to Casco Bay.[64]

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[63] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 122-123.
[64] Ibid., 48-49.

Mercy's consistent family history ends here, but it is possible to conjecture where she was after 1683. It is known that sometime after April of 1689 her father died, possibly as a result of another Wabanaki attack in September of that year. It was then that she moved in with her minister, George Burroughs.[65] It is worth mentioning here that at this time she was not only in close contact with Burroughs, but also lived very near Abigail Hobbs, both people that she would accuse of witchcraft several years later.[66] By the time of the trials, at the age of nineteen, Mercy had left Burroughs and was a maidservant in the household of Thomas Putnam.[67]

Despite her numerous accusations, Mercy's greatest role in the trials may have been behind the scenes. There is significant evidence that Mercy acted as a leader of the accusers, especially those who lived in the same household as she. Given this leadership role it is likely that many of the accusations of Ann Jr. and Mary Walcott reflect the influence of Mercy. This can be seen in the cases against Martha Cory and George Burroughs. In both of these cases Ann implies or outwardly accuses them of association with Indians.[68] In the case of Burroughs, Ann said the minister, "bewitched a great many soldiers to death at the eastward when Sir Edmon was there."[69] By accusing Burroughs of bewitching the soldiers who were fighting the Wabanakis, Ann is not only accusing Burroughs of witchcraft, but also charging him with being in league with the Indians.

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[65] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 130.
[66] Ibid., 128-129.
[67] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 145; Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 41.
[68] "Deposition of Ann Putnam Jr. v. George Burroughs, and Statement of Thomas Putnam, Peter Prescott, Robert Morey, and Ezekial Cheever v. George Burroughs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch-hunt*, 505.
[69] Ibid.

Although it was Ann who made this accusation, it was most likely Mercy who provided her with the information.[70]

Ann linked Martha Cory to the frontier when she said that, "here is a spit at the fire with a man upon it and Goody Cory you be atturning of it."[71] As Norton points out, this accusation is very reminiscent of the reports on the Wabanakis. Returned captives claimed that settlers had been roasted to death over fires.[72] Living on the frontier, this is something that Mercy would have been well aware of; it does not take much imagination to think she might have shared this fear with the younger girl. It seems unlikely that a girl as young as Ann would connect the trials and the Indian attacks independently in the fashion she did in these two cases. Keeping in mind that Mercy was the person closest to Ann that had experienced these attacks first hand, Mercy most likely influenced Ann, as well as Mary Walcott and the other accusers, with her accounts of the frontier. This means that when we look at Mercy's role as an accuser we must not only look at her accusations but those of the people around her, specifically Ann Putnam.

Many of the people Mercy accused of witchcraft had strong connections to the frontier and had been involved in Indian attacks, suggesting that Mercy's charges were strongly influenced by her experience in the Indian wars. One such person was Abigail Hobbs. Although it is difficult to know for sure, it is very likely that Mercy and Abigail were close neighbors in Falmouth and likely saw each other on a weekly or daily basis.[73] In Salem, the two girls probably knew of each other as well. It was here that Abigail had an impious reputation; one peer testified that she teasingly baptized her mother while

[70] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 122-123.
[71] "Deposition of Edward Putnam v. Martha Cory," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 152.
[72] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 48.
[73] Ibid., 128-129.

visiting a neighbor's house; another one stated that Abigail told her that she was not afraid of anything because, "she had sold her self body and soul" to the devil." It seems likely that the combination of her bad reputation and her association with Mercy's life in Casco Bay, a life rife with fear of the Wabanakis, was reason enough for Mercy to accuse her of witchcraft.

When Hobbs was accused Mercy was not the first, but the third, to speak against her. The first two were Ann Jr. and Mary Walcott, both of whom lived in the Putnam household.[74] Because they were in such close contact the fact that Mercy did not accuse first does not mean she did not encourage the other young women to do so, whether consciously or not. What is interesting about these three accusations against Abigail is that they were phrased almost identically and that they happened within four days of each other.[75] Ann accused Abigail of "biting, pinching, and almost choking me, urging me to write in her book," until the day of her examination. Mary Walcott claimed that Abigail did the same to her the next day, "pinching and almost choking me, urging me to write in her book" until her examination as well. Mercy's accusation reads similarly to the first two, claiming that she too was pinched, almost choked, and urged to write in the book until the day of Abigail's examination. The similarities in these charges suggest that they were made in concert with one another.

Abigail's stepmother, Deliverance Hobbs, was also a victim of Mercy Lewis. Although it is unclear who first accused Deliverance, the warrant for her arrest originated from the household of Thomas Putnam, implying it was Ann, Mercy, or Mary Walcott,

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[74] "Deposition of Mercy Lewis v. Abigail Hobbs," Rosenthal. *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 194; "Deposition of Ann Putnam Jr. v. Abigail Hobbs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 195; "Deposition of Mary Walcott v. Abigail Hobbs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 195.
[75] Ibid.

who also lived with them.[76] The most convincing evidence of Mercy's involvement comes from one of Ann's actions. During Deliverance's trial the judges tested the accusers and asked if they could name the woman in front of them, which was Hobbs. Both Mercy and Mary were struck dumb, but Ann was able to name her correctly.[77] The trial records read: "Mercy Lewes do you know her that stands at the Bar…Do you know her? Speaking to another; but both were struck dumb. Ann Putnam Jr. said it was Goody Hobbs, and she hath hurt her much."[78]

What is telling about this exchange is that Ann should not have been able to name this woman, for she was from Topsfield, not Salem. From her inability to name Rebecca Nurse it is clear that the girl was unable to recognize people who did not attend her congregation. In addition, the Putnam family had no conflicts or dealings with the Hobbs family, so she could not have recognized her that way. As Norton points out, the only way Ann could have known that the woman before her was Goody Hobbs was from Mercy Lewis, who had known her personally in Falmouth.[79] It appears that Mercy, although never identifying Hobbs, was responsible for her conviction because of the information she supplied to Ann either before or during the trial.

Another case in which Mercy was not the first accuser and yet still played an important role was that of George Burroughs. Although he has been discussed above it is necessary to take a closer look by focusing on Mercy's actions against him. Once again,

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[76] "Warrant for the Apprehension of William Hobbs, Deliverance Hobbs, Nehemiah Abbot Jr., Mary Esty, Sarah Wilds, Edward Bishop Jr., Sarah Bishop, Mary Black, and Mary English," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 200-201.
[77] "Examination of Deliverance Hobbs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 211.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 133-134.

Ann Jr. was the first person to accuse the minister.[80] She was then followed closely by numerous villagers, including Mercy Lewis. Only days after Ann first saw the minister, Mercy made her own charge.[81] Several things stand out from this accusation. First, she says that she knew Burroughs very well. She goes so far as to say this outright, stating, "Mr. George Burroughs, whom I very well knew, which did grievously torture me..." She implies this familiarity again when, speaking of the book he was pressuring her to sign, she recalled that, "I had been often in his study but I never saw that book there: but he told me that he had several books in his study which I never saw..."[82] Unlike Ann and many of Burroughs' other accusers, Mercy had firsthand knowledge of this man. She was well acquainted with his history and of his uncanny ability to survive the attacks that had devastated her family and community. It seems likely that she resented his survival or, at the very least, strongly associated him with the attacks on the frontier.

Secondly, a minute but important detail reveals that Mercy may have been directly linking him to the Indian wars in the North. She accuses him of torturing her, "as if he would have racked me all to pieces."[83] Mary Beth Norton argues that the inclusion of this phrase in an accusation linked the supposed witch with the Indian attacks. Before the late seventeenth century this had not been a common charge against witches, and yet in 1692 many of the accusers voiced this fear. Norton attributes this to their fear of the Wabanakis, for escaped captives and witnesses of the Indian wars reported that the

[80] "Statement of Thomas Putnam, Peter Prescott, Robert Morey, and Ezekiel Cheever v. George Burroughs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 505.
[81] Deposition of Mercy Lewis v. George Burroughs, and Statement of Thomas Putnam and Edward Putnam v. George Burroughs," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 244.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 245.

Wabanakis tore their victims apart.[84] With this in mind, Mercy's accusation can be read in a different light. Not only is she accusing Burroughs of witchcraft, she is directly linking him to the Wabanakis.

A last example of Mercy's influential role is seen in Ann's accusation of Martha Cory. As in the case of George Burroughs, it is the language that is used that connects Cory with the frontier. When Goody Cory came to the Putnam house on March 14, Ann Jr. fell into a fit almost immediately. It was then that Ann saw, "a speet at the fier with a man upon it and Goodey Corey you be a turning of it." Mercy Lewis then struck at the apparition with a stick, causing Ann to warn her "do not if you love yourself." Ignoring this warning, Mercy continued to do so until she was forced to stop by a pain in her arm, apparently caused by Cory.[85] As discussed above, this language was highly reminiscent of Indian reports from the frontier, reports carried by people such as Mercy Lewis.

Although Norton makes a convincing case that Mercy Lewis' accusations were driven by the Indian wars, it was not the only factor that influenced her. Some of the people she accused were related in no way to the frontier. In these cases she was primarily influenced by the position of the Putnams, the family she relied upon and was closest to in Salem.

This was the case with Daniel Andrew. Andrew was related to the Porter family by marriage, a family that had was politically and ideologically opposed to the Putnam clan.[86] In October 1691 he had been elected to the Village Committee that challenged the Putnam family power and opposed Samuel Parris. Not only did this committee oppose

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[84] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 135.
[85] Deposition of Edward Putnam v. Martha Cory," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 152.
[86] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 145; Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 114.

Parris, they had close ties to Salem Town, ties that the Putnams and Parrises could not replicate.[87] Considering Mercy's lack of ties to this man, it is interesting to note that she was one of the young women responsible for his arrest warrant.[88] Others who complained against Andrew included Ann Jr., Mary Walcott, and Abigail Williams, all of whom were directly connected to the households of Thomas Putnam or Samuel Parris, two of the men who gained the most from Andrew's fall. It is likely that, like Andrew's other accusers, Mercy Lewis charged Daniel Lewis with witchcraft because of his position in regard to the Putnam and Parris families.

Another instance in which Mercy acts in the interest of the Putnam family is in the case of Rebecca Nurse. As in many other cases, it appears that Mercy may have provided critical information to Ann that shaped the younger girl's accusation. As discussed earlier, when questioned by John Tarbell as to how Ann Jr. knew the apparition was Rebecca, Mercy Lewis replied that it was Goody Putnam that fed the girl Nurse's name. Interestingly, Ann Sr. responds by charging the same to Mercy Lewis.[89] The fact that Lewis may have provided Rebecca's name to Ann is interesting, for it means that Mercy influenced Ann's accusations not only when they were related to the Indian attacks, but also when they were related to the Putnam's politics.

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[87] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 139.
[88] "Complaint of Nathaniel Ingersoll and Thomas Putnam v. Daniel Andrew, George Jacobs Jr., Rebecca Jacobs, Sarah Buckley, Mary Whittredge, Elizabeth Hart, Thomas Farrar Sr., Elizabeth Colson, and Bethiah Carter Jr., Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 270; "Warrant for the Apprehension of Daniel Andrew, George Jacobs Jr., Rebecca Jacobs, Sarah Buckley, and Mary Whittredge, and Officer's Return," Rosenthal. *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 270-271.
[89] "Statement of Samuel Nurse and John Tarbell for Rebecca Nurse," Rosenthal., *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 165.

Now that both Ann Putnam and Mercy Lewis have been examined in detail, it is clear that neither accuser was motivated by only one factor. Both family politics and fear of the Indian wars influenced both girls to varying extents. What can we do with this knowledge in relation to the other accusers? Just as Lewis and Putnam had varying motivations, it is to be expected that each accuser had their own host of reasons. To a certain extent though, it is clear that many of the accusers, especially those who belonged to what has become known as "the core group," shared the motivations of Ann and Mercy. One indication of this is the evidence of collaboration.

Bernard Rosenthal has done extensive work on the crisis in Salem and stands out for his arguments for collaboration amongst the accusers. One of the arguments of *Salem Story* is that the accusers worked closely together in order to convict alleged witches.[90] One of the trials that most strongly supports this claim is that of Martha Cory. Deodat Lawson recalled that whenever Cory would bite her lip the afflicted people "were bitten on their armes and writs and produced the Marks before the Magistrates, Ministers, and others."[91] Lawson's statement means that either the young women were biting themselves and claiming that Cory did it, that someone was biting the accusers without their knowledge, or that they were so psychologically distracted that they were biting themselves without any knowledge of it.[92] As the latter two claims seem highly unlikely, especially considering that several of the accusers produced these marks, it seems that the afflicted had agreed to bite themselves in order to convict Cory.

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[90] Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 38-39.
[91] "Examination of Martha Cory, as Told by Deodat Lawson," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 148-149.
[92] Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 38-39.

Further proof that the accusers acted in concert is again provided by Deodat Lawson. He recalled that, while in court, several of the accused "had their wrists bound fast together with a real cord, so as it could hardly be taken off without cutting."[93] He also reported that, "some afflicted have been found with their arms tied, and hanged upon a hook, from whence others have been forced to take them down, that they might not expire in that posture."[94] Once again, these situations would be impossible without the collaboration of the accusers, for someone had to bind the limbs of the afflicted.[95] These examples are crucial to understanding the trials because they prove that many of the accusers agreed on what to accuse and that, to some extent, they had similar motives.

Keeping in mind the unity suggested by their collaboration, Mercy Lewis's role as a leader of the core group of accusers meant that many of her motivations for accusing influenced the actions of the entire group. That she was a leader during the trials is well supported. One instance of this is seen in the trial of Nehemiah Abbott Jr., the only suspect to be pronounced innocent at his trial.[96] During the examination, as Abbott continually asserted that he was innocent, one of the judges charged the accusers to, "charge him not unless it be he." At this Ann Jr. once again asserted that Abbott was the man. Mary Walcott, perhaps shaken by the magistrates' lack of faith in their charge, said that he looked like the man. Most importantly though, Mercy Lewis followed them saying that he was not the man. Instead of contesting her claim both of the other girls recanted, saying that he merely looked like their tormentor.[97] Norton argues that this

[93] Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 39.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 98.
[97] "Examination of Nehemiah Abbott Jr.," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 205.

interaction is proof that Mercy had assumed leadership of the core group of accusers.[98] In *Salem Story* Rosenthal presented two possible explanations for Mercy's actions. One possibility is that she did this to give the accusers more credibility. The second explanation, the one Rosenthal leans toward, is that the accusers had disagreed on who to name and Mercy was asserting her leadership by proclaiming Abbott's innocence.[99] Because of her leadership it follows that, whether or not the core group of accusers shared Mercy's reasons for accusing, by following Mercy's lead they were acting on her motivations. In this regard the motivations of Mercy Lewis and Ann Putnam Jr. reflected the motivations of the core group to a good extent.

Despite this proof that the accusers acted on many of the same motivations, it must be recognized that as each accuser was different, so were their reasons for doing acting the way they did. This is demonstrated in the case of Betty Parris. As one of the initiators of the entire crisis, it would be expected that she would remain highly involved throughout the trials. Instead, Betty Parris made her last accusation in the winter or early spring of 1692, months before the trials came to a close.[100] This indicates that, for whatever reason, her motivations for accusing were no longer present or compelling enough for her to continue her original role in the trials. However compelling Mercy's leadership was, each accuser had their own set of influencing factors that had the potential to lead them in a different direction than the group as whole.

Witch-finding was another area where Mercy, along with other members of the core group, took leadership of the hunts. Witch-finding episodes in Salem consisted of one of the members of this group going to an afflicted person's house and identifying

[98] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 135.
[99] Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 98.
[100] Hill, *The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials*, 69.

their tormentor. The first time this happened was on May 14, when Mercy Lewis went to the home of the Wilkens family. Mercy attested that, being carried to the Wilkens' house, "to see the afflicted persons there I saw there the Apparition of John Willard a choking Daniel Wilkens."[101] Mercy was joined the next night by Ann, who was also called upon to name the witches afflicting the Wilkens.[102] She, "being carried…to see the afflicted persons there," saw John Willard again. The specter told her that, "he would kill Daniel Wilkens if he could be he had not power enough yet to kill him." [103]

Another case of witch-finding took place when Jonathan Putnam fell ill. The record of this is valuable because not only does it illustrate Mercy's power, it also shows how witch-finding worked. When Mercy arrived she, "was presently struck dumb, but being bid to hold up her hand if she saw any of the witches afflict said Jonathan." Seeing a witch, Mercy "lift[ed] up her hand, and after fell into a Trance…she said she saw Goody Nurse and Goody Carrier holding said Jonathan's head."[104] Witch-finding was remarkable because it allowed the called-upon accusers to have a great amount of power. They were placed in a position where their neighbors requested them to accuse people of witchcraft. It is significant for our study because it shows that the it was not only the core group of accusers that were acting on Mercy's motivations, it was the entire village.

Although we have shed some light on the motivations of Ann and Mercy, it is still unclear if they were intentionally accusing innocent people of witchcraft or if they really

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[101] "Deposition of Mercy Lewis v. John Willard," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 296.
[102] Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 170.
[103] "Deposition of Ann Putnam Jr. v. John Willard," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 297.
[104] "Deposition of Samuel Parris and John Putnam Sr. v. Rebecca Nurse and Martha Carrier," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 429.

believed the charges they were making. It is impossible to give an all-encompassing answer to this question, but the majority of the sources suggest that the girls fabricated evidence in order to accuse people they knew were innocent of witchcraft.

One indication of this is Ann's apology to the church in 1706, nearly fifteen years after the Salem witch crisis began. She made the apology and confession when she was received to communion with the church for the first time. [105] In this apology Ann walks a fine line between admitting wrongdoing and shirking responsibility for her past actions.

One of the most prominent themes in Ann's apology is her admittance to wrongdoing and her guilt over that wrongdoing. She acknowledges that she, along with others, brought "the guilt of innocent blood," to herself and the land. Ann also admits that she "desire(s) to lie in the dust." These statements both show that she feels exceedingly guilty about her actions as a child. Whether or not she took responsibility for these actions, she did acknowledge that they had caused her enormous guilt. Despite claiming that she was "an instrument for the accusing of several personas of a grievous crime," Ann reveals a level of guilt that seems unfitting with the role of a young girl forced by Providence into making accusations. She does not claim that this guilt is misplaced, but instead claimed she desired to "earnestly beg forgiveness of God," indicating that she knows she deserves these consequences. This level of guilt suggests that, whether or not she was deluded by Satan, the young woman was aware of doing a horrible thing. [106]

Although Ann does admit to a high degree of guilt and responsibility, she also resists taking full credit for the havoc she wreaked. Throughout her apology, she

[105] Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 36.
[106] Ibid., 36-39.

persistent in her claim that the was deluded by Satan. She says that, "it was a great delusion of Satan that deceived me in that sad time." Ann also claims that "I did it not out of anger, malice, or ill-will to any person, for I had no such thing against one of them; but what I did was ignorantly, being deluded by Satan." This last claim seems too simplified to be true. It is difficult to reconcile this view of her actions with the theatrics and manipulation that was necessary to convict so many of her victims.

In conclusion, Ann's apology jumps back and forth between admitting to wrongdoing and insisting that she was not entirely to blame. There are several explanations for this, ranging between the possibility that she really was partially acting out of delusion, to the possibility that she was merely protecting herself in an apology she had to make in order to join the church. What is clear is that she does take some measure of responsibility, which indicates that to some extent, Ann knew in 1692 that she was in the wrong. This fact, that she was aware of her wrongdoing, is key. For, as Rosenthal points out, combined with such reports as pins sticking out of her skin and concurring stories with other accusers, we can safely derive that Ann was not hysterical during the time of the trials, and therefore was aware of what she was doing.[107] Not only was Ann making witchcraft accusations, she was fabricating the evidence. Ann admits to wrongdoing, which suggests that, although the accusers may have been pressured by family or peers or deluded by the devil, they were aware of their wrongdoing to some extent.[108]

Another indication that Ann and Mercy were aware of their actions is the physical evidence that they, along with others belonging to the core group of accusers, produced

[107]Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 36.
[108] Ibid.

during the trials. Although this has been discussed to some length already, it is worth mentioning again in this context. One of the most striking cases of this is with the pins that Ann produced on several occasions. During the trial of Elizabeth How it was recorded that "Ann Putnam had a pin stuck in her hand."[109] Her father and uncle witnessed that this had occurred to Ann numerous times, for which they originally blamed Rebecca Nurse.[110]

Such a simple observance has huge repercussions, which Rosenthal discusses in *Salem Story*. The fact that Ann had pins in her can only be explained certain ways. Someone could have stuck them in her without her noticing, which would be possible except for the instances where this happened to numerous accusers at once. Another possibility is that, in her hysteria, she stuck them herself. These seem unlikely for several reasons. First, in her apology Ann acknowledges some level of guilt, as seen by statements such as "I justly fear I have been instrumental...to bring upon myself and this land the guilt of innocent blood." This, coupled with the fact that she was not the only accuser to have pins stuck in herself, makes hysteria seem an unlikely explanation. The remaining explanation, and the most compelling, is that she stuck them in herself to falsely convict someone of witchcraft. This theory is supported by her lingering guilt, which is revealed in her apology to the church.

Evidence such as the situations discussed above indicates that Ann and Mercy were knowingly working to accuse people of witchcraft. The question that arises from this is whether the girls believed that the people they were accusing were actual witches or if they were intentionally accusing innocent people. One clue that hints at the latter

[109] "Examination of Elizabeth How," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 339.
[110] "Deposition of Thomas Putnam and Edward Putnam v. Rebecca Nurse," Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem witch-hunt*, 430.

explanation is that Ann admits to exceptional remorse in regard to her actions against Rebecca Nurse.[111] Her words in her apology to the church make it seem that Ann was fully aware that she had accused an innocent woman, although it is possible that this awareness only came with age and distance. Another indication that the girls knew they were accusing innocent people is the evidence discussed above. It seems that if the girls truly believed that someone was guilty of witchcraft, they would not have to go to such lengths to fabricate evidence. However, the possibility still remains that they truly believed some, or even all, of their victims were witches. Without going back in time, it is impossible to know their minds for sure. So, although it is impossible to prove beyond a doubt that Ann and Mercy were fabricating their accusations to condemn those they knew to be innocent, most evidence points towards this conclusion.

There is much to be gained by looking closely at the lives and accusations of these two individuals. While it is tempting to cast broad explanations over the events in Salem, close examination proves that this cannot be done successfully. There is no single answer to the crisis at Salem. If Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum are correct, then how do we account for the recurring connection between alleged witches and the Indian attacks on the Northern frontier? Similarly, if we subscribe completely to Mary Beth Norton's thesis, the many people accused by the Putnam family who were wholly unconnected to the happenings in the North remain unaccounted for. It is the microhistoric approach taken in this paper, which looks closely into specific cases, families, and individuals, that shows that the actions of people cannot be neatly sorted

[111] "The Confession of Ann Putnam, when she was received to Communion, 1706," found in Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft* II, 2, 510.

and explained. Instead, this approach acknowledges the anomalies and exceptions that occur in real life and real history. It is for this reason that microhistories can be used successfully in illuminating events such as the witch crisis of 1692.

In conclusion, there are no one-size-fits-all theories for what happened in Essex County in 1692. Instead, we must look at the accusers and accused in detail, at how they interacted and what their motivations could have possibly been. In regard to Ann Putnam Jr. and Mercy Lewis, it is clear that one factor alone did not motivate them. Ann, motivated by a strong and political clan, acted mainly on behalf of family politics. Her parents' actions during the trials made it clear that they were in full support of their daughter's accusations. In addition, there is a clear correlation between those she accused and those who were politically opposite of her family. This correlation comes into focus in cases such as Daniel Andrew, where her family directly benefited from her accusation.

As much as Ann's family influenced her, the same theory does not fit with Mercy Lewis. This young woman had lost most of her relations to Indian attacks; therefore it unsurprising that her accusations were primarily driven by fear of the Wabanakis and her memories from the North. In many cases Mercy accused those who had direct links to the frontier, including George Burroughs and Abigail Hobbs. However, within this framework both girls switched roles, with Ann accusing neighbors of connections with the Wabanakis and Mercy acting in the Putnam's best interests.

The histories of these young women highlight the fact that the events in Salem cannot be simplified to fit neatly within historical theories. There are as many explanations for the trials as there were people involved. By looking closely into the

lives of Ann Putnam and Mercy Lewis, it is made clear that despite what is known about the trials, there is still much to be discovered, and until we can know the minds of the accusers much will remain undisclosed.

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