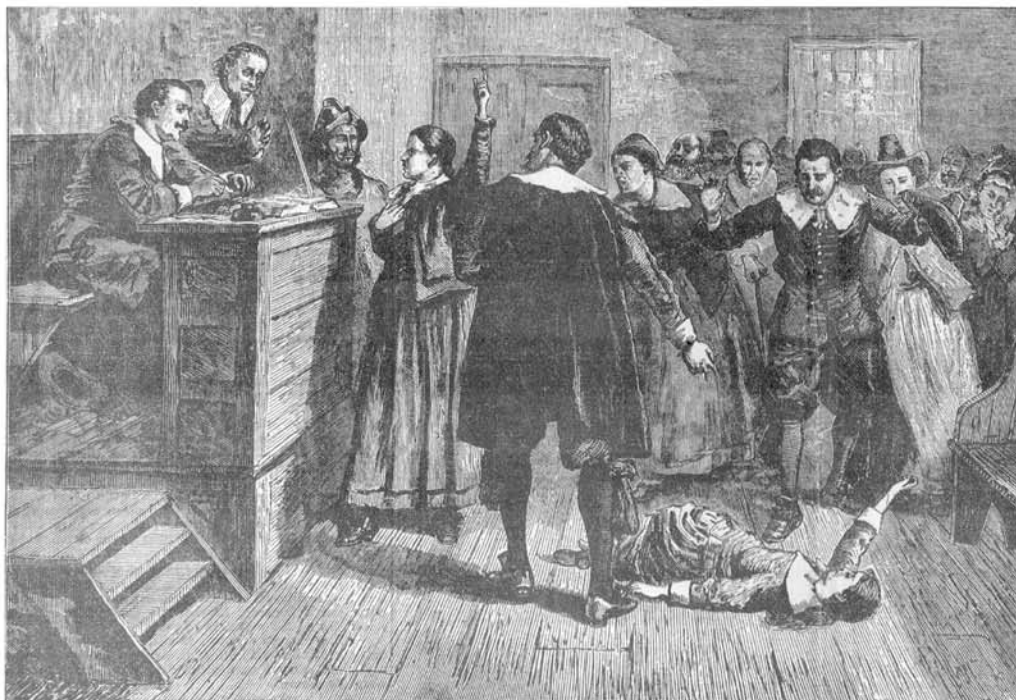


Hampton Folks Sorry Ancestors Condemned "Witch"



Rare old print of typical court room scene in old New England during a witch trial. Witnesses are swearing that the child suffering an epileptic fit on the floor became ill because just such a witch as Goody Cole caused "the devil" to enter the little girl's body.

So, With Only One Protest, Descendants of Original Settlers Reopen Trial That Took Place Almost 300 Years Ago and Find Goody Cole Not Guilty of Traffic With Old Nick

By Lucrece Hudgins

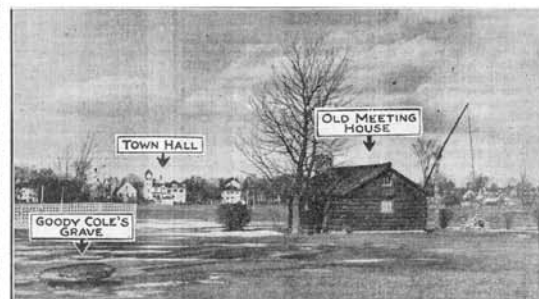
The century-old bells tolled out in the little, white Town Hall of Hampton, N.H. this week, when 300 townsmen, gathered together for the annual civic meeting, exonerated Eunice (Goody) Cole who, more than 200 years ago, was condemned for indulging in the mysterious practices of witchcraft and enjoying communion with his Satanic Majesty, Old Nick.

Not only was Goody Cole granted complete and unconditioned acquittal, but detailed arrangements were made for full reparations to be paid to the memory of the wretched woman whose tortured life has weighed upon the consciences of Hampton citizens for lo! these many years.

The adoption of this strangest of articles ever to appear in any warrant for a New England town meeting was the equivalent to a declaration on the part of present-day citizens of the tiny three-century-old village that, whatever their ancestors may have been led to do through misunderstanding and mass prejudice, they, themselves, believed that Eunice Cole had been unjustly accused and convicted, and deserved to have her name reinserted on the list of the town's first settlers.

Magic Water

To understand why this magnificent gesture was made, one must go back to a warm night of last summer when the salt breezes from Hampton river hung low over the marshes, and the moon was at its ebb.



This photograph of historic, three-century-old Hampton shows the rock under which the body of Eunice Cole reputedly lies. In the background is the Town Hall where 300 townsmen exonerated Eunice on this March 8. At the right is a typical log cabin of 1600, a replica of the old Hampton Meeting House.



William D. Cram (centre), president of the Hampton Apprehending Society, is shown with J.W. Tucker, vice-president, and Phyllis Tucker, secretary and treasurer. These three are responsible for the exoneration of Goody Cole.

A small group of Hampton citizens were lazily discussing the dramatic events in the history of their village, recalling the tales of the precocious rebel who 100 years ahead of time, was condemned as a revolutionary figure and dismissed to the much feared Tower of London for punishment; of the handful of Quakers who were flogged out of town because their religious beliefs did not happen to coincide with those of the majority; and most of all, of Goody Cole.

Wandering through the salt marshes of Hampton beach, along the Hampton river at dusk, it is not difficult to understand why the thoughts of this little gathering turned persistently to the tragic fate of that historic figure.

A half mile from where they sat, and reached by a many winding path, are the remains of a well, -the well of Goody Cole. Here, where once the pine trees grew tall and stately is now nothing but desolate wastes of salt marsh. And in the midst of that waste, half covered by an old and battered willow tree, is the hole which once held the water which led to the poor old woman's misfortune. For, it was reputed that the water taken from that well never grew stale or brackish in the ship's butt, no matter how long the voyage might be! Such an occurrence was a cause of justifiable and immediate suspicion in those days when all over Europe unhappy individuals were being boiled in oil, or burned at the stake, for being connected with anything one half as mysterious.

Thus, when one of Thomas Philbrick's calves died and

the other disappeared, a culprit had to be found, and who more natural than Goody Cole, who was in league with the devil? And when goodwife Sobriety and goodwife Sleeper heard scratchings at the window-and when no natural cause could be discovered-what more inevitable than that Goody Cole was the cause-Goody Cole on one of her midnight flights on a broom with the other witches of the universe?

Jailed in Boston

Finally, of course, the poor harmless woman, probably just as bewildered as any of her neighbors, was brought into the court of the province In 1656 and found guilty of being a witch. She was sentenced to be flogged and then to be imprisoned during her natural life, or until released by the court. She was jailed in Boston, at the cost of 10 pounds a year to Hampton citizens. After 10 years she was freed because it was considered too expensive to keep even a witch in jail. She returned to Hampton, feeble and aged, and although the town fathers supplied her with food and lodging sufficient to keep the breath within her wasted frame, she was subjected to continual abuse by suspicious townspeople.

She bore the hoots and sneers of the nagging citizenry for 14 or 15 years, when at last the wisp of air showed signs of departing from the hated and feared body. It is said that her last words were to one of her tormentors. "Aye," she said, "ye think ye will have peace when ye bury my bones, but I leave my spirit to trouble ye. It shall be good to those who have had kindly thoughts of me, but it shall trouble and ever curse those who have used me ill."

Perhaps she had come at last to accept the beliefs of her neighbors and thought, after all, she might be a witch.

She died that night-but not even death prevented her from indignities. A tiny group gathered at her miserable dwelling and carried her away into the night to bury her after the fashion of witches.

They dumped her small frame into a ditch and impaled, it with a stake, to the top of which was affixed a horseshoe-to make certain that she could not rise again and revisit her accustomed haunts.

Still later that memorable night, secret sympathizers with the unhappy woman dug up the body and laid it [unknown] final rest with some degree of [unknown] of dir[unknown] between two trees near the hovel [which] had been her home. No 'wonder the group of reminis [unknown] friends dwelt so long upon this tragic tale as they talked under the ebb moon last summer!

One Objector

After many retellings of the story which they had known since childhood, the little' group resolved itself into a society with one firm purpose in mind; to free the name of Goody Cole from all blame, to re-enter it upon the town roll, to organize some ceremony to give visible evidence of that exoneration.

Fittingly, the society became, forthwith, "The Society in Hampton Beach for the Apprehension of Those Falsely Accusing Eunice "Goody" Cole of Having Familiarity with the Devil." It was a small society, with membership limited to those who could trace their ancestry back to those Colonial days when the dastardly deed had been perpetrated. It was a society inspired by half in jest-half genuine sympathy -but overnight it became a matter of widespread interest and enthusiasm. From as far away as Phoenix, Ariz., that desert of America, came an earnest letter from the descendant of Nathaniel Boutler, "one of the first planters that did sit down" in Hampton, according to a disposition made in 1865. Nathaniel's good wife Grac(J) Swayne, and daughter, Mary Prescott, were accused simultaneously with Goody Cole, of co-operating with the devil in producing maladies and death upon acquaintances. From New York, from the South, and especially from all I over New England,-the letters poured in-praising the good work of the Hampton Society. Only one serious opposition appeared, in the nature of an anonymous letter which declared that the society was [unknown] simply for publicity purposes in connection with the tercentenary celebrations to be held this summer.

Furthermore, says the letter, according to Deacon Dow, in his History of Hampton, "It was reported of Goody Cole that she was ill-natured and ugly, artful and aggravating, malicious, and revengeful, and that her husband had to make over his small property to her to keep her from running away and leaving him in his old age. Goody Cole was treated as well in Hampton as she would have been in any town in New England. Unfortunately in raising Goody Cole from the dead and giving her a coat of white enamel, we are smearing some of her contemporaries.

"Dow's history lists half a dozen or more men and women who.. were active in her prosecution. They were the ancestors of Hampton's most prominent families. Now, I am rather proud of my own ancestors. They didn't do anything remarkable, so far as I can find out, but they were good, honest respectable folk, and I wouldn't want them held up to the world as monsters of cruelty. And I don't believe the living representative of the old families want their ancestors pilloried before the public. Why not let the dead lie quiet in their graves 7"

That Hampton's "prominent citizens," descended from the old persecutors, did not mind having tbe wrong, that their fathers did, righted, is proved by the unanimous vote cast in town meeting for Goody's exoneration. Further, how could the dead possibly lie quiet in their graves-when they've never had a decent grave to lie quiet in? Doesn't Goodwife Cole have as much right to rest peacefully as the most prominent member at the old Colonial village?

And finally-true-they are being raised -all those old "monsters of cruelty," but, being really just and God-fearing people, wouldn't they be the first to want to right their wrong?

As for the accusations that the society was formed for a publicity stunt-who can say? At any rate, the whole thing has reached such historic proportions that the

originators of the society feel that the end more than justifies any possible motive which may have first inspired it. So much for the opposition.

Only Case on Record

One wonders why Goodwife Cole was seized upon as an object of such extreme consideration? Why not one of her many reputed sister witches—who were especially prominent in the old Bay State Colony? There is very good reason for this. New Hampshire is taking care of its own and expects Massachusetts and other States to take care of their own. The Cole case happens to be the arrant exception to the rule that witch-baiting never had a chance in New Hampshire.

It is the only case on record which shows that any penalty was ever imposed in that State on man or woman for supposedly holding communion with evil spirits. True, there may have been other accusations—as, for instance, there were others slurred at the same time as Goody Cole.

But these came to nothing and were frequently made for no more cause than that the accused showed sympathy with Eunice Cole—offered her a kind word, or even paused a moment at her door to enquire of her health. Other Imputations arose from spite. Instead of gossiping about the neighbor's "tattle-tale grey" or "dish washer's hands" one had only to pass around the word that so-and-so had been seen mumbling to herself—and immediately so-and-so was a witch!

But even the courts of 300 years ago required more evidence than this. Cases other than that of Eunice Cole generally ended up by a series of accusations and counter accusations. If somebody called you a witch you could just turn around and call him a wizard. Then you had a pretty kettle of fish for any jury. At any rate, the fact is that Goody Cole was the only one who suffered any real harm by reason of these hysterical and popular suspicions.

Clears Many Names

Although 20 years later all the Bay State colony was busy baiting witches it was a diversion which apparently never particularly appealed to those whom Cornelius 'Weygandt, writing in the just-published federal writers' Guide, calls "the merriest of the Puritans, the early settlers of New Hampshire." So that is why Goody Cole was chosen. For even one sin on the conscience can be a heavy thing. And although Eunice Cole, wherever she may now be, probably doesn't care one way or the other what they do to the dust from her grave—still it is a gesture which includes all those falsely accused, and in clearing Goody Cole's name—all the other names in American history, resting under similar stains, are, in a sense, cleared simultaneously.

It wasn't until this winter that the little society saw fit to bring its case before the town as a whole. For this purpose it wrote to Judge W. Perkins, counsel for the town of Hampton, and chairman of the committee in charge of celebrating the town's tercentenary, and, incidentally, himself a member of the apprehending society. It requested Judge Perkins to lay the matter before the town and this he gladly did on March 8. A

unanimous vote was then cast by the town to arrange a ceremony to be held this summer wherein after an oration had been delivered, the ashes of the burnt accusations together with bits of earth taken from the spot where tradition says her body was first buried, from the place where it is reputed to have been later reburied, and from an appropriate location near the Witch's Well,—that all of these shall be placed in a suitable urn and buried on the town green.

There are only 22 members of the Hampton society who are responsible for this mass display of good spirit on the part of the town. William D. Cram, of Haverhill, is the president and J. W. Tucker of Hampton Beach, the vice-president. Although they went about their business of apprehending the descendants of those who "falsely accused," with great seriousness they were successful in finding only one, Arnold D. Philbrick, whose ancestor was that Thamas Philbrick who testified before the court of Norfolk long ago that "she (Goody Cale) had said if his calves should eat any 'Of her grasse she wished it might poison them or choke them; and he had never seen one of his calves afterward and the other calf came home and died about a week after." This was indeed an embarrassing situation in which Arnold Philbrick discovered himself. He wrote to Judge

Perkins, explaining that his ancestor —had acted in good faith and requesting that no discredit be brought upon the name of those who were concerned in the prosecution. "They acted," he says, "In good faith and in accordance with a belief that was well nigh universal at that time. Pity them if you will, but do not censure them." Which is, of course, precisely the attitude of all those concerned in the gesture. The only punishment meted out to Arnold Philbrick was a refusal to admit him as a member of the society —although he could trace his ancestry so far back.

Goody's Spirit

The urn holding the dust from Goody Cole's grave will be laid to final rest on the green not many yards from the old "haunted house" which is the house built by General Moulton on the supposed site of the old grave. When the old general died many generations ago, strange tales grew up concerning the ancestral name. People who lived there declared that nothing but ill luck pursued them. Pigs and cows acted queerly. Horrible noises occurred with no apparent cause. Crops failed.

Everyone believed that it was because the spirit of Goody Cole haunted the land but the truth of the matter, according to another historian, is that this old General Moulton was himself in league with the devil. He made a pact with the horned king to give him his soul if he, the devil, would fill his boot with gold every night.

This seemed a very satisfactory arrangement until the old general became greedy. He, craftily, cut a hole in the toe of his boot and when the devil came that night to fill the shoe he poured and poured but he couldn't seem to fill it with gold. A brief examination disclosed the trick. In anger, the devil took the soul of General Moulton right then and there, and decided to make the house his own, into the bargain.

One should not be too quick to blame poor Goody Cale for everything. Thoughtful Hamptonites like to speculate on what the good woman's reaction might have been if she had been told when she was at her hardest that some day her name would become a byword in every American home, that the radio would shriek her story into the air, and the newspapers carry it to every corner of the earth, that people would come from many States to witness her exoneration.

Probably she would have reported the luckless person who dared to prophesy to the authorities for practising[sic] witchcraft. Certainly she would have considered such a prophecy the meaningless babble of an idiot.

But, in the meantime, just in case the old woman is looking down on these new fangled proceedings, Hamptonites are being mighty careful what they say. They wouldn't want her to misunderstand them-even if they are convinced that she wasn't a witch.