Salem Witch Trials

The fear of witchcraft and partnership with the devil was widespread during the late 17th century. In Europe during the late Middle Ages, thousands of suspected witches were put to death. Between 1692 and 1693, in cities across the American Massachusetts Bay Colony, approximately 200 people were accused of being witches. Some of the most notable of these persecutions took place in the Puritan town of Salem, Massachusetts.

When two young girls, nine-year-old Betty Parris and eleven-year-old Abigail Williams began to have strange screaming fits, witchcraft was suspected. The girls claimed that three local women were witches and had cursed them. The girls' servant, Tituba, admitted to being a witch, which only fueled the fear and panic. Soon, witchcraft was blamed for everything. Whenever someone was accused of being a witch, the pastor of the local Puritan church would have a "trial" to determine whether or not the charge was true.

About twenty "witches" were executed in Massachusetts. Many other people were put in jail, where some died. Eventually, people began to realize that innocent people were being executed. The governor of Massachusetts stopped the trials in May of 1693 and pardoned and released the suspected witches being held at the time.

What were the Salem Witch Trials?