

Mysterious Delusions: Witchcraft in Salem Village

Walter Rowe

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The witchcraft trials in Salem in 1692-1693 were the largest episode of witch hunting in what is now the United States and the last large witchcraft outbreak in Western Civilization. Over a hundred persons were accused of witchcraft and imprisoned; nineteen witches were convicted and executed. A variety of explanations for this event have been advanced. In the Seventeenth Century most citizens of Massachusetts believed that witches existed and that the accused were part of a conspiracy to overthrow Christianity and replace it with the rule of Satan. During the Enlightenment many educated persons adopted the view that the witchcraft accusers were frauds and that their fits before the Massachusetts judges were mere imposture. In the last fifty years a new set of explanations has emerged. Some attempts at explanation have focused on food-borne toxins (ergot fungus) or pathogens (encephalitis). Other explanations have emphasized mass hysteria, bitter quarrels within the Salem Village community, the psychological stresses of adolescence and ageing or the psychological stresses experienced during a period of protracted warfare. This presentation will critique the modern explanations in the light of the historical record.

Prof. Walter F. Rowe is professor of forensic sciences at The George Washington University. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and a former member of the editorial board of the Journal of Forensic Sciences. Prof. Rowe is a longtime student of the Salem witchcraft outbreak and has spoken on this topic before NCAS as well as the annual meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. He is currently applying the methods of forensic firearms examination to archaeological artifacts excavated at the site of the 1866 Fetterman Massacre.

**Saturday, November 13
2-4pm**

**Montgomery County Library
Bethesda Branch**
7400 Arlington Road
Bethesda, Maryland
(A short walk from the Bethesda
Metro station)



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Shadow of a Doubt

THE MONTHLY CALENDAR OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA SKEPTICS

NOVEMBER 2004

Randi's "The Amazing Meeting" (TAM) More Amazing than Ever

Randi is holding the third annual TAM Jan 13-16, 2005. As usual there will be plenty of skeptical greats such as **Penn & Teller**, **Dr. Michael Shermer**, and our own **Jamy Ian Swiss**, as well as many others. *BUT*, what puts the *amazing* touch for me in this meeting is that **Dr. Richard Dawkins**, celebrated author, scientist, philosopher, humanist, lecturer, and educator from Oxford University will be the featured speaker. That alone makes this an extraordinary event. For details on how to attend, go to Randi's website at: <http://www.randi.org/tam3/index.html>

Author and Historian Anthony Pitch to Speak at the Library Nov. 9—Learn Methods of Historical Research

We are always talking about the scientific method that is applied well to the "hard" sciences, but there are organized, well-thought-out approaches to the social sciences as well.

Award-winning writer and historian Anthony S. Pitch will speak at the Library of Congress' sixth annual Judith P. Austin Memorial Lecture at noon on Tuesday, Nov. 9, in the sixth floor Dining Room A of the Library's James Madison Building, 101 Independence Ave. S.E., Washington D.C. This event is free and open to the public.

Pitch will share his unique insights about conducting research at the Library in a lecture titled "Research at the Library of Congress: An Historian's Perspective."

Pitch's flair for bringing the local area's past to life will interest both history buffs and residents of the metropolitan Washington area. An indefatigable explorer in the Library of Congress' myriad collections

of manuscripts, periodicals, microfilm and rare books, he relishes both the search for unusual source materials and the rewarding thrill of discovery. Pitch will offer some glimpses and insights into what he describes as "the rapturous delights" of researching at the Library of Congress.

Pitch is the author of a number of books, including *The Burning of Washington: The British Invasion of 1814* (History Book Club selection). His current research project is a book titled *They Have Killed Papa Dead! The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. Pitch lives in Potomac, Md.

Fun with HOAXES

I like to look at hoax photos and see if I can tell them from real photos. There are some of these photo tests on the Museum of Hoaxes website: <http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/>

Look at the right hand column first test. URL is: <http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/tests/hoaxphototest.html>

The problem with this type of test is that some of the hoax pictures have no clue to give them away and so can't really be told from real ones. But some of them DO have clues that give them away. Try your luck, or your skill. After a while you get the idea of what kind of things to look for.

Also there are other hoax tests there on History & Culture and Science and Nature.

Time to Renew!

Check your mailing label. If the renewal date has passed, please send to the NCAS address below \$30 (for 1 person) or \$40 (for 2-member households) for a 1-year renewal, or you will be dropped as a member.



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