Ergot and the Salem Witch Trials

Ergot is a fungus that grows on rye in certain conditions. Ergot growth is particularly encouraged when a wet spring follows a cold winter. When eaten, for example, when bread is made from rye which is contaminated with ergot, its hallucinogenic properties can cause paranoia, hallucinations, twitches, and spasms. In 1976, Linnda Caporael, a professor at the Science and Technology Studies Department at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, was the first to suggest that the events which led to the Salem Witch Trials in Colonial Massachusetts in 1692 and 1693 may have actually been cases of ergot poisoning.

Given just these few facts, do you think that Ms. Caporael's theory is possible? Why or why not?

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