

Emily Santoro  
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Professor Norton  
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### Samuel Parris as a Recorder

The Salem witchcraft crisis of 1692 developed from a fairly common circumstance into a unique and complicated event. Fortunately court records, town records, and letters from the time period survived to assist contemporary scholars to understand and explain its occurrence. Recently, handwriting analysis on these documents identified some recorders and enabled a closer analysis of these papers. This knowledge can answer the questions of why a recorder wrote specific documents and what his judicial role was on a certain day. The Salem Village minister, Samuel Parris, actively participated in the Salem witch trials. His daughter, Elizabeth Parris, and his niece Abigail Williams, were two of the first afflicted girls and accusers during the crisis. Further, Parris recorded several judicial documents in 1692 and an obvious pattern emerged. Samuel Parris's role as a recorder in the Salem witchcraft trials depended on the involvement of his niece, Abigail Williams, and his church members. In addition, the accused mentioned in the documents written by Parris and their families tended not to sign the petition supporting him in 1695 which suggests continued animosity.

Out of the 980 documents concerning the Salem witch trials, Samuel Parris's handwriting has been identified on 48.<sup>1</sup> Why had Parris written these particular documents? Since he did not record a majority of them, he did not have an official role recording all of the trials and associated papers. On the other hand, the figure indicates his recording was not done on rare occasions. Scribing 48 out of the 980 documents shows that Parris must have had specific reasons for writing them.

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<sup>1</sup> Research on Recorder Identification done by Margo Burns, Peter Grund, and Matti Peikola

Parris's first written paper was a warrant for Sarah Good on February 29, 1692.

However, his hand appears only as a secondary contribution since Parris only wrote the date 1.March.1691/2, which was probably when Sarah Good was apprehended. The warrant was issued on behalf of Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams, Anna Putnam, and Elizabeth Hubbard. It is not surprising that the first document involving Parris, even though minimally, was associated directly with his niece and daughter.<sup>2</sup>

The second warrant that Parris contributed to was issued on May 8, 1692 for Ann Sears, Bethiah Carter Jr., and Bethiah Carter Sr. Parris recorded that he apprehended Ann Sears and Bethiah Carter Sr. on May 9. However, he signed under "Ephraim Black, Constable of Woburn."<sup>3</sup> This suggests that Parris transcribed for Ephraim Black, who apprehended the accused and brought them to jail. Despite these warrants, most of Parris's recording roles involved him composing the majority of the document.

Unsurprisingly, Parris took an active role in Abigail Williams's participation in the judicial proceedings. In May of 1692, Abigail provided the court records with nine testimonies of her afflictions and afflictors. Parris recorded all of these testimonies, beginning on May 2 and ending on May 31.<sup>4</sup> In fact, these were the only exclusive testimonies that Parris wrote. In one instance Parris recorded a testimony of Ann Putnam Jr. but it was part of Ann Putnam Sr.'s deposition.<sup>5</sup> No one else wrote any of Abigail Williams's testimonies and so it appears that Parris reserved this right for himself.

The timeline of the documents written by Parris reveals more about his role as a recorder during the trials. In March 1691/2, Parris recorded three depositions and two examinations. In

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Rosenthal, Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 235, 254, 256, 296, 314, 338, 342, 343.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

April 1692, these numbers increased slightly to total two depositions, seven examinations, and one statement. May 1692 had Parris most intensely involved with eleven examinations, three depositions, Abigail Williams's nine testimonies, and one warrant. After that, his involvement phased out at a sudden rate. Up until the end of May, Parris recorded examinations on 9 out of the total 16 days they were held in the meeting place.<sup>6</sup> The gradual increase of his involvement coordinated with the gradual increase in the witch trial cases, until the establishment of the Court of Oyer and Terminer on May 27. Following the Court's founding, Parris only wrote six depositions in June 1692, followed by a month long absence of him recording anything in July. In August 1692, Parris inscribed his final judicial documents about the witchcraft trials, which consisted of one deposition on the fourth and one statement on the fifth.<sup>7</sup> It can therefore be concluded that Parris's role as a recorder of examinations increased as the examinations burgeoned, and then diminished directly in association with the Court's formation.

The depositions are an important factor to look at when attempting to understand Parris's role as a recorder. They differed from most of the court records because the people approached Parris to write these depositions. Out of the total fifteen depositions, nine involved Parris himself. In eight of these nine, Parris joined Nathaniel Ingersoll and Thomas Putnam to report afflictions that occurred during certain examinations.<sup>8</sup> The other one of Parris's depositions was with John Putnam Sr. about Putnam's illness. Parris was with John Putnam Sr. when they called in Mercy Lewis to see if she saw the specter of a witch that might have caused his suffering. The deposition stated that Mercy Lewis saw Rebecca Nurse and Martha Carrier as the sources of

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<sup>6</sup> Three additional days of examinations occurred during this time period but took place in the jail and all were either recorded by John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin. (Ibid., 198-200, 220, 237.)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 125-538. For a clear timeline of Parris's documents, see the attached Appendix.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 137, 152, 176, 179, 233, 292, 429,

John Putnam Sr.'s discomfort.<sup>9</sup> That was the only instance of Parris directly accusing someone and where he was not reporting an incident that happened to his niece and her cohorts.

Besides these depositions that personally involved Parris, he recorded for six others. On May 20, 1692, Parris wrote a deposition for Jonathan Putnam, James Darling, Benjamin Hutchinson, and Samuel Braybrook against Mary Easty.<sup>10</sup> James Darling was also Mercy Lewis's uncle-in-law, and it was her afflictions that the deposition primarily concerns.<sup>11</sup> Why did these four men come to Parris to have him record his deposition? One factor might be that they all hailed from Salem Village and so he was a community leader. Additionally, Jonathan Putnam was a member of Parris's church, as was Benjamin Hutchinson's wife, Lydia.<sup>12</sup> Three of the four men apparently supported Parris and respected him. Jonathan Putnam, Benjamin Hutchinson, and James Darling either signed the Pro-Parris petition of 1695 themselves or had relatives that did so.<sup>13</sup> Samuel Braybrook actually signed the Anti-Parris petition, as did his wife Mary.<sup>14</sup> Since this showed that Braybrook clearly did not have favorable views of Parris in 1695, it leads one to wonder why he chose Parris as the recorder of his deposition against Mary Easty. It may be because the other three men outweighed his opinion of Parris or perhaps Braybrook had a partial disposition towards Parris at the time, since the examinations were three years before the petition was signed.

An unusual deposition that Parris recorded concerns Thomas Putnam and Edward Putnam against Rebecca Nurse. The two men said that they witnessed Rebecca Nurse afflicting

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Beth Norton, In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692, (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, Salem Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1972), 269, 272, 407-409.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 262-263.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 261-262.

Ann Putnam Jr.<sup>15</sup> However, the odd component about this deposition was that Thomas Putnam himself avidly recorded for the witch trials. He normally wrote Ann Putnam Jr.'s depositions since she was his daughter.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Edward Putnam wrote his own depositions previously.<sup>17</sup> Why did Thomas and Edward Putnam have Parris record their evidence when both of them were capable? Perhaps Parris wrote this document since the evidence involved Rebecca Nurse, with whom his niece had previously had many spectral encounters with and whom Parris had written many documents about already.

Another Salem Villager who approached Parris to record his deposition was Bray Wilkins. He filed his deposition against John Willard on August 4 and it was the final deposition by Parris. Bray Wilkins belonged to Parris's church, which may again explain why Parris recorded Wilkins' evidence. Also, Bray Wilkins apparently adamantly supported Parris over the years because he also signed the Pro-Parris petition in 1695, as did about nine of his relatives.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, John Willard was the grandson-in-law of Bray Wilkins, which showed familial tension between the two men.<sup>19</sup>

Samuel Parris authored other depositions but was not the main scribe of them. An example of this was Ann Putnam Sr.'s deposition against Martha Carrier and Rebecca Nurse. Thomas Putnam originally wrote it on March 24, and then Samuel Parris's role in the document began on May 31 when Ann Putnam Sr.'s evidence was read in court. He added onto the document, saying that Rebecca Nurse afflicted her again during the trial.<sup>20</sup> This was logical since Parris recorded Rebecca Nurse's examination and therefore witnessed Ann Putnam Sr.'s

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<sup>15</sup> Rosenthal, RSWH, 430.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-140, 346.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 152, 163.

<sup>18</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem Village, 262-263.

<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal, RSWH, 936.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

affliction. He later added on this evidence to the original deposition. The same situation occurred when Parris added onto Susannah Sheldon's deposition that she suffered during the examination of Sarah Good.<sup>21</sup> Parris was present at both of the above events, witnessed these afflictions for himself, and then added them to the judicial record. Since the magistrates continually asked him to record examinations, they assumed that Parris was a reliable witness, a skillful note taker, and that most villagers respected him and his judgment.

Another very short role that Parris played was in the writing of Mary Walcott's deposition against Sarah Good. In this case, Thomas Putnam wrote the main part of the document and Parris's handwriting was only identified as making the mark of Mary Walcott at the end of it.<sup>22</sup> This is similar to Parris writing on behalf of Ephraim Black in Ann Sears, Bethiah Carter Jr., and Bethiah Carter Sr.'s warrant.

Parris also wrote two statements. One was his own statement and one he wrote on behalf of Samuel Sibley. In his personal statement, Parris wrote about Abigail Williams' complaints about John Proctor. It spans the course of three different dates: April 4, 6, and 12. He recorded that John Proctor tortured her at night and afflicted her, Mary Walcott, and John Indian. He also stated that Mary Walcott named John Proctor, Rebecca Nurse, Elizabeth Proctor, Martha Corey, Sarah Cloyce, and Sarah Childs during her fits.<sup>23</sup> This statement showed that Parris kept a careful record of Abigail Williams's fits in order to provide specific dates on which these events happened.<sup>24</sup>

The second statement, given by Samuel Sibley, was also against John Proctor. He said that he heard John Proctor threaten Mary Warren when she began to have fits. Although this did

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>24</sup> Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 56-57.

not appear in court until August 5, Bernard Rosenthal and his colleagues speculate that Sibley's statement was written as early as March 25, 1692, suggesting that Mary Warren suffered earlier afflictions.<sup>25</sup> Samuel Sibley belonged to Parris's church<sup>26</sup> and he also most likely knew about Abigail Williams's afflictions by John Proctor. These factors probably influenced Sibley in relating his statement to Parris.

As noted previously, most people who approached Parris lived in Salem Village. Parris's involvement with local people emerged as a consistent pattern when analyzing the papers. Out of the 29 people accused of witchcraft from Salem Village, Parris wrote documents pertaining to 13. The nearby town of Topsfield had seven people accused and Parris wrote about five of them. Parris was also involved in cases of people from the towns of Woburn, Marblehead, and Amesbury. However, he was not heavily involved with accused people from Salem Town. He wrote documents associated with only three of the eleven from there.<sup>27</sup> Salem Village and Salem Town histories were very intertwined, since the Village was not officially independent of the Town. Tensions existed for years between the two on the matters of taxes, lack of autonomy, as well as a lack of meetinghouse and pastor.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore surprising that he was not more involved with people from the Town. Rebecca Nurse lived in Salem Town and he participated in many of her documents; however perhaps he was apathetic about the other Town residents. Additionally, out of the 19 executed, Parris had written about 14 of them. Those he did not become involved with were Ann Pudeator, Alice Parker, Samuel Wardwell Sr., Margaret Scott, and Mary Parker. Pudeator and Alice Parker both hailed from Salem Town but their trials did

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<sup>25</sup> Rosenthal, RSWH, 538.

<sup>26</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem Village, 271.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 376-378.

<sup>28</sup> Norton, Devil's Snare, 16.

not begin until after Parris's scribal role started to decrease, while the remaining lived in Andover and were not accused until later on also.<sup>29</sup>

Another pattern evident from analyzing the documents associated Parris with his church members. Two of the accused witches belonged to his church: Martha Corey and Sarah Cloyce.<sup>30</sup> Nathaniel Ingersoll and John Putnam Sr. were both deacons in Parris's church and filed depositions together with Parris. The only one of the afflicted who was a church member was Ann Putnam Sr.,<sup>31</sup> since the others were younger girls and John Indian. However, others who accused in the forms of depositions and statements belonged to his church including: Nathaniel Ingersoll, Peter Prescott, Ann Putnam Sr., Edward Putnam, John Putnam Sr., Jonathan Putnam, Thomas Putnam, Samuel Sibley, Benjamin Wilkins, and Bray Wilkins.<sup>32</sup> Seven were depositions, while one was Samuel Sibley's statement and the other statement was offered during John Willard's examination where Peter Prescott and Benjamin Wilkins accused Willard of abusing his wife.<sup>33</sup>

Parris mostly wrote examinations during his time as a recorder. The people whose examinations that Parris recorded were: Martha Corey, Rebecca Nurse, Bridget Bishop, Abigail Hobbs, Mary Warren, Mary Black, Deliverance Hobbs, Sarah Wilds and William Hobbs, Dorcas Hoar, Susannah Martin, George Burroughs, George Jacobs Sr., Sarah Buckley, John Willard, Martha Carrier, Elizabeth How, and Wilmot Redd.<sup>34</sup> On March 21 and 24, Parris wrote the examinations for Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse. They were the only examinations on those days and the only other recording of them was done by visiting former minister Deodat Lawson.

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<sup>29</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem Village, 377-378.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 270, 272.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 269, 271, 274.

<sup>33</sup> Rosenthal, RSWH, 152, 160, 176, 179, 233, 289, 292, 302, 429, 430, 527, 538.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 152, 157, 185, 189, 196, 206, 208, 210, 214, 225, 228, 240, 251, 283, 286, 335, 339, 344.

On April 19, Parris wrote four of the five examinations, with Ezekiel Cheever writing another version of Bridget Bishop's examination. On April 22, Parris wrote four examinations out of the five recorded that day.<sup>35</sup> Parris was the only one that recorded the two examinations on May 2.<sup>36</sup> Again, on May 9 and 10, Parris recorded the only examination held on both days. May 18 had three examinations and Parris recorded all of them. The final day of May was also Parris's final day of recording examinations. There were a total of seven examinations held, but only records for four of them survived.<sup>37</sup> Parris's last recording of examinations was May 31, which was soon after the establishment of the Court of Oyer and Terminer on May 27. After this, most of the examinations were recorded by Simon Willard, Stephen Sewall, John Higginson Jr., and William Murray.<sup>38</sup>

Analyzing the identities of the individuals whose examinations Parris wrote will not reveal much information about Parris's relationship with them, since the magistrates John Hathorn and Jonathan Corwin probably asked him to record the examinations. Parris recorded most of the examinations that took place between March and May, with only a few being done by unidentified people, Cheever, Simon Willard, John Higginson Jr., or Jonathan Corwin.

To learn about the people Parris wrote for, one needs to analyze the depositions, since they sought him out. Parris mostly wrote about the afflicted girls, because of all the depositions and examinations that involved them. Abigail Williams was mentioned the most, with Mary Walcott, Mercy Lewis, Elizabeth Hubbard, and Ann Putnam Jr. being mentioned by Parris about half as much as Abigail. Looking at the accused people produces a less predictable and

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<sup>35</sup> An unidentified individual wrote the fifth examination. (Ibid., 205).

<sup>36</sup> Three examinations exist in total for May 2 because Parris wrote a more complete, second version of Susannah Martin. (Ibid., 230.)

<sup>37</sup> A total of seven examinations are known because of evidence from the Officer's Returns. John Alden wrote the fourth surviving examination but it was a narration that was recorded many years later and was not part of the original judicial record. (Ibid., 335, 348.)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 546, 548, 552-553, 556-557, 561-563.

interesting result. Out of the accused, Parris wrote the most documents about Rebecca Nurse. Not only was she the most mentioned, but all types of documents referred to her: depositions, statements, examinations, and testimonies.<sup>39</sup> Other accused mentioned a significant number of times were Sarah Good, Martha Corey, Sarah Cloyce, John Willard, John Proctor, and Elizabeth Proctor.<sup>40</sup> Parris's in-depth role in Martha Corey and Sarah Cloyce's cases probably resulted from their membership in his church. Sarah Cloyce was also the sister of Rebecca Nurse, which may have been a contributing factor.<sup>41</sup> What was somewhat surprising was Parris's lack of involvement in George Burroughs's case. Burroughs was a former minister of Salem Village and so his trial might have intrigued Parris and prompted him to be more involved. However, this is not the case and can be explained by Parris's involvement declining before Burroughs's judicial process began.

Parris's actions during the trials might have also had an effect on his life years after their end. In 1695, members of Salem Village attempted to oust Parris as their minister and started a petition against him. Although this movement was not directly related to Parris's role in the witch trials and instead was a dispute about his salary and service, Rebecca Nurse's son, Samuel Nurse, adamantly led this anti-Parris movement. The animosity of the Nurse family was to be expected since Parris played such a public and important role in her initial accusations and judicial proceedings. Additionally, even one of the surviving accused witches, Sarah Buckley, signed the Anti-Parris petition, probably because he wrote her examination and his niece played a role in her accusation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 157, 181, 342, 415, 429, 430.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 125, 137, 143, 160, 179, 181, 314, 338, 342, 343, 412, 413, 415, 429, 538.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 935.

<sup>42</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem Village, 261.

Further analysis and exploration of the relationships between the recorders and people involved is made possible through the new handwriting identification. Samuel Parris was the minister of Salem Village, related to two of the originally afflicted girls, and housed one of the first accused witches, Tituba. The addition of his role as a recorder increased his already prominent role in the trials. Parris mostly involved himself with local people, church members, and his niece when recording documents not designated by the magistrates. Rebecca Nurse also emerged as a major subject of Parris's recorded documents during this analysis. Even though Parris's scribal role increased as the trials began to escalate, it diminished significantly following the establishment of the Court of Oyer and Terminer. However, people continued to come to him to write their depositions. Samuel Parris was a key figure in the Salem witchcraft crisis of 1692, as he encompassed the role of a community leader and guide, relative of bewitched girls, and as a recorder of judicial records.

**Appendix – DOCUMENTS WRITTEN BY PARRIS AND DATE**

<b>FEBRUARY</b>	<b>MARCH</b>	<b>APRIL</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>JUNE</b>	<b>JULY</b>	<b>AUGUST</b>
<b>29:</b> 1 Warrant	<b>1:</b> 1 Deposition	<b>11:</b> 2 Depositions	<b>2:</b> 3 Examinations 1 Deposition 1 Testimony	<b>28:</b> 2 Depositions	NONE	<b>4:</b> 1 Deposition
	<b>21:</b> 1 Examination 1 Deposition	<b>12:</b> 1 Statement	<b>8:</b> 1 Warrant	<b>29:</b> 4 Depositions		<b>5:</b> 1 Statement
	<b>24:</b> 1 Examination 1 Deposition with testimony	<b>19:</b> 3 Examinations	<b>9:</b> 1 Examination			
		<b>22:</b> 4 Examinations	<b>10:</b> 1 Examination 1 Testimony			
			<b>11:</b> 1 Testimony			
			<b>18:</b> 3 Examinations 1 Deposition 1 Testimony			
			<b>20:</b> 1 Deposition			
			<b>23:</b> 1 Testimony			
			<b>31:</b> 3 Examinations 4 Testimonies			
<b>TOTAL: 1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

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