THE CUP OF RUIN AND DESOLATION:
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY WITCHCRAFT IN THE CHESAPEAKE

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research and analysis is on seventeenth-century witchcraft in the Chesapeake. To date, there has not been an in depth study witchcraft in the early Southern colonies. Most studies of American colonial witchcraft tend to be either on the 1692 witchcraft hysteria of Salem, or on Puritan witchcraft in New England in general. While both regions were comprised of English colonies, there were profound differences between the Northern and Southern colonists. These disparities resulted in dramatically different ways each group perceived the nature of witchcraft, and the way they dealt with it. To aid in the understanding of the place of witchcraft in the Southern worldview, the use of the traditional Puritan model of witchcraft as a heresy has been abandoned in favor of an English seventeenth-century model that holds witchcraft as a practice. Because this study covers criminal and civil trials over eighty years, it allows for a tracing of the evolution of the beliefs in the Chesapeake. As the social, political, and economic conditions on the frontier gave way to an emerging gentrified society, witches and their place in the Chesapeake were pushed to the background of a very colorful, eccentric society.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: OBSERVING THEM

Observe them carefully, for this will show them your wisdom and understanding...

Deuteronomy 4: 6

The tale of the two adulterous sisters in Ezekiel 23 is one of loss in the pursuit of desire. When the Lord punished them, he said:

You will drink your sister’s cup, a cup large and deep; it will bring scorn and derision, for it holds so much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation...

The story of the sisters parallels the story of the early Chesapeake colonists who came to the New World in pursuit of wealth. Whatever dreams they had when they left England were quickly replaced with the nightmare of the realities of life on the frontier. The typical colonist was a young man, forced into indentured servitude by an English judge or circumstances, and without any friends or family from his home in England. He could expect to die a bachelor before the end of his term of servitude. Along with his master, he would face starvation, disease, and lethal threats from the Powhatan. For the few women who came to the Chesapeake, life was not much better. They could expect to marry, but with mortality rates reaching as high as eighty-five per cent at times, the odds were that they would join their male counterparts in an early death. The life offered to so many who came to the Chesapeake was one of ruin and desolation.

It is impossible to read the accounts from the seventeenth-century Chesapeake and not develop an appreciation for these people’s will to survive—let alone succeed—in such a hostile world. Several recent studies into that world have focused on the adaptations people employed to survive and empower themselves. However, the one area scholars have neglected to research in any depth is the role of witchcraft in Virginia and Maryland. This is understandable when the first question most often asked is, “Were there any witchcraft trials outside of New England?” The answer is, “Yes, there were.”

The few historians who have written about the Southern practitioners of the black arts during this period have tended either to compile a list of cases or to examine perhaps
one or two cases. The lack of primary sources must surely account for some avoidance of the topic. The records that do exist are often brief, lacking any significant detail, and are sometimes in such poor condition that they are barely legible. In some cases, records are entirely missing. Information about the parties involved is often equally as sparse. However, thanks to a rise in computer literacy and an increase in interest in family histories, much more information available to researchers than in even the previous decade.

Because the use of information obtained from internet web sites is still so new in academia, there is a question of its place in scholarship. It is argued here that technology has given us access sometimes to information that had previously been in old family Bibles gathering dust on forgotten shelves. That this is not a traditional academic source is not a sufficient justification to warrant a ban on its use. The use of information here from the internet, especially data from family web sites, is intended to demonstrate its feasibility in historical analysis. Wherever possible, corroborating evidence has been added, but as with all historical evidence, it must be assessed on its own merit.

Without some of the family information, we may have been left with the barest of facts to explain witchcraft beliefs in the early Chesapeake. When one thinks of the high mortality rates and skewed gender ratios, it should not come as a surprise that only one woman was executed in the South for practicing the black arts. Where the Puritans saw women as the evil incarnation of Eve, and the Quakers saw women as different from men, but equal, the early Southerners were just happy to see a woman! These facts are important, but they are only a part of a larger story.

The early southern colonists were a very colorful, eccentric cast of characters who believed in the reality of witchcraft, but were ruthless and tough enough to sow the seeds of fear into the most hardened criminals of their time—or even ours. Faced with imminent dangers, the fear of witchcraft, while present, was peripheral in their world view. They were, without question, very different from their northern neighbors in their religion, their sense of community, and their development of distinct regional peculiarities. Because of this, it is necessary to re-evaluate the prominent traditional models of understanding
American witchcraft in order to gain a more complete understanding of the Southern colonists' beliefs relating to witchcraft.

The first to come under scrutiny is the Puritan-based model where the witch or wizard is said to have covenanted with Satan in exchange for preternatural powers. There are several problems with this model. First, Southerners were by-and-large not Puritans. The sensational Salem trials of 1692 have overshadowed the study of American witchcraft, even though they were an aberration in New England, to such an extent that it is often assumed all English North American colonists shared the same witchcraft beliefs. However, this was not the case. The covenant-based model reflected the Calvinist beliefs more prominent in Protestant areas of the European continent than in traditional English thought. Studies of English witchcraft indicate that outside of the Puritan stronghold of East Anglia, most Englishmen and women believed witchcraft to be a practice—not a heresy. Within the model, practitioners—generally known as cunning men and women—manipulated what they believed were the forces that existed in and between matter. There were no demonic overtones in their minds, and, in fact, some of their charms invoked Christian images. Since most of the Chesapeake colonists were neither Puritans, nor from East Anglia, the model of witchcraft as a practice is more applicable to Southern witchcraft than is the Puritan model.

Nevertheless, the Puritan model should not be entirely abandoned. The most sensational witchcraft trials of seventeenth-century England occurred between 1644 and 1646 under the Witch-Finder General of Essex Matthew Hopkins. Although these trials lasted only two years, they did have an impact on traditional English witchcraft beliefs in that some of the Puritan elements of witchcraft were incorporated into popular witchlore. But these innovations were never prominent enough to warrant the substitution of this model for the one of witchcraft as a practice in Chesapeake popular culture. Because Virginia and Maryland were still English colonies under English law, whether it was a practice or heresy, witchcraft was still a crime. The use of the two models allows for a tracing of the evolution of popular beliefs.

Recent feminist scholars have proposed another model of witchcraft that holds that witchcraft accusations were aimed at the poor, old women who had no means to defend
themselves. Feminist historians who employ this model often overlook the glaring fact that men were executed for practicing sorcery as well. In fact, if one were to examine the statistics of southern witchcraft criminal convictions, one would find that sixty-seven percent of the criminal convictions were of men, not women. This statistic, however, is misleading in that women account for one hundred percent of the executions. Perhaps no line is more appropriate here than Mark Twain's observation, "There are lies, damn lies, and then there are statistics." Only three people were convicted of sorcery, two men and one woman, and only the woman was executed. The reality was that more women than men were accused of practicing witchcraft, but in the South before Bacon's Rebellion, it was generally the upper class women who found themselves accused of witchcraft. After Bacon's Rebellion, the accused and accuser tended to come from the same socio-economic class. Therefore, this particular model of witchcraft does not provide any insight into the practitioners of the black arts in the Chesapeake.

The feminist model that is more applicable here is one based on how women empower themselves within a patriarchal hierarchy. The English women who came to the Chesapeake had to be strong just to survive on the frontier. Far from being victims of chauvinistic men, these women engaged in many of the same activities as men, working alongside them in the tobacco fields to taking up arms with them against whatever enemy was at hand. It would be a disservice to these incredible women to suggest in any way that they were victims of anything other than circumstance. Undoubtedly, from the moment English colonists first set foot in Virginia, they began to develop a patriarchal society, but men as well as women came under the control of the men in power. The type of hierarchy they developed was analogous to the one they were most familiar in England, and that one of the English king ruling over his subjects. Human nature being what it is, crafty subjects always find a way to get the better of their king.

The largest obstacles the English faced in creating their new social hierarchy were the conditions created on the frontier. Rich or poor, master or servant, man or woman, they all faced the same hardships and uncertainties in the early years of colonization. The absence of the institutions that maintained social order in England resulted in a pervasive
attitude of equality in the lower classes toward authorities much to the dismay of the would-be kings. The lack of recognition of social betters was a factor in many of the pre-Bacon's Rebellion witchcraft cases. Bacon's supporters, who generally came from the lower classes, became increasingly marginalized after the Rebellion. Women who had supported Bacon suffered the most under these changes. The upper class did more than marginalize them—they demonized them. The major consequence of this in regard to the witchcraft cases was that the individuals involved tended to come from the same socio-economic class.

The foundations for these arguments are more fully developed in the second chapter of this text, "Wisdom is Found in Understanding," as well as in subsequent chapters. In order to understand Southern witchcraft, it is important to assess the historical and social context of the seventeenth-century Chesapeake. Inevitably, there are comparisons with New England witchcraft because of the predominance of material in this area. One of the differences between Southern and Northern witchcraft was the absence of an emphasis on the relationship between religion and witchcraft in the South. Southerners identified themselves as Christians, but their religious fervor was never expressed as strongly as that of their Puritan neighbors in the North. They were officially members of the Church of England, although their beliefs and practices were more "low church" than "high church." Nevertheless, their Christianity was a basic part of their identity. It is for this reason the text and chapter titles in this dissertation are based on Biblical quotes.

Chapters Three through Nine trace the evolution of witchcraft beliefs from 1626 to 1706 through the individual cases that, for the most part, are in chronological order. The third chapter, "Death Rode a Pale Horse," focuses on the criminal trial of Goodwife Joan Wright (1626) who appeared to have the ability to predict deaths in a colony where death was commonplace! The testimonies given during the trial reflect the harsh conditions the early colonists faced, and how easy it was to look to witchcraft to explain so many tragic events. While it is tempting to assume Wright was the stereotypical defenseless, old woman who was a scapegoat for her fellow colonists' fears, a closer inspection of the records indicate she was an acerbic old woman who admitted some knowledge of witchcraft. The two elements that are significant in this case are, first Wright's failure to show respect to her
social betters, and second the fact that nowhere is there any mention the demonic covenant so prevalent in the Puritan witchcraft trials.

“Chapter 4. They are Gossips” is an examination of the power and consequences of women’s speech—particularly gossip—within a patriarchy. The 1641 civil suit involved Jane Rookens, a former servant, and Ann Burcher, the wife of a minor aristocrat. George Burcher, Ann’s husband, brought Rookens to court accusing her of scandalizing Ann Burcher by calling her a witch. Far from a sensational cat fight, the case was quietly settled when Rookens claimed she could not remember saying this, apologized, and paid the court costs. This case is a typical Virginia witchcraft case in that an accusation is brought to civil rather than criminal court there is little fanfare, and the records show few details. However, by piecing together known facts about the parties involved, their story becomes much more complex. The Rookens, who were former servants, had reached a level of economic parity with the Burchers by the time of the trial, a position they probably would not have achieved if they had stayed in England. This put Rookens’ husband, William, in the position of defending his place in the fledgling Virginia patriarchal planter society. Part of this included Rookens’ responsibility for the control of the behavior of those in his household. In this case, the form of behavior was gossip that was more than idle chatter between women. It had the power to create or destroy bonds between families and neighbors in a world where each was dependent on the other for survival.

“Chapter 5. Obeying Their Voices” explores the circumstances of the three women executed at sea for witchcraft. These women, along with the other passengers, the crews, and the captains were literally and figuratively between worlds. When the crews threatened to mutiny if the suspected witches were not executed, the captains obeyed their voices and allowed the women to be hanged. The investigation into Mary Lee’s execution (1654) is especially significant in that it occurred after Matthew Hopkins witch hunts (1644-1646), and may be used as a marker for the incorporation of Puritan beliefs into the Virginia witchlore. Moreover, these investigations of the executions at sea are a window into Chesapeake family relations and politics.
The focus of "Chapter 6. Get Rid of All the Slander" is on several cases between circa 1655 and 1676. Although criminal and civil cases are discussed in this chapter, the heart of this chapter is centered on a 1655 statute making it a crime to slanderously accuse a woman of being a witch without proof. The law was clearly aimed at neighborhood gossips causing social discord rather than the colonists' fear of witches' malicious mischief. There were at least two Anglican ministers, Reverends David Lindsaye and Francis Doughtie, who placed a priority on maleficium over social discord. Both ministers presented evidence in criminal witchcraft cases, but only Reverend Lindsaye saw a conviction against William Harding—the only person to be convicted of witchcraft in Virginia (1655). Yet, there is some question as to whether Harding was convicted on the evidence Lindsaye presented or was simply a ne'er-do-well whom the residents of Northumberland County wanted to make the next county's problem.

Joan Jenking's and Alice Cartwright's cases form the basis of "Chapter 7. Getting Revenge." They both occurred at the time of Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 when tensions between the settlers escalated to the point of civil war in the colony. The animosity prevalent in the colony is particularly reflected in Jenking's case. The accuser was Captain William Carver who was one of the wealthiest, most powerful men in the colony at the time. He is a prime of example of a ruthless planter who would stop at nothing—including murder—to be successful. Carver accused Jenking of being a witch after a failed business transaction between Carver and Jenking's husband, Lazarus. This is a rare case in the Chesapeake in that the accuser is from the upper class and the accused is from the lower class.

"Chapter 8. The Witchcraft of Your Mother" is a tale of family conflict where two brothers married two first cousins. It stands in southern witchcraft trials because the two brothers, John and Henry Dunkan, were the sons of a Scot immigrant, Peter Dunkan. The civil suits resulting from their conflicts illustrate the witchcraft beliefs the settlers brought with them to the Chesapeake. In this case, though, it was Scots' beliefs. The details in the testimonies are the closest instance in the Chesapeake to a Puritan-based model of witchcraft. If the awards in the cases may be used an indication of the pervasiveness of
these beliefs, then the beliefs were not widely accepted. The payments to the witnesses were higher than the awards to the plaintiffs!

The title of the ninth chapter, “Disquieting Dreams,” comes from court transcripts where those testifying described being ridden at night by their neighbors as if in a dream. Among the topics discussed in this chapter are the physiological explanations for the symptoms of bewitchment. Adherents to this model of explanation believe the symptoms were real, but can be accounted for through the application of knowledge derived from modern medical studies. However feasible it may be to employ these methods, they ultimately fail in that they can only account for the symptoms of bewitchment, not the context of the beliefs. The primary cases in this chapter, those of the Byrds and Grace Sherwood, are the last of the formal witchcraft cases in Virginia. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, beliefs related to the occult began to give way to the rationalism of the Enlightenment so that there is a dramatic decline in witchcraft prosecutions.

The study of the seventeenth-century witchcraft cases in the Chesapeake provides a unique perspective into the lives and culture of the early colonists. Ultimately, the Southern witchcraft cases are different from the northern ones because the people themselves were so different. Witchcraft was a reality in both their worlds, but the Southerners’ fears never reached the extreme levels of those in New England.
CHAPTER 2. WISDOM FOUND IN UNDERSTANDING

In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found

Proverbs X: 13

One of the most difficult research topics in Anglo-American history is surely that of witchcraft. Because of its illegality and demonic associations, it was practiced in private and most knowledge pertaining to it comes from either court records or texts designed to aid in the identification and prosecution of witches. It lacked a formal theological framework that makes it difficult for a researcher to define, let alone to explain. Additionally, beliefs about witchcraft tended to arise from the lower classes, but it was the intellectuals who codified them. Therefore, in the process, there were certainly modifications from the recording of the popular beliefs to the formalized version. The result is, at times, a seemingly incoherent and conflicting puzzle of impressions. These problems become even more pronounced in the study of witchcraft outside of New England where the records are sometimes scant at best.

An example of this can be found in the extreme differences in the Dorcas Good and William Harding cases. Salem, Massachusetts authorities issued a warrant for the arrest Sarah Good's four-year-old daughter, Dorcas Good, on the suspicion of practicing witchcraft on March 23, 1692. It was said this child had practiced the black arts on those whose testimonies were responsible for her mother's imprisonment on witchcraft charges. Dorcas testified to the judges three days after her arrest that her mother had given her a little snake that she suckled from a red spot below the lowest joint of her forefinger. Along with the other imprisoned witches, she was fettered in iron shackles in May of that year to prevent her from using her demonically-derived powers to further torment her
accusers. Eight months later, on December 10, 1692, the charges against Dorcas were dropped and she was released. Thirty-seven years earlier (1655) in Northumberland County, Virginia, a jury of twenty-four men found William Harding guilty of witchcraft and sorcery. He was sentenced to "ten stripes upon his bare back and forever be Banished this County and yet hee depart within the space of two moneths. And also pay all the charges of Court."²

Witchcraft cases in Maryland follow the same pattern as those in Virginia resulting in only two criminal convictions. John Cowman was sentenced to execution in 1674 for his bewitchment of Elizabeth Goodale, but he received a pardon from the Upper House Assembly "Provided that the Sheriff of St. Mary's County carry him to the Gallows, and that the rope being about his neck it be there made known to him how much he is Beholding to the Lower house of Assembly for Mediating and Interceeding in his Behalf." With the exception of Rebecca Fowler (1685), who enjoys the infamous


²Northumberland County Records, Orders Nov. 20, 1655. As a side note, Harding was the only person known to have been convicted of practicing witchcraft in Virginia.
distinction of being the only person executed for witchcraft in the Chesapeake, most of the cases were civil suits—not criminal prosecutions.³

These criminal cases illustrate the stark contrast between the way the colonists of the Chesapeake and the New England Puritans perceived the threat of witchcraft. A mere child in New England was imprisoned and fettered on at least eight months for the mere suspicion of practicing witchcraft, and she was not the only one, two other children under the age of ten were accused between 1620 and 1725.⁴ Yet, a grown man convicted of the same crime in Virginia was given a fairly light form of corporal punishment and two months to leave, not the colony, but the county. On July 5, 1706, Virginia justices in Lower Norfolk County decided to postpone a trial by ducking accused witch Grace Sherwood because “the weather being very Rainy and Bad Soe that possibly it might endanger her health.”⁵ In contrast, the emotional scars of her imprisonment left Dorcas Good unable to care for herself as an adult, forcing her father, William Good, to petition for financial assistance for her.

It is impossible to look at the records from the witchcraft trials from these colonies and not ask why were the Puritans and the Southerners were so different in their


⁴Karlsen, Devil in the Shape of a Woman, 64.

⁵Burr, Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706, 441.
treatment of accused and convicted witches. Authorities of the Chesapeake appear to be more humane and enlightened than the Puritans. Yet the Virginians are the same people who passed a law in 1619 making it a criminal offense to fire a gun while intoxicated except at weddings and funerals. However, even in comparison with the penalties meted out in the England, Virginians were still very lenient. During the seventeenth century there were over three hundred crimes punishable by death in England, whereas only a handful of crimes such as mutiny or murder merited death in Virginia. Did this make Virginians more lenient toward crime?

A number of early Virginians—as well as Marylanders—found their way to the New World courtesy of the English justice system. English judges were hard pressed to send a man or woman to either prison or the gallows for petty crimes, especially for crimes such as stealing a chicken for food. One solution to their moral dilemma was simply to transport minor criminals and indigents to Virginia as indentured servants. The transportation of petty criminals to Virginia served not only to punish the offender, but moreover help populate the colony. The importance of increasing the colony's

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8Theft of anything over the value of a shilling was considered a felony and therefore punishable by death. Abbot Emerson Smith, Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America 1607-1776 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1947), 90.
The population cannot be underestimated in the seventeenth century. As late as 1650, Virginian George Gardyner estimated that one third of the settlers died in their first year in the colony. Malaria, intestinal disorders, the Powhatan, famine, and even rattlesnakes claimed up to forty percent of the immigrants' lives within a few years of their arrival. The colony's population was reduced to a mere 500 people when The Abigail arrived in December 1622 without food and with plague-infected passengers. Perhaps the most shocking figure is that while an estimated 120,000 English men and women immigrated to Virginia during the seventeenth century, the population in 1700 was only 90,000. 9 Population estimates for those of European descent in Maryland in 1712 are approximately 38,000. 10 Continued migration was necessary to build and maintain a large, strong population to keep the early colony viable. It certainly must have crossed some judges' minds that transportation may have offered some individuals, at least those who survived the seasoning period or their terms of indenture, the opportunity to reform themselves.

What some judges must not have expected was how the transportees would, in some ways, pervert conventional English values—particularly those regarding property rights. Stealing a hare for dinner may have been enough to have been exiled from home and family in England where property rights were near and dear to judges' hearts, but in the early communal plantations there was very little personal property, and the resulting


attitude was much less severe. Consequently, where class may have played a role in an English judge's decision, class based on conspicuous material wealth was virtually non-existent in early Virginia and Maryland. Furthermore, the transportees' experiences as convicts must have colored the decisions as to the degree of punishment warranted by the crime. The close contacts the Virginians had living on the plantations and on the frontier led them to have more intimate contact with one another. It must have been harder for Virginia judges to impose a harsh penalty on someone they knew well than it was for an English judge to impose a heavy sentence on a complete stranger.\textsuperscript{11}

There are also the matters of practicality and circumstance. Once an English judge pronounced sentence on a criminal, he or she was removed from the courtroom and effectively from the judge's life. Virginia judges had no such luxury; there was no option of transporting a criminal back to England as the Pilgrims did so ceremoniously several times to Thomas Morton. Short of death, the worst a prisoner might expect was to be exiled from the county. Nevertheless, after execution, exile was the last option since men and women were needed in these frontier communities. Men were needed particularly as laborers and as a defense against Powhatan raids. The majority of Native Americans at this time in the Chesapeake area were part of what anthropologists identify as Algonquian-speaking Native Americans. The Susquehannocks, who were Iroquois-speaking, were the exception. Within this larger framework, groups were broken down to specific tribes such as the Chickahominy, Mattaponi, Monacan, Nansemond, Pamunkey, Doeg, and the Rappahannock. They came together to form what was called

\textsuperscript{11}Bruce, \textit{Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century}, 611-632.
the Powhatan confederacy named for Chief Powhatan. Working collectively, they employed a number of different tactics against the colonists including deadly raids against the settlements. Just how devastating these raids could be was shown in the series of coordinated attacks on scattered plantations on March 22, 1622. Almost the entire population at Martin's Hundred plantation was killed in a matter of hours. In fact, the 1622 raids nearly destroyed the fledgling colony. Almost one third of the colony—three hundred and forty-seven settlers—died in those raids.

One should not infer this was a one-sided affair, however. Captain William Tucker concluded peace negotiations with the Powhatan in May of 1623 by proposing a toast. Two hundred Powhatan died within minutes from the drink that had been laced with poison by Dr. John Potts, and another fifty were slaughtered. Approximately five hundred settlers lost their lives in the attacks of 1644. Edward L. Bond writes, "For a settlement with a deathrate approaching 85%, any colonist, no matter how base, was a treasure to be maintained, for the colony's survival rested upon keeping Virginia populated and putting men to work at tasks that would make the venture pay so that the

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12 Not only does this offer a possible explanation as to why Harding may have received such a light sentence for witchcraft, but also the prohibition of firing of guns when drunk. Gunshots were a way of alerting people to an attack. They would have been on a constant state of alert if they reacted to every drunk arbitrarily firing a gun.; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 34.


investors would risk more capital on empire."\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, Virginia judges had to weigh the criminal's threat to the community against his or her labor and defensive values.\textsuperscript{16}

One possible gauge as to the regional differences in the treatment of criminals is to compare the number of executions in the colonies until 1712. From 1622 to 1712, there were one hundred eighty-five executions in the colonies of Virginia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, New York, Rhode Island, and New Jersey. Bearing in mind that colonies were settled in different periods by quite different populations, it is nonetheless noteworthy that there were still more hangings in Massachusetts, with one hundred one, than in all of the other colonies combined with eighty-four hangings. There were thirty-three executions for witchcraft in New England, but only one in the Chesapeake. Of the one hundred thirty-nine witchcraft-related trials in New England, twenty-five involved slanderers. Three of the witchcraft-related trials in the Chesapeake involved the inquiries into the hangings of three women at sea for witchcraft. There were ten criminal trials with one execution and two convictions, and ten civil suits and/or accusations (some accusations never made it either to criminal or civil court). Another feature which separated the two areas was New Englanders' intolerance of pirates—there executed twenty-five while only one was executed in the Chesapeake.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15}Edward L. Bond, \textit{Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony} (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000), 82.

None of this is meant to suggest that Southerners were disposed to tolerate crime or that all Virginians and Marylanders were transportees. Cavaliers escaping Puritan England found a home in seventeenth century Virginia along with adventurers, indentured servants, sons who saw the family titles and fortunes going to their eldest brother, gamblers willing to take a chance on a better life in the New World, the poor and dispossessed who had nothing left to lose, orphans, merchants, craftsmen, artisans, political and religious dissidents, and African slaves.  

Of the approximately 120,000 English men and women who migrated to Virginia in the seventeenth century, it is estimated that indentured servants outnumbered free emigrants by three or four to one—the majority of emigrants were men or boys.  

With them, each of these groups brought their own sense of justice. Cavaliers might be expected to look at some crimes and criminals with a nod and a wink. Those from the lower classes could conceivably look upon petty criminals with an attitude of leniency born from experience. Certainly whatever attitudes and beliefs they brought with them necessarily had to be adapted to new conditions, i.e., a world fraught with dangers where class was based on initially reputation rather than visible material wealth. In a world where the chances of one dying from disease or at the hands of a Powhatan were greater than of surviving the seasoning period, circumstances pressured the colonists to put new priorities into place. One of the

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18 In 1627, 1,500 indigent children arrived in Virginia and were sold to the settlers.

19 Horn, Adapting to a New World, 25.

17
most conspicuous of these was the leniency of the punishments criminals often received at the hands of Virginia judges.²⁰

A factor that cannot be ignored is the scarcity of English women in Virginia and Maryland during this period. Unlike New England and the Middle Colonies where entire families, and in some cases communities, tended to migrate together, it was generally single men and women from all parts of England who migrated to the Chesapeake.²¹ In conjunction with high mortality rates, this made widowhood and remarriage so commonplace it prompted historian Phillip Alexander Bruce to write:

Instances of the same person having married at least three times were far from unusual; and there were even instances in which a person had been married six times, without having, like Bluebeard or Henry VIII, shortened the length of a single one of the six unions by murder or divorce.²²

The period observed between a husband's death and a widow's remarriage appears by contemporary standards rather shocking. The meats served at the wedding feast of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Danneline in June of 1696 were leftovers from the funeral of her late husband, John Smith. Once again, the Virginians had to be pragmatic in order to survive. Widows with young children on plantations were easy prey for indentured servants, African slaves, or the Powhatan in this frontier society. It was sometimes to

²⁰This is not to suggest that all crimes were treated with leniency. Marshall Thomas Dale was known for his horrific public executions.

²¹David Hackett Fischer, Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 231. Seventy-five per cent of the indentured males were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years old.

²²Phillip Alexander Bruce, Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth century (Lynchburg, Virginia: J. P. Bell Company Incorporated, 1927), 228.
their advantage to remarry as soon as possible, and women did not lack for suitors. In 1623, Reverend Greville Pooley asked Captain Isaac Madison to propose to Mrs. Jordan for him. Captain Madison was a bit hesitant given that Mrs. Jordan's late husband had only died three days earlier. Pooley convinced Madison that if he did not approach Mrs. Jordan quickly, someone else would. Madison relented, approached Mrs. Jordan who was agreeable to the match. Unfortunately for Pooley, he publicly announced the engagement too hastily and Mrs. Jordan, concerned with the appearance of impropriety, ended the engagement. 23

The Virginia Company, responsible for bringing the early female immigrants to Virginia, guaranteed those women some freedom in the selection of whom they would marry as well as food and shelter until they did marry. 24 With men outnumbering women in the early years with ratio of three to one, women had more of a choice in partners in Virginia than they did in England. The numbers were similar in Maryland by a ratio of six-to-one in the 1630s lowering to three-to-one by 1650. For poor young women from rural communities in England, the lure of the possibilities of a better life in the Chesapeake outweighed the probability of an early demise. Even as indentured servants, women could expect to have prospective husbands to buy their contracts, thus making them free women. Certainly some women, free from the constraints of home and family, found some form of sexual freedom in early Virginia. If a young woman chose not to

23 Bruce, Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth century, 229.

24 The women needed to get permission either from parents, their masters or mistresses, and/or the minister or local magistrate. The idea, in part, behind this is that women would marry men who would be financially responsible for them.
merry, she could easily find work as a domestic servant or as an agricultural laborer.\textsuperscript{25} However, almost all women did marry at least once so that spinsters and widows were practically nonexistent. On the other hand, twenty to thirty percent of men died bachelors and twelve to fourteen percent died as widowers.\textsuperscript{26} The lack of ministers to perform formal marriage ceremonies did not stop women from finding partners. Couples adapted by having “little weddings” where they exchanged vows with each other in front of friends and neighbors. Although Virginian authorities and church officials tried to stop these unions by charging couples with “Incontynencie,” couples protested both in court and church. The authorities’ concern was twofold. First, they sought conformity to the Anglican Church and to common law. Second, they were concerned that bastards would be a financial burden on the community.\textsuperscript{27}

These concerns were expressed in other ways. An attorney for the Virginia Company argued before the House of Lords in 1614 that “honest women” were needed to stabilize the fledgling community. The Virginia Company, and others as well, believed that laborers would become more substantial members of the colony if they had wives and children. Without a stake in the community, laborers were tempted to collect their wages and return to England. A family meant they had a vested interest in the community and were consequently more likely to see it as a permanent investment. The

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\item \textsuperscript{25}Bruce, \textit{Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth century}, 228-243; Edward F. Terrar, \textit{Social, Economic, and Religious Beliefs Among Maryland Catholic People During the Period of 1639-1660} (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 258.
\item \textsuperscript{26}Horn, \textit{Adapting to New World}, 206.
\item \textsuperscript{27}Horn, \textit{Adapting to New World}, 214-215.
\end{itemize}
Virginia Assembly realized this in the need to bring "well-bred" women to Virginia. One attempt to do so was that during the first half of the seventeenth century, where wives were able to claim land in their own right. This incentive encouraged both permanent settlement and adherence to English law. The Virginia Company charged one hundred twenty pounds of tobacco per woman—six times the cost of a male indentured servant. Therefore, only men of means could afford a mail-order bride.²⁸

Even the best laid plans can go awry. There was nothing to lure well-bred women to Virginia with the possible exception of the promise of adventure. Often it was the destitute and women of questionable character who willingly chose to make Virginia their home—or were forced to do so by the English court system. Authorities in London and Virginia may have been dismayed by this fact. Nevertheless, records indicating the number of kidnapings by would-be masters and husbands suggests that the men were less troubled. This becomes more understandable in light of the fact that out of the approximately 1, 250 Europeans in Virginia in 1624, fewer than 230 were adult Englishwomen. With five times more men women, Virginian men might have easily overlooked a woman's questionable character. An example of this is Roger Dilke's testimony in court on September 25, 1626 against Goodwife Fisher. Upon his oath he swore:

The Virginia Company did little to alleviate this skewed gender ratio in the following years. Profits were to be found in tobacco production that required male, not female, laborers.  

With the exception of women being wives and mothers, men and boys could easily do women's domestic chores on a plantation at a fraction of the cost.

The extreme scarcity of English women must have dissuaded any enthusiastic criminal prosecution against female witches. The Virginia courts recognized two categories of witchcraft. The first, and most commonly known, was the *maleficium* form of witchcraft wherein the witch could destroy property and physically hurt or kill people, therefore making it a capital offense. The second form was known as "petite witchcraft." This form is also known as white witchcraft practiced by cunning men and women. Generally these practitioners cast love spells or charms to find lost objects and the like. The penalty if convicted of petit witchcraft was to spend no more than one year in prison and to confess publicly the transgression every quarter of the year. There are no records in Virginia to indicate that anyone was ever brought into court on these

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29 Minutes of the Council and General Court 1622-1632, September 25, 1626 in H. R. Mc Ilwaine, editor, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, second edition (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1979), 115. There is no evidence to suggest that Goodwife Fisher paid for her transgression.

30 Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 82.
charges. Hugh Rankin posits the reason for this may have been, “Crime and mortal criminals caused enough trouble without calling in the supernatural.”

This sentiment was expressed in the only law Virginians passed that specifically related to witchcraft. The 1655 law reads:

Whereas diverse dangerous & scandalous speeches have been raised by some persons concerning severall women in this Countie, termeing them to be Witches, whereby there reputation have been much impaired and there lives brought in question (ffor avoydeing the like offence,) It is by this Court ordered that what person soever shall hereafter raise any such scandall, concerning any parties whatsoever, and shall not be able to prove the same, both upon oath, and by sufficent witness, such person soe offending shall in the first place pale a thousand pounds of tobacco: and likewise be lyable to further Censure of the Court.

This law unquestionably was aimed at scandalmongers and not witches. The court that passed this law had met privately one week before its passage to hear a slander case involving Mrs. Ann Godby and Mrs. Thomas Daines. More than likely Godby was the inspiration for the law. Records indicate that she was involved in several slander suits and assault cases. In 1659, Godby was convicted under this statute for accusing Mrs. Nicholas Robinson of being a witch without proof, and her husband was ordered to pay three hundred pounds of tobacco.

At the heart of this law concern about one's reputation. It underscores the high premium Virginians placed on an individual's standing in the community. In a colony

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31 Rankin, Criminal Trial Proceedings in the General Court of Virginia, 228-229.


where conspicuous material wealth was almost entirely absent until the eighteenth-century, it was one's prestige that separated the fledgling aristocracy from the middling and lesser sorts. While the undeniable lure of Virginia was wealth, and one of the few tangible vestiges of this on the frontier was to be held in high regard, the values placed on reputation became even more significant than they had been in England. Women in particular—many of whose reputations must have been in question from the moment they landed in Virginia—must have suffered under this idiosyncratic adaptation. This law, albeit aimed at discouraging gossip, offered women protection, and their husbands, for their reputations. Because Virginians lacked any effective means of communication throughout the colony, gossip was a problem that could potentially estrange neighbors from each other.  

This concern adds another dimension to the importance of reputation in this frontier colony. In a world where the mortality rate was shockingly high, the uncertainty of life created a situation where people had to depend on and trust each other to a higher degree than elsewhere. Consequently, maleficium was not of primary concern. The overall absence of a spiritual component in Virginians' outlook on witchcraft is particularly significant.

New Englanders were likewise concerned about the appearance of propriety, but the specific allegation of practicing witchcraft had far deeper implications. Chesapeake residents may not have taken witches and sorcerers very seriously, but their Puritan

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34 T. H. Breen, “Looking Out for Number One: The Cultural Limits on Public Policy in Early Virginia,” in Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 112. Of the twenty-one “witches” in this study, sixteen are involved in slander, not criminal suits, excluding the three hung at sea.
neighbors to the north did especially with the specter of so many executions so close at hand. If someone was accused of being a practitioner of the black arts, the logical conclusion could only be that a criminal charge was sure to follow a rumor. Hence, one way to stave off a criminal prosecution stemming from a rumor was to end the rumor. The positive side of this strategy put the plaintiff in the position of the victim of his or her accusers, but there was always the possibility this plan could backfire, leaving the accused to answer to criminal charges if the evidence presented in the civil suit was strong enough to call for a criminal trial. In some cases, the accused won the civil suit only to find criminal charges brought against them at a later date. Even if the plaintiff won the case, it did not necessarily mean an end to the rumors.35

Any discussion of witchcraft must necessarily include a discussion of its religious dimensions. The English colonists came from a background where witchcraft was generally seen as a practice, not a belief or heresy.36 The Acts of 1542 and 1563 made the practice of invoking or conjuring spirits a felony because of the potential of the witch’s ability to cajole entities to cause a victim’s death. Neither of the Acts associated witchcraft with a covenant with Satan. Surprisingly, the Act of 1563 was more lenient to witches than the Act of 1542. If a witch tried to kill someone, and failed but did manage to have the victim maimed, the penalty was a year’s imprisonment with quarterly

35Demos, Entertaining Satan, 246-274.

36This was a marked difference between English and continental witchcraft. According to Jeffrey Burton Russell one feature English witchcraft had in common with German witchcraft was the predominance of familiars. He suggests that the English name their imps such things as Vinegar, Pyewacket, and Grizel Greediguts because of their fondness for pets. A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 92.
appearances in the pillory. The Act of 1563 also provided for hanging as the form of execution for sorcery, reserving burning at the stake for traitors and heretics. The Act of 1604 repealed the maiming provision of the Act of 1563 and included the clause "[to] consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose." This statute applied to all the English colonies and remained in effect until 1736. The records indicate, however, that the majority of the English prosecutions were based on anti-social behavior rather than heresy. Because the trials were held in civil rather than ecclesiastical courts, convicted witches were hung rather than burned at the stake that was the popular form of execution for sorcery on the continent. 37 It was not until the Puritan Matthew Hopkins' investigations and prosecutions of the 1640s that evidence of a written covenant with the Dark Prince appears. 38 Prosecutions for witchcraft declined after 1646 when Hopkins was forced to retire. Jeffrey Burton Russell suggests that the subsequent decline in the criminal prosecutions for witchcraft was due to a combination of three factors: the introduction of new beliefs that were common in continental witchcraft, but rare in England such as the covenant, the public's distaste for Hopkins' execution of more witches in a two-year period than in the previous century, and a lack of support from the common people for criminal prosecutions. 39 These factors notwithstanding, the majority of witchcraft trials in Virginia occurred after 1646, and the first witch was hung in New England in 1647.

37 Russell, History of Witchcraft, 92.


39 Russell, History of Witchcraft, 97-100.
The sensational nature of the Puritan witch hunts in Old and New England can be misleading if one is to assume that all Englishmen and women subscribed to the belief that the practice of magic was necessarily demonic in nature, and practitioners were in league with the Devil. During this same period, intellectuals recognized natural or low magic as a legitimate science where the practitioner could manipulate the interconnected spiritual forces that existed in and between matter. Generally these practitioners were from the lower classes and known as cunning men and women although certainly these practices were not limited to them. They employed a number of different tactics in their quests to cure the sick, deflect curses, find lost objects, and to inspire love including charms, incantations, talismans, and Christian invocations. Knowledge of these practices tended to be passed on from individual to individual, therefore, lacking any real formal body of instructions let alone a unifying theological or philosophical foundation.⁴⁰

Until recently, studies of the cunning folk were overlooked in favor the formidable witches and wizards whose practices crossed the boundaries of decency thus warranting their executions. The same legal statutes applied to both groups of magicians, but cunning folk were far less frequently criminally prosecuted than were witches. In fact, records from secular and ecclesiastical courts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate behaviors such as defamation, sexual misconduct, drunkenness, and the disruption of church services were of far greater concern than were the cunning folk. This is not to suggest authorities viewed cunning folk as benign—on the contrary, they were sometimes seen as even more dangerous than the witches and wizards who formally

entered into covenants with Satan because they preyed on the desperate who saw an alternative to putting their faith in God's will. Civil authorities may have wanted to criminally prosecute cunning folk, but unless people brought charges against them there was little authorities could do. Given that those who sought help from cunning folk saw them as beneficial rather than malevolent, few were willing to bring charges or testify against them. If, by chance, a cunning person found him or herself in an ecclesiastical court, they could expect, at worst, to be excommunicated from the church, but more likely they faced a public form of punishment such as time in the pillory. These were the beliefs and attitudes regarding witchcraft the colonists brought with them to the Chesapeake.

In Virginia it is not the theological aspects of witchcraft that are of interest, but the religious attitudes the English brought with them. Whether the colonist was a Cavalier or a transportee, few could have escaped the tension and wars brought on by religious conflict. From the 1530s when Henry VIII's broke with the Roman Catholic Church until the Glorious Revolution in 1688, religion was a common denominator in England's wars and civil uprisings. Virginia did not escape the religious tensions. Quakers and Puritans were frequently targets of Virginia's religious intolerance. Virginians could be fined one hundred pounds sterling, as opposed to the usual fines measured in pounds of tobacco, for merely allowing Quaker missionaries into their homes. Puritans were more welcomed than the Quakers, but not by much. Sir

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41 Owen Davies, Cunning-Folk, 1-28.

42 Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, 230. Hening's Statutes, vol 1 p.533. Isabel Spring was sentenced to twenty lashes, ten more
William Berkeley, the most prominent of the seventeenth century governors (1641-1652; 1660-1677), was "an ardent and zealous follower" of the high church Archbishop William Laud.43 During the Protectorate, Puritans should have enjoyed a position of privilege, but their numbers were never extensive enough for them to have a significant impact on Virginia religion, culture, or politics.

Thus aspiring elites sought conformity in Virginia society with the Church of England. All plantations were ordered to have a place of worship and a cemetery. Despite statutes requiring church attendance, there was never a sufficient number of clergy to attend to the population. There were fewer than fifteen ministers in 1670 for a population of roughly 30,000 people. The absence of a larger number of ministers was due, in part, to Virginians themselves. Having grown accustomed to a certain amount of autonomy on the frontier, they were resistant to a church that would either curb their growing political power or interfere in their personal lives. Consequently, they fought against having a bishop in Virginia. No doubt the social and political turmoil in England over religious matters was felt in Virginia, but its impact was minimal. Rather than imposing a rigid, orthodox religiosity as the Puritans did, Virginians rejected it in favor of a less severe compliance. They were more interested in the particulars of their

than William Harding received for his witchcraft conviction, for allowing a Quaker meeting in her Lower Norfolk County home in 1656. Her sentence was remitted on her word she would never do it again (Bruce 234).

43 Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, 253. Laud was Charles I's infamous Archbishop of Canterbury (1633-1645). His fanaticism against Calvinism and Puritanism led to his persecuting anyone whom he perceived as heretical. Laud was eventually executed under a bill of attainder issued by the House of Commons.
ministers' contracts and salaries than they were in the finer points of theology. What the Virginians opted for was in essence a rather neutral form of religiosity. The less controversial it was, the better it was.

This is not to suggest that Virginians were lacking in spirituality. Granted, they were not as tolerant as their neighbors in Maryland who had not only opposed a state-supported church, but moreover had passed an act of religious toleration in 1649 that freed people to follow their consciences as long as their religious practices did not disturb the public peace—although this only applied to Christians. In Governor Berkeley's estimation, nonconformity to the Church of England was a disturbance of the public peace. No doubt he found tremendous support from the immigrant Cavaliers. Indeed, it may be argued that one of Virginia's most salient religious features in this period was that it was grounded in royalist politics. Having enjoyed a position of privilege in the Old World, the Cavaliers no doubt wanted the same position in the New World with all the privileges—including positions of influence in the Church of England.

But before the arrival of Berkeley and the Cavaliers, primarily between 1642 and 1676, the colonists were better known for their unsavory qualities rather than for their piety. The bulk of the population was made up of transportees and indentured servants—hardly the sort to find the Lord after all hope of remission of their sentences had dissipated. Virginians of this period have been described as hard-drinking, vile, and corrupt. Abbot Emerson Smith describes them colorfully as "rogues, vagabonds, whores, cheats, and rabble of all descriptions, raked from the gutter and kicked out of the

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44 Horn, *Adapting to New World*, 383-386.
country.  

English contemporaries described them as "The superfluitie, or if you will, the very excrements" of England, and "no more sensible than beasts." T. H. Breen writes:

Newcomers schemed to strike it rich before disease or Indians struck them down. And no one was too particular about means employed to gain wealth. The colony's appalling rate of mortality only exacerbated the unsettled quality of Virginia life. In this social environment, the toughest, luckiest, and most unscrupulous planters usually came out on top.  

Early authorities enjoyed equally glowing legacies. Governor John Harvey (1630-1639) was charged with thievery in 1634 over an episode where he gave the use of a male servant to two of the king's envoys without receiving permission from the servant's master. Harvey exploited his position in other ways such as collecting fees from new immigrants, and demanding gunpowder and shot from all ships entering the James River. He even knocked out the teeth of a councilor during a brawl. Some Virginians may have spoken or wrote about the need for a religious influence in the colony, but the reality was that most of the early colonists were at best only nominal Christians.

The differences that separated the English into Catholics and Protestants or Anglicans and Puritans in England had very little meaning in early Virginia. It has been argued the English and Virginians were each struggling to find definition and identity.

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45 Abbot Emerson Smith, Colonists in Bondage, 3.

46 William Crashaw, Sermon Preached in London (1610) and Ralph Hamor, The True Discourse of the Present state of Virginia (1615) in Bond, 79.

47 Breen, "Looking Out for Number One," 111.

Edward L. Bond writes, "While people in England struggled to define the Church of England as an institution central to their lives, resident authorities in Virginia struggled even to maintain religion as a part of their cultural identity." Virginia authorities were constantly striving for hegemony within the colony. The more the colonists were alike, the less likely there would be dissension. In a society wracked with instability from outside forces, maintaining internal social stability was necessary for survival. Realizing the lack of religious conviction among the majority of the colonists, Virginia authorities hoped to establish at the very least Christian behavior, hence the passage of the *Lawes Divine, Morall and Martial* in 1610. This established the supremacy of Christian behavior over theology as a model for the colony. While initially authorities assumed the colonists would nominally be Church of England, the de-emphasis on theology did pave a way for later religious toleration. Unlike colonists in New England and the Middle Colonies, the Virginians made their primary goal to make money, and they had seen how religious dissension could lead to wars that destroyed economies.

Religiosity may have been confined to the leaders during the early years, but as early as the 1620s, with the rise of middle-class immigrants, some religious sentiments could be found from servants to planters. During this period, religious expression was adapted to the conditions of the time: for example, celebration of religious holidays began to revolve around tobacco season. Unfortunately for those religiously inclined, the ministers who were there were given to indulging in the same vices as the majority of

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49 Bond, *Damned Souls*, 83.
settlers, i.e., drinking, gambling, and fornicating. They were described as “roar[ing] in a Tavern” and “babbl[ing] in a Pulpet.” Sampson Calvert, Lower Norfolk County’s first minister, was convicted of committing adultery with a parishioner’s wife six months after his arrival. By the 1630s, the Privy Council refused to sponsor missionaries to Virginia, deeming it a voluntary missionary field. Virginian dealt with this dismal state, in part, by combining ecclesiastical courts with the civil courts thus making the civil courts responsible for what in England had been church matters. Edward L. Bond suggests that one of the benefits of the paucity of clergy, and, therefore, a shortage of theologians to inspire or flame disputes, resulted in Virginia’s relative lack of the religious violence and dissension that plagued England and New England during this period. An example of this is the Statute of 1641 that banished Roman Catholic priests—as soon as the weather permitted. It appears that Virginians preferred good weather when engaging in activities such as ducking witches or expelling Catholic priests. Admittedly comical on the surface, this does lend credence to the contention that witches or Catholic priests were of little concern to Virginians.

It is worth noting that the county with the largest number of formal witchcraft cases was Lower Norfolk County, which was subdivided into Princess Anne County in 1691, and it also had the largest Puritan community during the first half of the seventeenth century. However, the majority of formal witchcraft accusations occurred

51 Bond, Damned Souls, 93-176.

52 There is evidence some Virginians either kept Catholic devotional objects such as crucifixes, religious medallions, and rosary beads, or engaged in practices such as offering prayers for the dead. Bond, Damned Souls, 94, 133.
during the second half of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{53} During the early 1660s, Quaker missionaries gained a small foothold in the county. The appeal of Quakerism in this particular county may have been another pragmatic solution to the problem of getting and keeping qualified ministers. In a county in which their first minister was convicted of fornication six months after his arrival and the next died within a year of his arrival, the fact that the Society of Friends did not have ordained ministers may have seemed a solution to such disappointments. Furthermore, the doctrine of the inner light—the belief that men and women can have personal relationships and understandings of the Divine without authorities dictating theology—must have had a tremendous appeal for these independent settlers on the frontier. The records suggest Governor Berkeley was less enamored with the Quakers than were the people of the county, urging the sheriff to put an end to their meetings.\textsuperscript{54} Lower Norfolk County resident Isabel Spring's sentence of twenty lashes for allowing a Quaker meeting in her home was remitted when she promised not to do it again (1656).

If Lower Norfolk was Virginia's most religiously radical county, then its radicalism was not very pronounced. The one law pertaining to witchcraft in Virginia was from Lower Norfolk County, and it merely made gossip subject to a fine. As previously noted, the judges there postponed accused witch Grace Sherwood's ducking trial in 1706 until the weather was better out of concern for her health. Isabel Spring was allowed to promise never to allow a Quaker meeting in the home again and was thus

\textsuperscript{53}\textsuperscript{Eight of the nine cases are civil, not criminal cases.}

\textsuperscript{54}\textsuperscript{Bond, Damned Souls, 156-157, 167. Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, 210.}
spared any other punishment. None of this is noteworthy except when compared with the
fact that in Salem a four-year old girl was imprisoned and shackled for ten months for the
mere suspicion of practicing witchcraft during the same period.

Unlike Virginia, Maryland was originally settled as a Roman Catholic colony,
but its nature was similar to Virginia's. Both colonies had tobacco-based economies,
faced the same type of problems of high mortality rates, disproportionate gender ratios,
and an overall lack of class distinction based on material goods leading to the planter
class' preoccupation with reputation. One of the differences between the two colonies
was underscored by Maryland's An Act Concerning Religion, better known as the
Religious Toleration Act of 1649, which allowed a certain amount of freedom of worship
to Christians to worship as their consciences dictated. Virginia authorities, on the other
hand, tried to maintain an Anglican hegemony. In practice, both colonies practiced
some degree of religious toleration. Although no reliable records survive as to the exact
number of Catholics in Maryland during the seventeenth century, a conservative estimate
would place them as constituting only ten per cent of the English population.55

Tensions brought about by religious differences in the Chesapeake paled in
comparison to the realities of survival. Natural disasters such as the storms of 1667
destroyed between 10,000 and 15,000 homes, flattened crops, and killed livestock. By
1675, corruption in government, high taxes, low tobacco prices, sharp class distinctions,
and increasing fear of the various Native Americans in the region culminated in Bacon's
Rebellion, bringing, in effect, civil war to the colony which eventually spilled over into

55 Terrar, Social, Economic, and Religious Beliefs Among Maryland Catholic People, 92.
Maryland. Other events such as the English Civil War (1642), Charles I's execution (1649), the first Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654), the Interregnum (1649-1660), and Virginia's submission to Parliament in 1652 after a two-year struggle against Cromwell and the Commonwealth all contributed to the instability of a colony already in chaos. In Maryland, Puritans staged one coup d'état during the Interregnum (1652) when they replaced the Religious Toleration Act with an act which extended freedom of conscience except to "popery, prelacy, or licentiousness of opinion." Among its provisions was "That none who profess and exercise the Papistic, commonly known as the Roman Catholic religion, can be protected in this province." The Maryland Puritans felt confident that Oliver Cromwell would support them only to find Cromwell ordering Lord Baltimore's restoration and the return of the Religious Toleration Act. Lord Baltimore appointed Captain Josiah Fendall governor because of Fendall's support for Governor Stone. Shortly after being becoming Maryland governor in 1657, Fendall began to collaborate with some of Maryland's Puritan leaders, among them his father-in-law, Captain John Hatch, in yet another bid to take over the colony. The second plot, known as Fendall's Rebellion, ended with the accession of Charles II to the throne of England.56

Virginians and Marylanders had little to fear from witches when man and nature could be more destructive than the most malicious witch.

It should be of little surprise, then, that the majority of witchcraft trials were civil suits, not criminal cases. Historian James Horn writes:

No Chesapeake witches were accused of devil worship, engaging in wild sexual orgies, cannibalism, or congregating at sabbats. Neither were they accused of elaborate pacts with the devil. The increasing "sophisticated demonology" that developed in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries largely bypassed Virginia and Maryland.57

Certainly Virginians believed the Powhatan to be in league with the Prince of Darkness, but it was Puritan minister Alexander Whitaker, who in 1613, perhaps first linked the Powhatan priests with English witches.58 Probate inventories indicate some of the better educated Virginians had copies of witchcraft treatises such as William Perkins' *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1610), Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphans* (1666, 1681), and John Webster's *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677) in their libraries. Less educated Virginians drew on folk beliefs found in the areas of England from which they came.59 The evidence suggests, then, that they probably viewed witchcraft as a practice, not a heresy, and were more inclined to deal with it in an informal manner rather than going through the legal system or through the church. Evidence of this is a "witch jar" archaeologists have found in Princess Anne County near Grace Sherwood's home. A practitioner would place pins and urine in a small jar and

57 Horn, *Adapting to New World*, 413-414.

58 Richard White, in his book *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), argues that the Native Americans thought the Jesuit priests were practicing witchcraft.

bury it upside down in the belief it would deflect spells, sending them back to the witch who sent them.60

The traditional model of associating witchcraft with a demonic compact is not applicable in Virginia. As Richard Davis Beale put it, “[H]is Satanic Majesty made appearances in human form never got much acknowledgment from any Virginia lawyer or jury.”61 Apart from this, the devil may have been very real to Virginians in other ways. Other crimes were said to have been “led and instigated by the divell,” yet there is nothing in the records to suggest the Dark Prince signed formal agreements with anyone, let alone a witch or wizard.62 This does not mean such allegations were never made, but, there is nothing in the records to suggest they were.

The records are problematic at best, particularly regarding witchcraft cases. Some court records only mention the dismissal of charges against an unnamed woman. Even in the case of convicted witch William Harding, the records only state that after a jury considered the evidence brought before them by Rev. David Lindsaye, they found him guilty. With a few exceptions, the court recorders, for whatever reasons, did not leave detailed accounts of witchcraft trials. In the case of Grace Sherwood, some records are completely missing because of a courthouse fire during the Civil War. Time, the elements, and wars have taken their toll on the scant records that still exist. There are several cases where there are discussions of witchcraft cases in secondary sources, but the


61 Beale, “The Devil In Virginia in the Seventeenth Century,” 149.

primary sources regarding the cases have yet to come to light—if indeed they still exist.63 Nonetheless, it is clear that there were very few trials, there were no compacts with Satan mentioned, and more often than not, cases were dismissed.

The Westmoreland County witches of 1694-1695 are the closest examples to Satanic witches in Virginia with the accusations against them most resembling the traditional beliefs associated with witches. Phyllis Money and her daughter, Elizabeth Dunkan, were said to have practiced *maleficium* on their neighbors, particularly Henry Dunkan, and to have made witchcraft a family tradition. Money taught Elizabeth the black arts and she, in turn, taught them to her husband, John Dunkan therefore making them “instruments of the Devill.” Henry Dunkan, John’s brother, spoke of “[their] children [as] witches’ imps, seldom or never calling them by any other names, whenever [he] spoke about them.” Henry also accused Elizabeth of suckling the Devil.64

The Money-Dunkan case is traditional in that it was a civil suit brought on by the Dunkans against Henry Dunkan. They asked for 40,000 pounds of tobacco in damages, but the jury only awarded them ten. This temperate verdict supports speculation that Virginians were more interested in appearances than in supernatural transgressions. More importantly, while there were associations with the Dark Prince, there is no specific accusation of a covenant with him, although one may infer that there may have been one. The trial came fifty years after Hopkins’ trials in England and two years after the Salem

63These include the Virginians Paul Carter (1679, Accomack County), Nell Cane and Eleanor Morris both of King and Queen County in 1695. The missing Maryland records are of Katherine Prout (1702) and Virtue Violl (1712). These people are included in this study only to the extent they are mentioned, but not discussed.

64Westmoreland County, Virginia, Order Book 1690-1698 Aug. 28, 1695.
witch hunts. This was decidedly enough time for more seemingly sophisticated views on witchcraft to have become a part of the Virginian cultural landscape. One difference between the Salem trials and the Dunkan case is that unlike the Salem criminal trials where the accused witches and sorcerers did not have legal representation, the Dunkans were represented by an attorney, Simon Robins. Technically, the Salem judges were supposed to look out for the interests of the accused, but given the number of executions, their proficiency in this role is arguable. Last, it should be noted that among the intriguing aspects of the Money-Dunkan cases is that Henry and John were brothers, sons of a Scottish immigrant that may explain the Satanic overtones in the accusations, and their wives were first cousins.

The Money-Dunkan cases were not the only ones to involve relatives. John Washington, George Washington's great-grandfather and the first of the Virginia Washingtons, instigated the investigation into Elizabeth Richardson's execution at sea for witchcraft (1658). The owner of the Sarah Artch was Edward Prescott, Washington's brother-in-law, with whom Washington had been engaged in a series of lawsuits and counter suits after a failed business relationship.65

Conflicts between neighbors were often at the heart of witchcraft accusations in the Chesapeake. The first of the accused witches was Joan Wright (1616). She was a caustic old woman who refused to defer to her social betters. This, combined with her seemingly supernatural ability to predict deaths, left her open to witchcraft charges.

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Wright was not the only woman to find herself in court over a witchcraft accusation because of strife between herself and her social betters. Three others—Jane Rooking (1641), Ann Godby (1659), and Joan Jenking (1675)—were defendants in cases brought against them by those higher on the social ladder than themselves.

Class differences became increasingly pronounced after Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. The frontier in the tidewater gave way to a gentrified society where the lower class whites, in particular lower class women, were increasingly demonized. Those who sided with Bacon were seen as a threat to the hard-earned peace and prosperity of the tidewater. Although women were active participants on both sides of the rebellion, loyalist women were later portrayed in later pro-loyalist propaganda as the victims of the fractious rabble while the basest of terms were used to describe the women who supported the rebels. As a result of the re-defining of women in this period, the witchcraft accusations took on much more sinister tones in comparison to those before the rebellion.

None of the Chesapeake witchcraft cases are as simple as the brief records indicate. Wherever possible, as many records pertaining to the individuals involved in the cases have been employed to illuminate the circumstances of the case. Often these records show the witchcraft charge as being on the periphery of a much more complex conflict. The goal of studying these cases is two fold. The first is to place the cases in a historical context, and the second is to trace the evolution of witchcraft beliefs within the cultural context of the seventeenth century Chesapeake.
CHAPTER 3. DEATH RODE A PALE HORSE

Behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.

Revelation 6:8

Because one of the most salient characteristics of seventeenth century Virginia was the high mortality rate, it was almost inevitable that at least some Virginians would look to witchcraft as a possible source of their misfortunes. In September of 1626, Goodwife Joan Wright was the first Virginian to be brought to court to answer to criminal charges of witchcraft. Not surprisingly, the primary charge against her was maleficium; she was not only suspected in having a hand in the death of a baby, but also as having been instrumental in the deaths of plants and animals. The bewitchment of animals did have precedents in England, but the significance of it in Virginia was vastly different—particularly because starvation was one of the contributing factors to the high death rate. An examination of Wright’s case provides an opportunity to examine how witchcraft functioned during the early years of colonization.

It is ascertainable from the scant records of her life that Wright was from or had lived in Hull, England, married Robert Wright in 1610, had been a servant at one time, possessed an acerbic personality, and had some knowledge of midwifery and witchcraft. The 1624/1625 muster records show the Wrights as living on Virginia Company land beyond the Hampton River in an area known as the Borough of Kecoughtan, with a population of approximately two hundred eighty men and eighty women at the time of her trial. Joan’s age is not listed, but Robert is listed at forty-five years of age that would have made Joan probably middle-aged at the time of her trial. The records do not list
them as having any children, or indicate their status in the borough, or when Joan arrived in Virginia, but the records do show Robert Wright as having arrived in 1608 on The Swan.¹

In 1624, the community boasted eighty-nine houses, twenty stores, twenty-four palisades, fifty-four musters, and six boats. Kecoughtan had escaped relatively unscathed from the Powhatan attacks of 1622, losing only four residents. Survivors from other plantations moving there helped to spur its population growth in the following years. By the standards of the time and place, it was a thriving metropolis with the next largest community being James City with a population of one hundred seventy-five. John Pory, the Secretary of Virginia in 1619, described residents in a letter to Sir Dudley Carleton as follows:

Nowe that your lordship may knowe, that we are not the veriset beggaers in the worlde, our cowekeeper here of James citty on Sundays goes accoorted in all freshe flaming silke; and a wife of one that in England had professd the black arte, not of a scholler, but of Croydon, weares her rough bever hatt with a faire perle hatband, and a silken suite thereto correspondent.²


The population included four Africans, among them Antoney, Isabell and William "theire Child Baptised." There were two Frenchmen, Virbritt and Oble Hero, who had come to Kecoughtan in 1620 at the behest of the Virginia Company to teach the settlers how to cultivate mulberry trees for silk production and how to grow wine grapes—decidedly not subsistence crops. The cultivation of silk was important enough for the Virginia legislature to request all Virginians in 1623 to plant mulberry trees. Production increased even more after 1661 when Charles II was coronated in a robe made from Virginia silk.

The period before Goodwife Wright's trial was particularly bleak in an already dark period of Virginia's early colonization. Nearly 4,500 Englishmen and women joined the four hundred colonists already in Virginia in the Great Migration between 1618 and 1623. Ninety of these were mail-order brides who were sold to the settlers for one hundred fifty pounds of tobacco each in 1619. Despite this influx of colonists, by the end of 1622, the population would be reduced to a mere five hundred. The Powhatan launched two major attacks in 1620 and 1622. The first was at Falling Creek where authorities had hoped to establish the first ironworks in the colony. Three hundred forty-eight settlers were massacred before the project could even begin. The second major attack was a series of coordinated raids on March 22, 1622 throughout all the settlements.

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4The colonists could be as ruthless as the Powhatan. At the conclusion of peace negotiations with the Powhatan in May 1623, Captain William Tucker provided the Powhatan with drinks laced with poison by Dr. John Potts. Two hundred died immediately and another fifty were subsequently slaughtered. Potts went on to be elected governor of the colony in October 1629.
Three hundred forty-seven colonists were killed on that day alone, and those who survived these and other raids faced the prospect of death from either disease or starvation. Richard Frethorne wrote to his parents in 1623:

... for since I came out of the ship, I never at[e] anie thing but pease, and loblollie (that is water gruell)[.] as for deare or venison I never saw anie since I came into this land [.] there is indeed some foule, but Wee are not allowed to goe, and get yt, but must Worke hard both earelie, and late for a mess of water grueH, and a mouthfull of bread, and biefe[.] a mouthfull of bread for a pennie loafe must serve for 4 men which is most pitifull if you did knowe as much as I, when people crie day, and night . . . .

These aspects were no more poignantly illustrated than with the arrival of the Abigail in December 1622. The ship arrived without supplies and with a cargo of plague-infested passengers. The colony's astronomical mortality rates led, in part, to James I's revocation of the Virginia Company Charter in June 1624. Among the charges was that the company had failed to provide sufficient provisions and shelter for the immigrants, thus sending these men and women to their deaths. The death rate for the immigrants in Kecoughtan in 1624 was twenty-eight percent.

George Lyman Kittredge has argued that the belief that diseases were supernatural in origin was common in English popular culture during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alan Macfarlane disputes this assertion by comparing the

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7 Hatch, Virginia 1607-1624, 93.
frequency of witchcraft prosecutions with death rates from known epidemics, infant mortality, and the number of midwives charged with witchcraft. He does recognize that a variety of illnesses of animals and humans were, however, blamed on witches, but suggests that some of the victims' symptoms were psychosomatic. Certainly starvation and illness in Virginia were not psychosomatic, nor were they directly associated with witchcraft. Yet the conditions the English settlers faced must have been overwhelming to them. Evidence from the Wright trial, considered in the light of the absence of further criminal prosecutions of maleficium, suggests that Virginians entertained the possibility that some illnesses or deaths were associated with witchcraft while others were not.

As has been previously suggested, the Virginia Company was literally sending colonists to their deaths. Surely the majority of settlers were not so naive as to believe all of the descriptions in propaganda by people such as John Smith or even William Simmonds who denounced the colony as barbarous but at the same time portrayed the land as analogous to Eden. If Virginia was perceived as the land of milk and honey, the native inhabitants were considered by the English to be even more barbaric than the immigrants. They would not have needed the clergy to denounce the Powhatan as minions of Satan—they could have unequivocally done this on their own on a number of different levels. Their ethnocentrism would have preceded any theological arguments a

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minister could have posited. Yet, in this land of plenty, how could so many people die from starvation and disease? One explanation is that only the gentry would have possessed hunting skills in the early years, and since there were so few of them, the settlers could not depend to any great degree on whatever game they could have provided. Undoubtedly the lure of the profits from growing tobacco outweighed the practicality of raising subsistence crops particularly when the settlers depended on the Virginia Company to meet their needs. In the end, the reality was that early Virginians lacked the skills to fend for themselves and the Virginia Company failed to compensate for this. Even under these conditions, it must have been very difficult for them to face so many deaths—deaths that could have been prevented. It is common under such stressful times for people to look to the supernatural for answers as a way to cope with crises.

Even so, it is perhaps a surprise that among the charges against Goodwife Wright was her ability to predict a number of deaths “which came to pass.” In retrospect, the charge seems ludicrous since one did not need any preternatural powers to predict an individual’s death. Statistically, a person had almost an one-in-three chance of dying shortly after arrival in Kecoughtan.

Rebecka Graye testified on September 25, 1626 that Wright not only told her she would “burye her Hubbande,” but Wright also told Thomas Harris and Tobias Felgate that they would bury their wives “(weh cam fo to pa/s).” Graye further testified Wright told her of a woman who said to Wright, “I have a crofs man to my hufband.” To which

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10 For a more detailed discussion of European perceptions of Native Americans see Bernard McGrane Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

11 Morgan, American Slavery: American Freedom, 64.
Wright replied, ""(be content) for thow fhaltie shorttie burie him" (weh cam fo to pafs)."

One would think that this prediction might have offered a ray of hope to this unnamed woman rather than becoming evidence in a criminal proceeding. It was perhaps Wright's reputation that brought Alice Baylie to ask Wright who would die first, Baylie or her husband. Baylie testified that Wright answered, "I can tell you yf I would, but I am exclaimde againft for fuch thinges and Ile tell no more."12

There is nothing in the transcripts to suggest the witnesses accused Wright of being responsible for the deaths, only that she could foresee them. Still, it was Wright's ability to predict deaths which was problematic in that it identified her as both having supernatural powers and as a person of questionable character. Parliament described rogues and vagabonds in part as, "fayning themselves as having knowledge in Phisiognomye Palmestry or other like crafty Scyence, or pretending that they can tell Destenyes Fortunes or such other like fantansticall Imagynacons ..."13 Superficially it seems absurd that any Virginian would be concerned about a woman of questionable character with the ability to predict deaths in a community where deaths were so commonplace. However, in a colony where rogues and vagabonds were the rule rather than the exception, her seemingly supernatural abilities set her apart from the other disreputable characters, and, at the same time, put her in a position of power. This power was one to be feared rather than respected. Kathleen Brown suggests that Wright had

12 McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 111-112.

become “excluded from gossip networks, and her neighbors began to reinterpret her matronly power as a danger.” Brown further argues that Wright should have enjoyed a position of influence and respect due to her age, marital status, and knowledge of midwifery. What Brown does not include in her discussion of Wright is that she also confessed to some knowledge of witchcraft as well. This is far from an admission of guilt on Wright’s part, but it was important enough to include in the trial transcripts.

Lieutenant Gieles Allingtone testified that, despite his wife’s wishes for Eleanor Graves to be her midwife, Allingtone arranged for Wright to be present at their child’s birth. The reason Allingtone gave as his wife’s objection against Wright was that she was left-handed. Both Graves and Wright were present at the birth, but Wright left soon after becoming “very much discontented, in regarde to the other midwifie [having been] brought.” The birth was apparently a difficult one for it took Mrs. Allingtone almost five weeks to recover from it. Allingtone himself was seriously ill for a period of three weeks after the birth before recovering. More importantly, the child became sick and died five weeks after its birth. 

The court records do not give any sense of the chronology of events described in Wright’s trial. Still, one might assume that Mrs. Allingtone knew of Goodwife Wright’s reputation and did not want her as a midwife for reasons other than she was left-handed—a characteristic that further sets Wright apart from the majority of the community. Despite

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15McCullwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 111.
the recent controversies over whether midwives were targets for witch hunts, there were English folk beliefs that held that a good midwife could charm children so that spirits could not hurt them. Conversely, a midwife with supernatural powers could harm the mother or child. Even the most benevolent of midwives could be dangerous for more mundane reasons. Keith Thomas writes, “A midwife estimated in 1687 that two thirds of contemporary abortions, stillbirths, and deaths in child-bed were attributed to lack of care and skill displayed by her colleagues.” Often the source for miscarriages, stillbirths, and difficulties with childbirth was found in witchcraft. The death rates for pregnant women, infants, and children were particularly high in Virginia due to these individuals’ susceptibility to malaria. Only sixty-one percent of the children born there in the seventeenth century survived into adulthood. It is no wonder that Mrs. Allingtone might fear all midwives let alone the aid of one with a reputation as possessing a sour disposition.

Despite whatever fears a woman might have had regarding midwives, they were usually respected members within the community. Midwives were generally respected for their skills as medical practitioners as well as their being privy to personal information. This was particularly evident in their roles as legal authorities. In cases of illegitimate

16Kittredge, Witchcraft in Old and New England, 34.


pregnancies, judges often instructed midwives to interrogate the unfortunate woman during labor to ascertain the identity of the father if the woman had not already named him. Because the community was financially responsible for the care of the mother and child, every effort was made to identify the father to make him responsible for their financial upkeep even to the point of secular judges instructing midwives to withhold medical help during labor in order to coerce the women to reveal the secrets of their pregnancies. The Church of England also charged midwives with the same responsibility so the Church might better discipline the offenders in an ecclesiastical setting. In addition to bastardy cases, there was always at least one reputable midwife on the juries involving cases of infanticide. However, the evidence in Wright’s case indicates she did not enjoy the same respect or status as other midwives in England and Virginia during the same period.

More than having a disagreeable temperament, Wright, perhaps, held a questionable place in the Kecoughtan social hierarchy. Neither her status nor her husband’s is listed in the 1624/1625 muster. They were probably free, not servants, and Robert Wright served in Anthony Bonall’s muster. This in itself is not significant given that forty-three of the ninety-four people listed do not have a recorded status. What is significant is that in Hull she had been a servant and the Allingtones were minor members of the aristocracy. Lieutenant Allingtone described himself as a “gentleman” in his application for land grants registered between 1622 and 1624. Records show he was

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from an aristocratic family in Cambridgeshire.21 The Virginia frontier in the 1620s may have been a great social leveler in terms of conspicuous material wealth and position, but undoubtedly the aristocracy retained its sense of the distinction between the nobler sorts and the lesser sorts. Following the rules of etiquette in England, one would have expected Wright to acquiesce to her dismissal from the birth. Instead, she voiced her discontent in no uncertain terms which unquestionably brought even more tension, and perhaps even heightened the level of fear, to an already trying situation. The death of the Allingtones baby no doubt reminded the judges and residents that witches had long been known to kill babies. Wright was not accused of practicing *maleficium* on the Allingtones, but their subsequent illnesses and the death of the baby was enough in their minds to make a link between this and Wright’s presence at the birth.

Other allegations against Goodwife Wright involved food, another source of considerable concern in the colony where starvation was rampant. Witnesses testified to the deaths of plants and chickens associated with Wright.

> Daniell Watkins fworne and examined fayeth yt about February laft past, this deponent beinge at Mr Perryes Plantatione ther was Robert Thresher who had a cowpe of henns poyrpfinge to fend them over to Elizabeth Ardundle And good wiefe Wright beinge there in place, faide to Robert Thresher, why do you keepe these henns heere tyed upp, The maide you meane to fend them to will be dead before the henns come to her.  

> Robert Thresher fworne and examined fayeth yt goodwief Wright came to him and requested requited him to give her some plants, He anwered yt when he had ferved his owne tourne, she should have some, so she went away and yt all his plants were drownde.  

Fourther he fayeth that he left 2 hennes with good wiefe Wright to be fent over to Elizabeth Ardundle either by the ptovyf marshall or some other, and

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that goodwif Wright did tell Daniell Watkins that Elizabeth Ardindle would be dead before the henns were fent over.

Elizabeth Gates fworne and examined fayeth ye goodwif Wright came to Mr Moores at Kickotan to buy fome chickens, but when he would fell her none, shortly after the chickens died, and after that the henn died, and this the affirmeth she had heatde from others. 22

At first glance, the suspicious deaths of these “hennes” appears comical. Yet, they were a precious commodity in Kecoughtan. In comparison to the other settlements, Kecoughtan was livestock- and poultry-poor. They did have six boats and nearly 4,000 acres of land, and a good portion had already been planted. Thus, their supplies of corn and fish were higher than those of the other settlements. The census shows only two people in Kecoughtan as having livestock, Francis West and Tiler William. West owned thirty-two goats and William owned four cows, one bull, and five pigs. The same records show John Moore as having three barrels of corn and four hundred dried fish, but no poultry. Since no date is given for the hens’ demise, one is left to speculate whether the census was taken after Goodwife Wright saw his hens. 23

The deaths of hens due to bewitchment does have an English precedent. Alan Macfarlane’s research of assize indictments between 1560-1680 that included bewitched animals listed eleven chickens and capons. The most numerous animals were pigs (one hundred twenty-four) followed by sheep (one hundred twenty-three) and then by cows (one hundred ten). 24 Pigs seem to have been the animal of choice for bewitchment in

22 McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 112, 114.

23 Virtual Jamestown Muster Records.

England, but they were too few in Virginia during this period, thus leaving the most portable domestic animals, chickens, as the most likely targets of *maleficium*.

Of individuals named in these incidents, only twenty-year-old Elizabeth Ardundle can be positively identified as a servant, and while she was just a servant, she was the servant of Sir George Yeardly that probably shielded her from a modicum negative criticism and gossip. Robert Thresher was the head of a muster unit, and Elizabeth Gates was married to Thomas Gates, head of a muster unit—making them important members in the settlement. Daniel Watkins, whose status is unlisted, was probably a free settler. Mr. Moore is most likely John Moore who was the head of a local muster unit.\(^{25}\) That Moore is identified as “mister” rather than “goodman” suggests he was above the middling sorts.

Thresher, Moore, and Gates were all above Wright on the Kecoughtan social ladder, and each of them could have expected, but did not receive, some degree of deference from her. The problem was not just that Wright did not perhaps show the respect for her betters that she should have, but that she was linked with the destruction of food. The implication in Thresher’s and Gates’ testimonies is that Wright was acting out of selfishness—if she could not have the plants and chickens, then no one would have them. There is a hidden insidiousness in these allegations far worse than practicing witchcraft. Starvation was one of the leading causes of death in the colony, and if starvation was not a direct cause of death, it was a contributing cause weakening individuals and making them more susceptible to disease. Above all, survival was a community effort. Circumstances forced the colonists to depend on each other. The

\(^{25}\)Virtual Jamestown Muster Records.
implication in these testimonies is that Wright acted selfishly against the common good and survival of the community. This was a particularly heinous action, given that the colony was not self-sufficient. As already seen in Kecoughtan, the Virginia Company brought Frenchmen to show the settlers how to grow mulberry and wine grapes. People grew these crops and tobacco instead of subsistence crops, depending on the Virginia Company to supply their needs which failed miserably. While not directly being accused of killing the plants and chickens, Wright was linked to their deaths.

It would appear that Goodwife Wright not only possessed power over domestic animals, she seems to have had a power over wildlife as well.

Liv. Gieles Allingtone fworne and examined fayeth, That he harde Sargeant Booth faye yt he was crofete by a woman and for twelve months fpace he havieng very fayre game to f chute at, yet he could never kill any thinge but this deponet cannot fay it was good wief Wright.

Kathleen Brown argues that the charges against Wright brought by men--in particular Booth, Thresher, and Moore--all reflect a loss of their ability to perform male-defined functions in the community. Thresher's and Moore's plants and chickens died while Booth was unable to kill any game. She further argues it was Wright's perceived ability to disempower men that made her such a threat in the community.

Subsistence hunting in England would not have been as critical as it was in Virginia. Furthermore, only the gentry would have hunted during this period; thus, there is a noticeable lack of reference to the bewitchment of game animals in England.

26 McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 111.

27 Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 103.
Witches were thought to have power over nature in general. It is a logical adaptation, then, that the bewitchment of game animals would be assimilated into the corpus of witchcraft beliefs in the New World. The implicit accusation against Goodwife Wright connecting her with the loss of game animals reenforces the implication that the entire community would suffer lack of sustenance because of Wright’s *maleficium*.

The belief in evil associations with crossroads and the action of crossing one’s path is well-founded in English folklore. After execution and cremation, a witch’s ashes were scattered at a crossroads. The legends of the crossroads still exist in contemporary folklore. An example of this is that blues legend Robert Johnson is said to have traded his soul to the devil in exchange for his musical abilities at a crossroads at midnight. To have a hare cross one’s path was considered to be extremely unlucky, especially if a witch had taken the physical form of a hare.28 This belief survives in contemporary folklore with the hare having been replaced by a witch’s familiar in the form of a black cat. Albeit Allingtone did not name Wright as the woman who crossed paths with Booth, his testimony strongly suggests the woman was indeed Goodwife Wright. His testimony linking Wright with the action of crossing Booth’s path strengthened the accusation of witchcraft against her, particularly when the subsequent result of this encounter was that Booth was not able to kill any game.

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The next set of charges against Goodwife Wright reflected women's interactions with one another. Isabell Perry, one of the women witnesses against Wright, was the thirty-seven-year-old wife of merchant William Perry. Her testimony is as follows:

Mrs Isabell Perry fworne and examined fayeth that vppon ye lofing of a logg light wood owt of the fforte, good wiefe Wright rayled vppon a girle of good wiefe gates for ftealinge of the fame, whervppon good wiefe gates Charged the faid good wiefe Wright wth witchcrafte, And faid that she had done many bad things at Kickotan, whervppon this Examinate Chid the faide Good wiefe Wright, And faid vnto her, yf thou knowft theyefelfe Cleare of what she Charged thee, why doft thou not complaine And cleare theyefelfe of the fame, To whom good wiefe Wright replied, god forgive them, and so made light of it, And the faid good wiefe Wright Threatened good wiefe Gates girle and told her, that yf she did nott bringe the light wood againe she would make her daunce ffarke naked and the next morninge ye lightwood was found in the forte. And further fayeth yt Dorethie Behethlem asked this Examint why she did suffer good wiefe at her howfe, fayinge she was a very bad woman, and Accompted a witch amoungft all of them at Kickotan.

Undoubtedly by the time of the wood-stealing incident, Goodwife Wright had earned the reputation of being a witch. Beyond this, and the fact this is the only part of all the testimonies where God is mentioned, all the participants in this incident are women. And with the exception of the servant, all appear to be of a higher social status than Wright. One clue to Perry's social standing in the community is her title of “missus,” a term that was applied to women of means as opposed to “goodwife,” reserved for married women among the lesser sorts of the community. Although Elizabeth Gates was also referred to as “goodwife” in this section, since her husband was the head of a militia unit, she was


30McIIwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 112.
still in a more privileged position in the community’s hierarchy than was Wright. The servant, who was almost certainly lower on the social scale, was still a member of the Gates’ household and must have enjoyed some, although a small, sense of rank as evidenced by her mistress’ defense of her.

Both Wright and Perry were older than most of the women in Virginia at this time. Eighty percent of the women who migrated there were under twenty-five years of age. At the time of the census, less than one percent of the females whose age was given were thirty-five years or older. The overall female population was less than ten percent, and less than fourteen percent of the entire English population was over thirty-five years old. Thus Wright’s age and gender set her apart from the majority of the population. In addition to her low social standing, this essentially left Wright with either a very small or virtually nonexistent peer group.

This conclusion helps explain Brown’s point that Wright had been excluded from gossip networks. During this period of colonization, gossip was one of the main forms of communication. More than idle chatter, it helped to create bonds between people from different social, economic, and geographic backgrounds. These bonds reinforced the interdependence of the colonists on each other helping to ensure survival. Wright’s age, gender, and personality excluded her from these networks, making her a threat rather than an asset to the community.

Her husband, Robert Wright, may have contributed even more to her marginalization. He, along with William Browne, William Tiler’s servant, were charged with theft. Sir Samuel Argall brought charges against Browne and Wright on January 29, 1624/1625 for selling his tobacco and keeping the profits. Browne was eventually
ordered to reimburse Argall, but the record is silent as to what happened to Wright. Nevertheless, it is evident Wright trafficked with servants, and, at the very least, earned the disdain of at least one member of the early Virginia aristocracy.

Goodwife Wright’s threat against the unnamed female servant is puzzling to say the least. There is the implication that being bewitched into dancing “flarke naked” is undesirable. In England, no doubt, dancing naked would have been scandalous, but this was the Virginia frontier where unusual behavior was commonplace. Kathleen Brown argues that this behavior would have lessened the servant’s chances for marriage. However, given the skewed gender ratio this is highly unlikely that the servant would have had any problem finding a husband. The real difficulty she would have faced was finding a decent husband. Alaskans in the 1980s described the chances of a woman finding a good husband there under similar gender-skewed conditions as, “the odds are good, but the goods are odd.” The consequences of her dancing in the nude around the fort may have been in reality inconsequential as to harming her reputation in a community of rogues, yet it is indicative of an attempt to maintain conventional English morals on the Virginia frontier. This is, perhaps, the most significant aspect of the threat, and reflects the settlers’ desire to maintain their sense of English identity under the trying conditions of frontier life.


32 Kathleen Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 103.
The servant may have had other reasons to fear being bewitched into such lurid behavior. While life may have been hard for everyone, it could be particularly harsh for female servants. An example of unreasonable punishment toward women came during Thomas Dale’s tenure as governor (1611-1618). Two women were assigned the responsibility of making shirts for some of the men. When they found they did not have enough thread for the task they unraveled the bottoms of the shirts for the thread they needed to finish. They were subsequently beaten for not making the shirts long enough. Therefore, the servant’s fear of bewitchment may have been well-founded for other than the obvious reasons.

Perry followed her story about the stolen wood with what might have been the most damning testimony against Wright—she admitted to having had a knowledge of witchcraft. Her testimony is as follows:

"yt good wiefe did tell her yt when she lived at hull, beinge one day Chirninge butter ther cam a woman to the howfe who was accompted for a witch, wherevpon /he by directions from her dame Clapt the Chirne flaiffe to the bottom of the Chirne and clapt her hands acrofs vppon the top of it by weh means the witch was not able to flire owt of the place where /he was for the /pace of /x howeres after /h time good wiefe Wright deffired her dame to aske the woman why /he did not gett her gone, whervpon the witche fell downe on her knees and asked her forgivenes and saide her hande was in the Chirne, and could not flire before her maide lifted vpp the flaiffe of the Chirne, weh the flaide good wiefe Wright did, and the witch went awaye, but to her pfeverance [perception] ye witch had bothe her hands at libertie, and this good wiefe Wright affirmeth to be trewe." 

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34McIlwaine, *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia*, 112.
This testimony, and further testimony concerning Wright’s knowledge of witchcraft, supports the contention that the English perceived witchcraft as a practice rather than a heresy. Nowhere in any of the testimonies provided is there mentioned any association with Satan. Wright may have been wicked, evil, and selfish, but she does not appear to have been in league with Lucifer in any of the witnesses’ minds according to their testimonies. Only Wright mentioned God and that was to invoke His forgiveness on her tormentors. Had Wright been a practitioner of magic, she would have been called a cunning woman, but taking the testimonies at face value, the most that can be said is she repelled spells. This passage, for example, refers to what is sometimes called “milk magic,” which includes bewitching cows into not giving milk, or giving bloody milk, casting a spell so cream would not turn into butter, or, as in this case, the belief that witches are actually or mystically being in the churn.\textsuperscript{35}

The next passage from the transcripts might explain why Wright was acquitted of the charges. If she had been a witch, would she divulge how to counteract one of her spells?

\begin{quote}
Further Mrs Pery fayeth yt good wiefe Wright told her, that she was at Hull her dame beinge fiek fufected her felfe to be bewitched, and told good wiefe Wright of it, wherupon by directione from her dame, That the comming of a woman, whe was fufected, to take a horshwe and flinge it in the oven and when it was red hott, to flinge it into her dames vrine, and so long as the horshwe was hott, the witch was fike at harte, And when the Irone was cold she was well againe, And this good wiefe Wright affirmeth to be trewe also.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35}Kittredge, \textit{Witchcraft in Old and New England}, 167.

\textsuperscript{36}McIlwaine, \textit{Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia}, 112.
The baking, boiling, or other uses of a victim's urine in countering witch's spells or detecting the identity of a witch or wizard appears to be fairly common throughout England and the American colonies. The most famous American example of the use of urine was in the baking of a "witch cake," that is one made of rye mixed with the urine of one of the bewitched children from Salem, and fed to a dog in the hopes that if the child were indeed bewitched, the dog would become bewitched as well from ingesting her urine. A lesser known example is a "witches' jar" found in an archaeological site near Grace Sherwood's home in Princess Anne County in southern Virginia. Such jars, which have also been found in England, were filled with urine and pins, needles, nails, spikes, or thorns and then buried in the foundation, threshold, or hearthstone of a home. The jars are believed to protect the victim by repelling the spell back to the witch, and exacting revenge by causing injury to the witch. A common hoped for result was the that witch would suffer from strangury. Keith Thomas cites a similar example of country women who would "put hot pokers in boys' excrement, believing that this would cause them pain and deter them from ever defecating outside their front doors." The use of horseshoes as protective amulets was common in England during this period, especially in the West End of London. Should a cow become bewitched, the remedy was to place a red hot horseshoe into its cream thus reversing the spell and burning the witch. Therefore, the adaptation to a hot horseshoe into the bewitched victim's urine is logically consistent within this framework.

Both magic and behavior were adapted to the frontier of the New World. The bewitchment of game animals took on a new importance as did the bewitchment of hens. Like the coal miner’s wife and the cow keeper who wore silk, Wright’s “crofte” disposition and behavior may have seemed boorish to what would have been her social betters in England. Whether English men and women arrived in Virginia as transportees or were members of the minor aristocracy or somewhere in between, the primary lure was wealth. Along with wealth came some sense of social mobility. Starvation, disease, death, and the Powhatan were the great social levelers in early Virginia. Wright comes to represent a tension in the colony between the striving for hegemony for internal harmony and the individualism of the frontier. Almost without exception, those who testified at her trial held some position of a higher status within the community than Wright, and, almost without exception, Goodwife Wright did not defer to them.

Alan Macfarlane has argued an individual’s personality was a determining factor in whether he or she was prosecuted for witchcraft. From all accounts it appears that Goodwife Wright was a caustic old woman. Her behavior was decidedly antisocial, whether it was predicting deaths “which came to pass,” being involved in hens’ deaths, or threatening to bewitch a female servant into dancing stark naked. Just as there is honor among thieves, there was behavior which was socially unacceptable to even the “rogues, vagabonds, whores, cheats, and rabble of all descriptions, raked from the gutter and

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kicked out of the country" who called themselves Virginians.\textsuperscript{40} Joan Wright crossed the line by being antagonistic in a community where survival meant relying upon each other.

RECEIVED AS FOLLOWS
CHAPTER 5. OBEYING THEIR VOICES

I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.
1 Sam. 15:24

The captains of the *Sarah Artch* and the *Charity* found themselves in the position of facing mutinies from their passengers and crew on what started as seemingly routine voyages from England to the Chesapeake. In each case, the threat was a woman the passengers and crew believed to be a witch. Rather than facing mutinies, Captains Edward Prescott and John Bosworth acquiesced to the women's executions. The first of the women, Mary Lee, was on her way to Maryland in 1654 when some of the crew of the *Charity* believed her *maleficium* to be the source of a violent storm. They found her guilty of sorcery, hung her, and then threw her corpse and all her belongings into the sea only to have the storm continue. The next woman, Elizabeth Richardson, on Prescott's ship the *Sarah Artch*, was on her way to the Chesapeake in 1658 when she was hung at sea for being a witch. One last woman, Katherine Grady (also spelled Catherine Grade), was also executed at sea in 1658 for witchcraft on a ship commanded by Captain Bennet. Almost nothing is known about her, the circumstances of her death, the name of the ship she was on, or even a positive identification of Captain Bennet who is sometimes identified as Barret in secondary sources.¹

The passengers and crew were between the Old World and the New when circumstances pushed them to kill three women whom they believed were responsible for their misfortunes. The women’s deaths, they believed, would alleviate their sufferings. Those responsible for these women’s death had yet to be tempered by their experiences in the New World. They were leaving an England that had gone through a series of dramatic changes in a very short period of time. They had lived through a civil war, seen their king, Charles I, executed and replaced with Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector of England, and had seen more executions for witchcraft during a two-year period (1644-1646) than in the previous century. For whatever reasons they left England and whatever their status was going to be in the colonies, they all faced a harsh future. Rich or poor, free or servant, they could all count on fighting for survival. The high mortality rates were still present, the various Algonquian factions had not been suppressed, and the majority of people—even the rich—still lived in crude, wooden shanties.

Crossing the Atlantic during this period was hazardous under the best of conditions. The trip could take weeks to months depending on the weather and time of year. Lack of sanitation, poorly preserved food, and overcrowding made disease and death an expected part of the voyage. Even when ships traveled in groups, they were still self-contained—cut off and isolated from the rest of the world. It was a harrowing experience for those young men and women, many of whom were bound to servitude either voluntarily or as convicts. Many were away from home and family for the first time with the odds being they would never return. One fifth of the convict transports were women, fifteen percent were teenagers, and five percent were over fifty years old. Some of the women were victims of their neighbors in England who, being afraid of them, sold them into servitude.²

Once on a ship, the immigrants found themselves subordinate to the captain and crew of the ship—no matter what their station may have been on shore. The hierarchy aboard ship was sharply divided between the captain and the crew leaving the passengers to deal primarily with the crew instead of the captain who tended to remain isolated from the rest of the ship’s company. The average seaman was in his twenties and, if he had been given a choice, would have avoided a life at sea at all costs. As one London physician described it, life in prison was preferable to life at sea, as one had less of a chance of being drowned in prison and was generally in better company! Factors such as the harshness of life at sea, high mortality rates, the separation from society and its institutions, and the limitations of a small wooden world in the midst of a seemingly limitless world of the sea led to a distinctive seaman mentality. One of the characteristics to emerge was a set of religious beliefs that reflected the adaptations necessary to meet the seamen’s unique needs. Their religiosity typically strayed from the orthodox to a blend of traditional and folk beliefs. The boundaries between the natural and supernatural worlds were blurred with natural phenomenon becoming portents of good and ill. In this all-male world, the feminine often became demonized, especially in relationship to storms. Some sailors believed that simply discussing women was enough to bring on a storm; therefore, it was natural for them to believe that a female witch could be the source of a storm of unusual proportions.3

It was under these circumstances in early 1654 that the Charity left London under the command of Captain John Bosworth with passengers headed for Maryland. Among the passengers was Mary Lee, who appears to have been suspected of being a witch almost from the beginning of the voyage. Henry Corbyn, a twenty-five-year-old seaman

on the *London Merchant*, testified on June 23, 1654 before Governor William Stone and the Council of Maryland, who were investigating Mary Lee’s death, that while he was serving on the *Charity* there were persistent rumors among the other sailors that Lee was a witch. Believing she was being transported to Maryland for being a witch, the sailors implored Captain Bosworth to try her at sea. Bosworth, perhaps in the hopes of avoiding such a drastic measure, compromised by saying he would put her ashore at Barbados, but persistent bad weather prevented the captain from doing so.4

Jesuit missionary Father Francis Fitzherbert, quoted in the 1655 *Annual Letter of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, described what happened:

. . . violent waves so shattered, that, springing a leak by the continued violence of the sea, it almost filled its hold. But in carrying away and exhausting the water, the men, four at a time, not only of the ship’s crew but of the passengers, every one in his turn, sweated at the great pump in ceaseless labor, day and night.

Wherefore, having changed their course, their intention was to make sail towards the island, which the English call Barbados; but it could be accomplished by no art, by no labor; then the design was, having abandoned the ship and its freight, to commit themselves to the long boat. But the sea, swelling with adverse winds, and the huge mountainous waves, forbade. Many a form of death presenting itself to the minds of all, the habit of terror, now grown familiar, had almost excluded the fear of death. The tempest lasted two months in all, whence the opinion arose, that it was not raised by the violence of the sea or atmosphere, but was occasioned by the malevolence of witches.5


Corbyn testified that two of the sailors took matters into their own hands by taking Lee, without orders or permission, and conducted a search of her for “Some Signall or Marke of a witch upon her.” When the men found what they believed to be such a mark, they called Corbyn and a man Corbyn identified as Master Mr. Chipsham to examine Lee for themselves. After the men had examined the mark, they tied Lee to the capstan overnight. Corbyn continued his testimony:

in the Morning the Signall was Shrunk into her body for the Most part, And an Examination was thereupon importuned by the Seamen which this Deponent was desired to take where-upon She confessed as by her Confession appeareth, And upon that the Seamen Importuned the Said Master to put her to Death.

Corbyn’s testimony as to what followed regarding Captain Bosworth’s actions are puzzling behavior for a captain of a ship. Rather than taking charge of the situation, he washed his hands of the affair. He went to his cabin neither giving consent to her execution nor sparing her life. The men continued to press him for her death. It was with apparent reluctance, Corbyn testified, that Bosworth told the men, “they Should doe no more than what they Should Justifie which they Said they would doe by laying all their hands in generall to the Execution of her.”

Thiry-nine year old Francis Darby Gent refuted this version of the story in his testimony before Governor Stone and the Council by claiming Captain Bosworth did not give tacit approval for Lee’s execution. In fact, he testified, Bosworth admitted having an ignorance of English law in this matter, and Gent “could not perceive any thing either by word or Deed whereby he gave order for her Execution or putting to Death and after

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this he Commanded they Should doe Nothing without his Order.” Gent described Captain Bosworth’s reaction to hearing of Lee’s hanging as, “Speaking with trouble in a high Voyce replyed he knew not of it.”\(^8\) The crew threw Lee’s body and all her belongings overboard. Contrary to their hopes, however, the storm did not end with her death.\(^9\)

The records of Mary Lee’s execution at sea are the most extensive pertaining to the three women’s deaths. Despite the obvious conflicts between Gent’s and Corbyn’s testimonies, it appears that all that was done in regard to her death was to hold an official inquiry; there is nothing in the records concerning a judgment against Captain Bosworth or any member of the crew or passengers of the Charity.

Exactly who Lee was is a mystery. Corbyn said it was rumored she was deported from England for the practice of witchcraft. If she was, there are no records that support this. It is possible that she may have indeed been one of those unfortunate women transported to the New World under dubious circumstances. Furthermore, Lee is not listed in any of the Registers of Servants Sent to Foreign Plantations between 1654 and 1686.\(^10\) While details of her life may not be known, her story does give insight into English witchcraft beliefs of this period.


\(^10\)Virtual Jamestown, Registers of Servants Sent to Foreign Plantations, 1654 - 1686., University of Virginia, http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vcdh/jamestown/indentures/search_indentures.cgi?search_type=basic&start_page=0&servant_ln=lee&servant_fn=&servant_place=&servant_occ=&destination=&ship=&year-ops=&year=&year1=&agent_ln=&agent_fn=&agent_place=&agent_occ=&result_order=&submit=Initiate+Search&db=bristol_ind. There is a Mary Lee listed, but her indenture date is listed as December 10, 1662 eliminating her as the same Mary Lee hung at sea in 1654.
One of the most revealing facets of Lee’s story is the sailors’ examination of her for “Some Signall or Marke of a witch.” The mark Corbyn referred to is most commonly known as a “witch’s teat.” According to seventeenth-century Puritan beliefs, a man or woman became a wizard/witch when he or she entered into a covenant with the Devil. As evidence that this type of witchcraft was considered to be antithetical to Christianity, the witch received at this time a mark believed to be made with the Devil’s talon. This Devil’s mark was supposed to be the opposite of what Christ leaves on an individual at baptism. 11 In addition to the Devil’s mark, the witch received familiars or imps from Satan. 12 Descriptions of these demonic creatures range from ordinary animals to the chimerical. They carried out the witch’s orders and fed off her body in spots known as witch’s teats. 13 Since these unholy and unnatural features were used to feed demonic creatures, they were cold, hence the expression “cold as a witch’s teat.” Sociologist Stanislav Andreski offers a contemporary explanation for presence of the witches’ teats. He contends that some of the women may have been syphilitic. Skin lesions and insensitive spots on the body are common symptoms of syphilis. The historical descriptions of witch’s teats are often consistent with those of syphilitic lesions, lending credence to Andreski’s argument that many of the accused witches may have indeed been suffering from syphilis. 14


The search for a witch's teat did have a precedent in English law. Michael Dalton in his guide for rural judges, *The Country Justice* (1619) wrote:

Now against these Witches of the Justices of peace may not alwaies expect direct euidence, feeling all their workes are the works of darkneffe, and no witneffe prefent with them to accuse them; And therefore for their better difcouery, I thought good here to insert certaine obferuations out of the booke of difcouery of the witches that were arraigned at Lancafter, ann. Dom. 1612 before Sir Iames Altham, and Sir Edward Bromeley Judges of Affife there.

1. These Witches haue some ordinarily a familiar, or spirit, which appeareth to them.
2. Their said familiar hath some bigg or place vpon their body, where he sucketh them.
3. They haue often pictures of Clay, or Waxe (like a man,&c.) found in their houfe.
4. If the dead body bleed, vpon the Witches touching it.
5. The testimonie of the person hurt, vpon his death.
6. The examination and confeffion of the children, or feruants of the Witch.
7. Their owne voluntarie confeffion, which exceeds all other evidence. 15

Corbyn and the other seamen need not have been seventeenth-century legal experts to have had followed Dalton's seemingly common sense advice—or even be familiar with Dalton. The beliefs relating to witch's teats were part of English witch lore. In addition, Corbyn and the crew were probably familiar with the Puritan Matthew Hopkins' witch hunts when, from 1644 to 1646 over three hundred people were executed for witchcraft. 16 Part of Hopkins' arsenal of evidence for detecting a witch was the presence of a witch's teat.

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Hopkins and his witch trials are an identifiable benchmark in a shift in traditional English witchcraft beliefs. It is with these trials that evidence of a written covenant with the Dark Prince appears as an important element of witchcraft, thus elevating it from a questionable practice to a heresy. Although Hopkins' trials only lasted two years, they did serve to introduce and begin the incorporation of Puritan beliefs about witchcraft as a heresy into British popular culture and religion. Traditionally, witchcraft beliefs originated with the lower classes and intellectuals subsequently codified these beliefs. Here, the Puritan intellectuals began incorporating continental witchcraft beliefs into their own particular brand of English Protestantism. Hopkins' trials served as a vehicle to introduce these beliefs to the general public, and it, in turn, began to embrace them. Corbyn's testimony hints at this adoption with his emphasis on the presence of the witch's mark, and intimates the supernatural quality of the mark by testifying it shrank back into her body overnight. Father Fitzherbert's letter adds to this by stating that the passengers believed the storm was caused by the malevolence of witches. Thus, witchcraft in this context has moved from the realm of a potentially innocent or even benevolent exercise to a demonic association complete with hellish imps, as evidenced by the presence of the preternatural appearing and disappearing witch's teat.

Another respect in which Lee's case is unusual is that, according to Corbyn's testimony indicates that it was the men who examined her. Normally it was a panel of older women and/or midwives who examined the women in question. This is an often overlooked example of Anglo-American women's status and power within their communities. Their testimonies regarding the presence of witch's teats was accepted as that of experts. If it was the men who examined Lee, the question then becomes why women did not examine her. It is doubtful she was the only woman aboard the Charity.

One possible explanation is that the crew did not want to share any position of power with the passengers. In the small, isolated world aboard a ship, authority can be tenuous. It was imperative that any challenge to authority, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, be met swiftly and harshly. One point that the Corbyn, Gent, and Fitzherbert accounts are all in agreement is that the passengers were afraid because of the unusually long lasting, violent storm. It can easily be assumed that their fear must have eroded their confidence in the captain’s and crew’s authority along with their ability to bring them safely to the Chesapeake. Perhaps to have crew members examine Lee and pass judgment upon her would reaffirm their authority over the passengers as well as hopefully restore their confidence in the crew.

The next question is whether Lee confessed as Corbyn testified. There are several possibilities; if is she did confess, it is possible Lee might have thought her life would be spared if she confessed and repented. Accused witches forty years later in Salem were spared when they confessed and repented for their transgressions while those who maintained their innocence were executed. Not all confessed English witches were spared the hangman’s noose, but it was certainly a gamble Lee had nothing to lose and everything to gain—if she did confess. Thomas Hutchinson’s ideas concerning the confessions of the innocent during the Salem witchcraft trials might be applied here as well. It is his contention that some women, after seeing the evidence presented against them, were convinced that they must have made a compact with the Devil even though they could not remember having done so.18 The 1654 voyage of the Charity stands apart from other harrowing trans-Atlantic voyages due to the longevity and severity of the storm they encountered. It is possible under these and the passengers’ and crew’s suspicions that Lee could have come to believe she was guilty of such a malicious crime.

This becomes even more plausible when one takes into consideration what must have been for her the traumatic experience of being examined by men. If Corbyn’s testimony that it had been rumored she was a witch from the beginning of the voyage is true, then it is probable that she was ostracized by the passengers and crew, leaving her vulnerable to a myriad of insults and other abuses which ultimately led to her death. It is quite conceivable Lee could have come to believe she was a witch.

The confession, however, is problematic since neither Father Fitzherbert nor Gent mention a confession, giving rise to the possibility that Lee did not confess at all. If Lee did confess, why would Gent and Fitzherbert fail to mention it? Gent may not have mentioned it in his testimony before the governor and the council because he did not personally witness it. Father Fitzherbert’s account reads, “[T]hey seize[d] a little old woman suspected of sorcery; and after examining her with the strictest scrutiny, guilty or not guilty, they slay[ed] her, suspected of this very heinous sin.” Did his idea of the “strictest scrutiny” include a confession? It probably did not. Certainly a confession would have acted as a strong validation for her execution, and therefore would have been included in their accounts.

If she did not confess, why would Corbyn manufacture a confession? By his own testimony, Corbyn was an active participant in Lee’s examination, condemnation, and execution. One of the few particulars both Gent’s and Corbyn’s statements are in agreement on is that Captain Bosworth did not give an explicit order to execute Lee. Therefore, it is not only possible, but probable that Corbyn and other crew members took it upon themselves to hang her without having a direct order to do so. In light of this, and being called to answer to Governor Stone and the Council, Corbyn may have exaggerated

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19Father Francis Fitzherbert, “Extracts from the Annual Letters of the English Province of the Society of Jesus” in Narratives of Early Maryland 1633-1684, 140-141. The “they” in this account is not specifically identified.
to some extent the evidence against Lee—including her alleged confession—and the circumstances surrounding her death as a justification for his actions.

There is no mention in any of the testimony as to why Father Fitzherbert was not involved in Lee’s examination or if he was consulted in determining her guilt. One possible explanation for this is that even though Maryland was ostensibly a Roman Catholic colony, the majority of the colonists were Protestants, as probably were the crew and passengers on the Charity. This difference may have excluded Father Fitzherbert from any of the proceedings. Another possible explanation is the recurring theme that Corbyn and his confederates took the matter into their own hands to assert the crew’s authority over the passengers.

It is very unlikely that Lee, Richardson, or Grady for that matter, would have been executed in Maryland or Virginia. Only one person, Rebecca Fowler, was executed for witchcraft in Maryland in 1686, and no one at all was executed in Virginia or the middle colonies for the same crime. 20 These colonists and their judges were not inclined to execute suspected sorcerers and witches, yet the passengers and crew of the Sarah Artch, the Charity, and Captain Bennet’s ship were not quite colonists and no longer quite English; they were literally and metaphorically between old and new worlds. It is for this reason, in part, that these women were executed at sea, not in Virginia or Maryland, yet at the same time the captains were called to answer for their deaths.

The next man to be called to court to answer for the death of an alleged witch at sea was Edward Prescott. On September 29, 1659, John Washington, George Washington’s great-grandfather, filed a formal complaint to Maryland’s Governor Josiah

Fendall requesting that Prescott answer for Elizabeth Richardson’s execution at sea for witchcraft on the Sarah Artch the previous year. The initial records for Washington versus Prescott (1659) reads:

Whereas John Washington of Westmerland County in Virginia hath made Complaynt agst Edward Prescott merch't, Accusing the s'd Prescott of felony unto the Gouerno' of this Prouince, Alleaging how that hee the s'd Prescott hanged a Witch in his ship, as hee was outwards bownd from England hither the last yeare. Vpon w'h Complaynt of the s'd Washington, the Gou' caused the s'd Edward Prescott to bee arrested; Taking Bond for his appearance att this Prouinciall Court of 40000l Tob, Gyuing moreouer notice to the s'd Washington by letter of his proceedings therein.

Governor Fendall’s response:

M' Washington Vppon yo' Complaynt to mee th' M' Prescott did in his voyage from England hither cause a Woman to bee Executed for a Witch, I haue caused him to bee apprehended uppon suspition of felony, & doe intend to bind him ouer to the Prouincial Court to answere it, Where I doe allso exspect yo' to bee, to make good yo' Charge. Hee will bee called uppon his Tryall the 4th or 5th of Octob' next, att the Court to bee held then att Patux't, neare M't ffenwicks howse. Where I suppose yo'd will not fayle to bee. Wittnesses Examined in Virginia will bee of noe ualew here in this Case, for they must bee face to face w' the party accused, or they stand for nothing. I thought good to acquaynt yo' w' this, that yo' may not come un-prouided.²¹

As with all the witchcraft cases, nothing is as simple as it seems. One of the more intriguing aspects of this case involves Washington’s relationship with Prescott. Their story begins in England before either left for the New World. John Washington, the son of Lawrence and Amphillis Twigden Washington, was born in the Washington

ancestral home near Sulgrave, England about 1631. The Washingtons, who suffered along with so many other Royalists, had their home seized during the Civil War. Forced to seek his fortunes elsewhere, Washington left his home to try his luck as a merchant trading between England and Virginia. In 1655, he and his brother-in-law, Edward Prescott, embarked on a new life as merchants. Their partnership was short-lived, ending soon after their ship was wrecked in a storm. The loss of the ship left Washington disillusioned with the life of a merchant, and he gave up his partnership with Prescott and moved to Virginia. This began a series of legal confrontations between Washington and Prescott, with Prescott first suing Washington for his failure to maintain the financial obligations of their partnership. 22

The inquiry into Elizabeth Richardson’s death should not be dismissed as simply another chapter in an ongoing feud between quarreling in-laws. The captains of all three ships where women were hung at sea for witchcraft were called to answer for their actions in Virginia and Maryland courts. The initial proceedings against Prescott may have been at the behest of Washington, but Prescott would have probably been called to court even if Washington had not pressed his suit. However, it is Governor Fendall’s response to Washington that raises a number of questions.

The first question is why would Washington, a Virginia resident, appeal to Maryland’s Governor Fendall rather than Virginia’s Governor Samuel Matthews, Junior? Washington may well have indeed appealed to Matthews first. Fendall’s notation that, “Witnisses Examined in Virginia will bee of noe ualew here in this Case, for they must bee face to face wth the party accused, or they stand for nothing” suggests that there was a previous investigation in Virginia, and little, if anything, was done in regards to holding

Prescott responsible for Richardson’s death; otherwise Washington would not have pressed the issue. Unfortunately no Virginia records of this have been recovered to date, suggesting that perhaps they have been lost to the elements or destroyed in war.

If testimonies were heard in Virginia, then why was there no action taken against Prescott? The obvious answer is because Prescott was found not guilty—despite the preponderance of evidence Washington thought was against him. If it can be assumed that in all probability Prescott gave the same testimony in Virginia that he gave in Maryland, then he was acquitted, in part, on the basis that even though he was the owner of the Sarah Artch, John Greene was the captain of the ship for the voyage in question. Prescott admitted that Elizabeth Richardson was a passenger on the Sarah Artch and was hung at sea. He continued, “That he wth stood the proceedings of his s\textsuperscript{d} Master and Company, & protested agst them in that busines. And that thereupon both the Master & Company were ready to mutiny.”\textsuperscript{23} This illustrates the tacit understanding of the power of authority of a captain at sea. In the small, isolated shipboard world at sea, the captain’s word was paramount to the point of superceding the orders of the owner. It also illustrates the implied power of the crew. The threat of a mutiny was enough for Prescott to acquiesce to Richardson’s execution. Prescott would have been well aware of the fact that should the crew have mutinied he would have probably ended up hanging next to Richardson. Apparently the court recognized this as well in acquitting Prescott.

Two other factors need to be taken into consideration in Prescott’s acquittal in Virginia. The first is the political atmosphere in Virginia of the 1650s. Even though it was a British colony under the Protectorate, Virginia was a Royalist stronghold before, during, and after the Civil War. In fact, the peak of Cavalier migration from England to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{23}Proceedings of the Provincial Court 1658-1662, Vol. 41, p. 328-329, October 4, 1659
http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/specoll/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000041/html/am41--328.html.}
Virginia occurred during the 1650s. Going hand-in-hand with Royalist politics was a commitment to the Church of England to the extreme exclusion of anything relating to Puritanism, and as a result Puritans were frequently targets of Virginia's religious intolerance. When Puritan ministers William Thompson, John Knowles, and Thomas James came to minister to the wayward Virginians in 1643, as has been previously mentioned, they were met with legal and personal resistance. Discouraged, Knowles and James returned soon after to New England, leaving Thompson to minister to a handful of converts. The key point here is even though the Puritans were theoretically in a position of power in the colony during this period, there was an ongoing tension between themselves and the Royalists. If there were Puritans involved in Prescott's hearing, then they would have been more inclined on a theological basis to approve the execution of a witch than would have Anglicans on the bench.

On the other side of the coin, one must account for an Anglican acquittal as well. Here the argument is based on a cultural perspective, not a religious one. One of the most salient features of Virginian colonial society at this time was the primacy placed on a hierarchal power structure. As already noted in the extreme example of allowing John and Alice Proctor literally to get away with the murders of their servants Elizabeth Abbott and Elias Hinton in 1624 illustrates the legal power of a master over a servant.

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24Fischer, Albion's Seed, 212.


26Philip Alexander Bruce, The Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century 252-261.

27Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 126-130; transcripts of court proceedings in Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, October 10, 1624, 21-24.
In his book, *Anne Orthwood's Bastard: Sex and Law in Early Virginia* (2003), John Ruston Pagan recounts the myriad of problems former servant William Kendall faced when, after having risen to a position of power as the senior justice on the Northampton County Court in 1664, he failed to regulate the sexual relations between his servant, Anne Orthword, and his nephew, John Kendall.\(^{28}\) In 1641, William Rookings faced humiliation in his failure to control his wife Jane's scandalous speech. The Royalist sentiments were so pervasive in Virginia colonial culture that the patriarchs saw themselves as the metaphorical extension of the king with complete authority over those in their charge.\(^{29}\) Within this context, then, the Anglicans would have supported Captain Greene's execution of Elizabeth Richardson on the basis of his supreme authority aboard ship.

Why would Fendall have Prescott arrested? After all, Washington was a Virginian, not a Marylander, so Fendall really had no obligation to him. One possible explanation for this may be found in Fendall's political aspirations. Fendall's story begins with the passage of Maryland's Acts Religious Toleration of 1649. Shortly after its passage, Lord Baltimore, a Roman Catholic, sent invitations to a number of Puritans promising them freedom of worship in Maryland. Among those taking up Lord Baltimore on his offer of refuge were three hundred Virginia Puritans who, after the House of Burgesses declared the beheading of Charles I an act of treason, decided it would be better to be under a Roman Catholic colonial government rather than one with openly Royalist inclinations. Not only were the Puritans free to worship as to the dictates of their consciences in Maryland, but they were also granted the right to vote. Despite Lord Baltimore's hospitality to the Puritans, rumors began to circulate in England that the


\(^{29}\)John Ruston Pagan, *Anne Orthwood's Bastard*, 33-34.
Puritans were being discriminated against and were not free to worship as they pleased. In an effort to dispel these rumors, in 1650, Maryland Governor William Stone and Protestant councilors, burgesses, and thirty-eight freeman signed what came to be known as the Protestant Declaration. All of these men swore they had in no way been “troubled or molested” because of their religious beliefs. Irrespective of these freedoms, a coalition of Puritan leaders from Virginia and Maryland overthrew Lord Baltimore. What Lord Baltimore had done in granting refuge and privileges to the Puritans was unwittingly to have set the stage for their coup d’etat.

Once in power, the Puritans repealed the Religious Toleration Act and replacing it with an act extending freedom of conscience except to “popery, prelacy, or licentiousness of opinion.” Among its provisions was “That none who profess and exercise the Papistic, commonly known as the Roman Catholic religion, can be protected in this province.” The Maryland Puritans felt confident that Oliver Cromwell, who had been waging war at that time against the Catholics in Ireland, would support them. One can only imagine their surprise when Cromwell ordered Lord Baltimore’s restoration and the return of the Religious Toleration Act. Lord Baltimore, in a magnanimous act of reconciliation, granted immunity and restored the property and privileges to those Puritans involved in the overthrow. He then appointed Captain Josiah Fendall governor because of Fendall’s support for Governor Stone. Shortly after being appointed Maryland governor in 1657, Fendall began to collaborate with some of Maryland’s Puritan leaders, among them his father-in-law Captain John Hatch, in yet another bid to take over the colony. The second plot, known as Fendall’s Rebellion, was thwarted with the accession of Charles II to the throne of England. Clearly, then, Fendall’s sympathies were with the Puritans. So why would Fendall prosecute Prescott?

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One answer to this question is that it was Fendall’s legal obligation to investigate a possible murder at sea, which constituted a felony. The case is problematic in that Richardson’s death occurred at sea; therefore, the question is who would have jurisdiction in the matter, Virginia or Maryland? Or would this be a matter for the Admiralty Courts? In Virginia during this period, the county courts and the General Court acted as an admiralty court for offenses committed on the high seas. It was precisely for this reason that Captain Bennet (or Barret) was called to the Jamestown Court to answer for Katherine Grady’s execution at sea for witchcraft (1659).31 The problem was that until 1700 the colonial courts were in such a state of disarray that the Maryland Provincial Court also acted as an admiralty court.32 Thus, both the Maryland and Virginia courts technically had jurisdiction in the Richardson case, which provides an example of the problems associated with the British government’s practice of salutary neglect. However, there is still the question of why Governor Fendall would prosecute Prescott if the Virginia court had already heard the case?

Whatever Fendall’s reasons were are lost in history. However, it is possible to speculate as to why Fendall would get involved in the case. One possible explanation is that Governor Fendall used the case as a show of power to the Virginians. Tensions were particularly high between Virginia and Maryland during this period—especially before and


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during the Puritan regime. The Anglican Virginians were never comfortable with Maryland first being a Catholic colony then with it having a Puritan run government. Consequently, it is very plausible that Fendall used the Richardson case to assert his and Maryland's authority over Virginia. If it can be assumed that charges against Prescott were dismissed in a Virginia court, then Fendall's decision to re-arrest Prescott would have flown in the face of Virginia authority, thereby making Richardson and Prescott pawns in a political struggle between the two colonies. Fendall’s comment that “Witnesses Examined in Virginia will bee of noe ualew here in this Case, for they must bee face to face wth the party accused, or they stand for nothing,” intimates his opinion of a substandard Virginian examination of the witnesses as well holding Maryland to a higher standard of legal procedures. One can also interpret this statement in combination with Fendall’s insistence on Washington’s presence in the court that Fendall was well aware of the animosity between Washington and Prescott and their propensity to use the courts as weapons against each other. It was perhaps in a move to avoid allowing the Maryland courts as a tool of a possible personal vendetta that Fendall was so insistent on Washington’s presence at court.

It is not difficult to imagine that Governor Fendall was none too pleased when he received Washington's response, which reads:

I am sorry th' my extraordinary occasions will not permitt mee to bee att the next rouinciall Court, to bee held in Maryland the 4th of this next month, Because then god willing I intend to gett my yowng sonne baptized, All the Company & Gossips being allready inuited. 33

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Although Prescott appeared before the Maryland court on October 4, 1659, neither Washington nor any of the other witnesses did. Prescott’s main defense was that John Greene was the captain for the voyage, and was forced to accept the hanging under the threat of a mutiny. The court records of the dismissal of charges against Prescott reads:

Edward Prescott Prisoner at the Bar uppon suspition of ffelony stand uppon his acquittall. If any person can giue evidence against him, lett him come in, for the Prisoner otherwise will bee acquitt. And noe on[e app] earing, The Prisoner is acquitted by the Board.34

The two people who appear lost in this story are Elizabeth Richardson and John Greene, the captain of the Sarah Artch for the voyage in question. Richardson is only mentioned by name once in all of the records relating to the inquest. Of course it must be taken into consideration that not all of the evidence presented at court was placed into the official records. However, this does not alter the fact that almost nothing was included in the official record about Richardson or the events leading to her death. Like so many other immigrants during this period, who she was and why she left England is lost to history. The only person to express any concern was Washington, and even then his concern was centered on the idea that he could use her death as a weapon against Prescott. What is perhaps even more indicative of the real motivations behind the investigation of Richardson’s death is the lack of action against Greene once it was established he was the one ultimately responsible for her death. Clearly, then, Richardson’s life and death only had value in that they could be used as tools in the struggle for power.

If Richardson's life had so little meaning to the Chesapeake colonists, then Katherine Grady's meant even less so to them. All that remains of the records regarding the investigation into her death are as follows:

Capt'n Bennet had to appear at the admiralty court to answer the putting to death of Kath Grady as a witch at Sea. 35

Who Katherine Grady was and the circumstances surrounding her death are a mystery. Like Mary Lee and Elizabeth Richardson, she is not listed in either the servant or passenger lists for the vessels during this period. 36 Even more puzzling is who Bennet was. Phillip Alexander Bruce alternately identifies him as Captain Barret and Captain Bennett. He describes Barret/Bennett as, "an Englishman engaged in trade with the Colony[.]" 37 Yet, Bruce cites the same Robinson transcript as above for his source. The data bases presently available regarding ships' manifests during this period yield no more information on Barret/Bennett than they do about Lee, Richardson, or Grady. 38 Until a

35 Selections from Conway Robinson's Notes and Excerpts from the Record's of Colonial Virginia, June 7, 1659, in H. R. McIlwaine, ed., Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 2nd ed. (Richmond: 1979), 504.


time, if ever, more information becomes available regarding Grady’s case, most of our understanding of it will be based purely on speculation.

The Lee, Richardson, and Grady cases do give some evidence that, for whatever reasons, their executions for witchcraft would not be accepted without some kind of explanation—even if the captains gave orders to have them hung. Even though Elizabeth Richardson appears to be insignificant in the legal and political wranglings surrounding her case, her story does give insight into political and private tensions of that era.

Lee’s case in particular reflects an increasing adoption of Puritan beliefs into popular Anglo-American witchlore. When comparing the evidence presented in Joan Wright’s case (1626) with that of Mary Lee’s (1654), an implied emphasis can be seen on the demonic covenanted associations in Lee’s case that are absent in Wright’s case—or for that matter even in Jane Rookings’ case (1641). Additionally, Lee’s case may be used as evidence of a cultural marker for the transportation of these Puritan beliefs into the Chesapeake. In all likelihood some of these beliefs preexisted the Lee case within the southern Puritan communities; however, they probably did not exist throughout the Virginia-Maryland communities as a whole. Therefore, Lee’s case may be viewed as the first official witchcraft case to incorporate Puritan beliefs in southern courts, but it would not be the last.
CHAPTER 6. GET RID OF ALL THE SLANDER

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Ephesians 4:31

During the same period in which Mary Lee, Katherine Grady, and Elizabeth Richardson were hung at sea for witchcraft, the Virginians of Lower Norfolk County passed the only Virginia law pertaining to witchcraft.

Lower Norfolk: at a private Court held the 23rd of May, 1655, at the howse of Mr. Edward Hall in Linhaven, Coll. John Sidney, Mr. John Porter, Junior, Mr. Thomas Bridge, County Commissioners [or justices].

Whereas diverse dangerous & scandalous speeches have been raised by some persons concerning severall women in this Countie, termeing them to be Witches, whereby theire reputacons have been much impaired and theire lives brought in question (ffor avoydeing the like offence.) It is by this Court ordered that what person soever shall hereafter raise any such scandall, concerning any parties whatsoever, and shall not be able to prove the same, both upon oath, and by sufficient witness, such person soe offending shall in the first place paie a thousand pounds of tobacco: and likewise be lyable to further Censure of the Court. ¹

Technically Virginia and the other British colonies were under English law, but they were free to pass their own laws as long as they did not conflict with English law,² thus leaving the Lower Norfolk justices free to pass their own witchcraft law designed to fit their specific needs. Clearly their needs were not to hunt down and destroy practitioners of the black arts, but to maintain some semblance of peace. In order to do this, it was necessary to control speech—particularly women’s speech. The importance of women’s speech, especially in the form of gossip, in early Virginia culture cannot be

¹Lower Norfolk County Records, Orders May 23, 1655.

underestimated. It had the potential of creating strong bonds between family and neighbors as well as destroying relationships and reputations. As seen in the Jane Rookings case (1641), slanderous gossip had far deeper implications than just harming the reputations of the innocent; women’s speech was a reflection of patriarchal power in Virginia. George Burcher and William Rookings were obligated to make a public show of their authority in their homes as a result of a witchcraft accusation. In their hierarchal world, so much of who and what Virginians were depended on others’ perceptions of them, and when it came to witchcraft, the power of women’s speech could be particularly damming. A woman’s charge of witchcraft against another had the potential to be taken far more seriously than an accusation regarding a woman’s licentiousness that was the most common form of verbal attack by one woman against another.\footnote{Terrri L. Synder, \textit{Brabbling Women: Disorderly Speech and the Law in Early Virginia} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1-18; Kathleen Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 99-100.} Regardless of whether they believed witchcraft to be a heresy or practice, it was still a capital crime. As seen in the Joan Wright case (1626), the mere suspicion of a woman being a witch could place her on the margins of a society where interdependence was crucial for survival.

The accused women’s families could suffer as well on a number of different levels. Whatever wealth a family accumulated which could be attributed to supernatural manipulation rather than hard work or good fortune gave the witch’s family a distinct edge on their neighbors causing resentment from those less fortunate or skilled in the black arts. Also prevalent was the belief that witchcraft ran in families as an inherited ability and a taught skill.\footnote{Robin Briggs, \textit{Witches and Their Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft} (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 24-25.} For example, as already seen, Salem judges imprisoned four-
year-old Dorcas Good in 1692 on the suspicion her mother, Sarah Good, had taught her to be a witch. Thus, there was always the very real possibility that the accused’s children would seek revenge for whatever was done to their parents. These factors put a witch’s family in the precarious position of needing to defend the accused not only out of family loyalty but to also insure their respected place in their community.

The first witchcraft-related case after the passage of the Lower Norfolk law was not a civil suit but a criminal case against accused sorcerer. Approximately six months after the passage of the law, in November 1655, William Harding was convicted in Northumberland County of practicing witchcraft. Harding enjoyed the distinction of being the only person ever convicted of witchcraft in Virginia. The court record of his case reads:

Whereas Articles were Exhibited against William Harding by Mr. David Lindsaye [minister] upon the suspicion of witchcraft sorcery etc And an able jury of Twenty-four men were empanelled to try the matter by verdict of which jury they found part of the Articles proved by several deposicons The court doth therefore order yet ye said William Harding shall forthwith receive ten stripes upon his bare back and forever be Banished this County and yet hee depart within the space of two moneths. And also pay all the charges of Court.5

Once again, the court records pertaining to Virginia witch cases are problematic. In this case, there is a question as to whether Harding was actually convicted of sorcery. A footnote in Philip Alexander Bruce’s discussion of the Harding case reads, “There were other charges besides witchcraft against Harding on this occasion, and it is possible that the conviction was for these other offenses, and not for sorcery. The expression is: ‘They (the jury) found part of these articles proved by several depositions.”6 However,

5 Northumberland County Records, Orders Nov. 20, 1655.

6 Philip Alexander Bruce, The Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century: An Inquiry into the Religious, Moral, Educational, Legal, Military, and Political Condition of the People Based on Original and Contemporaneous Records
there are no other charges against Harding listed in the Northumberland County Records for the time in question, but that may be explained by a simple failure to record them. Bruce’s contention that the sorcery charges were only part of a larger case against Harding does have some merit. Given the Virginia judges’ lack of zeal in criminally prosecuting witches, it does stand to reason that the witchcraft conviction was used an excuse to cast Harding out of Northumberland County.

One fact that seems to support Bruce is that there are no records of Harding being a landowner. This would suggest that Harding was perhaps an indentured servant, yet he is not listed in Registers of Servants Sent to Foreign Plantations, 1654-1686, nor is he in the 1624/1625 muster records. This in itself only indicates that Harding was perhaps never listed in the register or came to Virginia before more detailed records were kept and after 1625. The overall lack of records relating to any kind of meaningful contributions Harding may have made to the colony, and the fact that the only record of his is a criminal one, does lend support to Bruce’s idea that Harding was a ne'er-do-well.

Whatever credence may be placed in Bruce’s interpretation of Harding’s conviction should not be diminished by the fact that Bruce was an unabashed southern apologist. Among those to whom he dedicated his 1927 book, Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, are the “Great Southern Landowners and Slaveholders of the

(Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964, original publication New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1910) 280.


Furthermore, Bruce credits the difference between the high number of witchcraft executions in New England and the small number of Virginia witchcraft prosecutions to the belief that Virginians were not superstitious. Bruce made the erroneous assumption that a seventeenth-century belief in the reality of witchcraft was tantamount to being superstitious. But contemporary scholars, who have been influenced by theories in cultural anthropology—specifically ideas relating to cultural relativism—have demonstrated that to explain such beliefs as merely superstitious results in a one-dimensional understanding of these historical characters and their beliefs in the supernatural. With this caution in mind, the two major points Bruce appears to have overlooked in his interpretation are that Harding's trial took place during the Interregnum and that the Scott minister David Lindsay presented evidence against Harding.

Although the Puritans were never numerous or powerful enough to have a significant impact on Virginia culture, they were able to make some minor strides during the Protectorate. Among the changes they attempted to make were curbing public drunkenness and blasphemy, making officials responsible for church attendance for their subordinates, and the preventing of firing of guns or of loading ships on the Sabbath. As already noted, there was also a failed attempt to unite Virginia and Maryland under a

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Puritan rule.\textsuperscript{12} In this political climate characterized by religion, one could expect an increase in witchcraft prosecutions if not convictions. This is evidenced in the complete lack of criminal prosecutions for witchcraft between Joan Wright's trial (1626) and William Harding's trial and conviction (1655). Furthermore, while there were no criminal witchcraft trials in that twenty-nine year period, there were four witchcraft-related trials during the ten-year period from 1655 to 1665 with only one criminal conviction.\textsuperscript{13} This dramatic increase in the number of criminal trials reflects a limited Puritan influence on the Virginia courts. More importantly, the number of trials and the increasing role of religion indicates an incorporation of Puritan beliefs in Anglo-American witchlore particularly in the Chesapeake.

These ideas are especially evident in the Harding case, even though the specific articles of evidence presented against Harding are absent from the records. There is, however, an implied religious association with the sorcery charges in that it was a minister, Reverend David Lindsay, who presented evidence against Harding. Given his Scottish origins, one might expect Lindsay to be a Presbyterian, or a Puritan because of his involvement in the trial. Surprisingly, Lindsay was neither—he was Anglican. According to the Lindsay family history, David Lindsay (1603-1667), son of Sir Jerome Lindsay, Lord Lion King at Arms, and Margaret Colville, was the grandson of David Lindsay, the Bishop of Ross, Scotland. He graduated from St. Andrew's University in Fife, Scotland in 1621, and was ordained probably shortly thereafter. Lindsay family historians believe he immigrated to Virginia circa 1652 based on a certificate for land presented to Hugh Lee on May 20, 1652 for transporting Lindsay and three others to


\textsuperscript{13}The cases are as follows: Harding (1655) in Northumberland County, Barbary Wingbrough (1657) in Northhampton County, an unnamed witch 1665 Lower Norfolk County, and Alice Stephens (1665) in Lower Norfolk County.
Virginia. In 1655, Lindsay became the rector of the Yeocomico Church in Northumberland County where he served until his death in 1667. During his tenure there, he received at least two different land patents. Virginia land records show he was granted a patent for two hundred thirty-six acres on Perries Creek in Northumberland County on March 23, 1657, and family records indicate he received a land grant of six hundred fifty acres in Northumberland County in April 1664.14

Reverend Lindsay should have enjoyed a privileged place in Virginia society. After all, he was a property owner, a member of the clergy, and an aristocrat, but this did not stop others from bringing several charges against Lindsay. In one instance, he was brought to court for failure to pay a bill; in another he failed to obtain justices’ permission before withdrawing a petition from the clerk’s office. Perhaps Lindsay’s most egregious offense was to marry two servants who had not obtained their masters’ permission, been granted a license, or posted the banns. His action in this matter went against one of colonial Virginians’ most profound beliefs of the complete authority in Virginia masters over those in their charge. Yet none of this seemed to have damaged his reputation too severely. He was still prominent enough within the community to be the target of slander. In 1665, Richard Thompson made a disparaging remark about Lindsay’s wife, Susanna, forcing Lindsay to bring Thompson into court seeking damages for the harm done to Mrs. Lindsay’s reputation.15

The Harding case is unique in that it is the only witchcraft conviction in the colony’s history, but it is also the first Virginia witchcraft case in which a member of the clergy presented evidence. While there are no details of the evidence presented against Harding, one can assume that because of Reverend Lindsay’s participation in the trial there must have been some religious elements involved, further changing the Virginian view of witchcraft from a practice to a heresy within the populace. Even if there was not any specific evidence presented of a demonic covenant, Lindsay’s position as a minister would have lent a religious dimension to the proceedings. Moreover, his participation may be used as a marker for the beginning of an acceptance of a Puritan-influenced maleficium form of witchcraft in the Virginia legal system. The Virginia courts recognized two categories of witchcraft—maleficium and “petit witchcraft.” There are no records to indicate that anyone was ever brought into court on petit witchcraft charges.  

Harding’s conviction may be viewed in a broader context of the social and political changes in Virginia during this period. The fall of the monarchy with Charles I’s execution in 1649, and its replacement by the Commonwealth, forced the staunchly Royalist Virginians into accepting a regime they were diametrically opposed to on political and religious grounds. In an already unstable colony, Virginians now had to adapt to an entirely new set of circumstances. Sir William Berkeley retired from his position as governor in 1652 to take up the life of a planter on his Green Spring plantation. Parliament replaced Berkeley with Puritan Richard Bennett, nephew of Edward Bennett, founder of the Puritan community in Lower Norfolk County in 1619, as Governor and Puritan William Claiborne as the Secretary of the colony—both of whom would later be involved in the failed attempt to unite Virginia and Maryland under a single Puritan rule. This was not the radical shift in Virginia politics that it may appear to

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16Rankin, Criminal Trial Proceedings in the General Court of Virginia (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), 228-229.
be on the surface despite the later attempted coup d'etat; both Bennett and Claiborne had previously served in Berkeley's councils. Their appointment to these positions was a reflection of Virginians' desires to be governed by Virginians who placed a priority on their interests not Parliament's. Nevertheless, the House of Burgesses made the pointed declaration that they had been elected by the people, implying Bennett and Claiborne were representatives of Parliament. Whatever the tensions were between Virginia Anglicans and Puritans they never reached the heights they had in Old or New England. Arguably the most controversial pre-Interregnum act of legislation passed against Puritans was the 1647 act which allowed parishioners to withhold salaries from ministers who refused to read from the Book of Common Prayer. The combination of a paucity of ministers, the control vestries had in hiring ministers, and the overall lack of a profound religiosity left this law all but unchallenged—with one exception. Reverend Thomas Harrison was brought to court in 1645 for refusing to follow the Church of England's canons regarding baptism, catechism, and not reading from the Book of Common Prayer. Harrison's case was eventually referred to Berkeley and his Council, who decided Harrison could remain at his post.17

The Harrison case is indicative of how Berkeley often handled religious matters. His quick temper aimed at what he considered religious dissidents was notorious throughout the colony as well as his ability to accommodate them once his anger had subsided. Although Berkeley was not governor at the time of the Harding trial, his terms being from 1641 to 1652 and 1660 to 1677, his influences were still felt during the

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Interregnum. It was in this atmosphere of alternating tension and accommodation that Harding’s trial and conviction took place.

In some ways, the conditions surrounding Harding’s trial are very similar to those of the Salem witchcraft trials. The political uncertainties and resulting tensions of the Restoration (1660), King Phillip’s War (1675), the 1684 revocation of Massachusetts’ charter, King James II’s accession to the throne (1685), the appointment of Sir Edmund Andros as governor of Massachusetts (1686), and the Glorious Revolution (1688) all have been considered to be contributing factors to the Salem witchcraft hysteria of 1692. By comparison, Virginia went through the English Civil War (1642), continual skirmishes between the Powhatan and the colonists with a major attack on the colonists in April of 1644, Charles I’s execution (1649), high mortality rates, the first Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654), the Interregnum (1649-1660), and finally Virginia’s submission to Parliament in 1652 after a two-year struggle against Cromwell and the Commonwealth. Since James I revoked the Virginia Company’s charter in 1624, the colony had been left, more or less, to its own devices. In this state of salutary neglect, Virginians had come to thrive economically, and more importantly, had begun to enjoy a certain amount of freedom from the Crown. There was the very real possibility of losing these freedoms, given that many of the investors in the London Company backed Charles’ opponents in the civil war. Their victory could have paved the way for a re-institution of the colony as a company enterprise. In this worse case scenario, Puritans and Anglicans alike would have suffered. The Virginians’ resistance to the Commonwealth, combined with Parliament’s desire to maintain peaceful relations with the colony, allowed for uneasy compromises.\footnote{Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, Thad W. Tate, \textit{Colonial Virginia: A History} (White Plains: KTO Press, 1986), 50-51.} It was in this world of political, social, and religious tensions that William Harding was convicted of witchcraft.
Clearly Virginians were not particularly troubled by witchcraft. It had been almost thirty years since a Virginian had been brought to trial on criminal charges for the practice of witchcraft, and when there finally was a conviction, the sentence was ten lashes and two months to leave the county, not the colony, rather than execution. The use of the lash was a popular form of punishment for those unable to pay their fines in tobacco.\(^{19}\) This is another clue that Harding may not have been a man of means thus lending credence to the hypothesis the sorcery charge was merely an excuse to deport him from the county. Is it equally possible that Harding was a scapegoat in much the same way as the accused witches in Salem as a way of coping with political uncertainties? The similarities in the situations between Salem and Virginia suggest that this is a very credible comparison. While Virginians may not have been disposed to prosecute witches as readily as New England Puritans, witchcraft did provide a way to make sense out of their world. Three decades earlier, Virginians looked to Goodwife Wright’s *maleficium* to explain the deaths of humans, plants, and animals. The records are too incomplete to make any assertions regarding Harding’s case with any real degree of certainty, but it is still possible to speculate. The reasons behind prosecuting Harding were probably due to a combination of factors, among them the undesirability of his presence in Northumberland County.

The next person to be brought to court on criminal witchcraft charges was Barbary Wingbrough (also known as Barbara Winbrow) in Northampton County in December of 1657. The entire record for her case reads, “*Barbary Wingbrough arraigned for a witch, but acquitted.*”\(^{20}\) The Wingbrough case is similar to the Harding case save for the conviction. Very little is known about Wingbrough except that it was said she

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\(^{19}\) Philip Alexander Bruce, *The Institutional History of Virginia*, 621.

\(^{20}\) Northampton County Records, vol. 1657-1664; General Court Orders, Dec. 1, 1657.
was "notoriously bad in her life and conversation." And, as in William Harding's case, it was a minister, Reverend Francis Doughtie, who brought the charges against her. 21

While even the most basic information about Wingbrough may be lost in history, there is certainly more known about Doughtie who was a colorful character in his own right. Ostensibly he was a minister in the Church of England, but he definitely had strong Puritan leanings, which eventually led to his dismissal from his vicarship in Old Sodbury, England in 1636. From there, Doughtie moved his family to Dorchester, Massachusetts in 1638. Within a year he became the minister of the Taunton church, but he was dismissed in 1641 over his liberal views regarding baptism. Like so many other Puritan dissidents, Doughtie found refuge in Rhode Island, but that was short-lived as well. He soon became involved with a colonizing project in Mespat, what is now Brooklyn, New York in 1642, but was forced to flee to Manhattan because of Algonquin uprisings. New York at this time was still a Dutch colony, which only recognized the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. However, the Dutch agreed to let the English form a congregation with Doughtie as their minister and with their collections going to the Dutch church. In 1646, Doughtie decided to return to Mespat, where this time he was so successful that his former partners took him to court, suing him for their share of the profits in the colony. When the court ruled against Doughtie, he threatened to appeal to the Dutch court in Europe. The judges helped him to change his mind by fining him and sentencing Doughtie to jail for twenty-four hours. 22

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From Mespat, Doughtie moved to Flushing where he was the minister from 1647 to 1654. He left his post there after suing his congregation for what he claimed was their failure to pay him what was specified in his contract. In 1655, Doughtie, now a widower, moved to Virginia with his widowed daughter, Mary Doughtie Vanderdonck, where he became the pastor of Hungars Parish in Accomack County. Two years later, Doughtie moved up the Virginia social ladder by marrying Captain Thomas Graves’ daughter, Ann. Graves was one of the original Jamestown founders and his other daughter, Verlinda, was married to Maryland’s Governor William Stone. At the time of her marriage, Ann Graves had already been married twice which was not unusual in this period, but what was unusual was that all three of her husbands had been the Hungar’s parish pastors one after the other. Graves, it would seem, had a penchant for ministers with Puritan leanings. Her second husband, Reverend Nathaniel Eaton, also came to Virginia via Massachusetts where he had been the first master of the school that later became Harvard. John Winthrop wrote of Eaton that after he came to Virginia he became a “drunken preacher.” In 1646, Eaton abandoned his wife and returned to England where he died in debtors’ prison.23

Very little is known about Doughtie during his tenure as the pastor of Hungar’s parish from 1655 to 1660, when he moved to Pickiawaxen, Charles County, Maryland. The records of the Wingbrough trial, as in so many of the Virginia witchcraft cases, contain only the barest of facts. There are, however, more extensive records from

another witchcraft case Doughtie was involved in and that is Joan Michel’s (also known as Mitchell) case in Charles County, Maryland in September 1661.24

When Reverend Doughtie tried to bring charges against Joan Michel, she immediately counter sued Doughtie and a number of his parishioners for slander. Her petition against Doughtie reads:

Whereas your poor petitioner is most shamfully used and her good name taken away from her she dowth desire that she may be righted and that shee may be searched by able women whether she bee such a person or no which those persons say I am and if I bee found to bee such a one I may bee punished by law or els to bee cleared by proclimation and that the worshipfull bench would take it into ther serious consideration how that I am abused and my good name taken from mee withoud disart and I most humbly desire your worship that I may have the law against them and I your poore petitioner shall bee bound to pray for you and yours. I desire yt Mr. Francis Doughty may bring those persons to light that have raised these scandalous reports of mee for hee says that I aslulted a woman at church and her teeth fell aking as if shee had bin mad and I desired him to tell mee who had raysed this report of mee and hee would not and so from one to another my good name is taken away that I cannot bee at quiet for them for it is all ther delight and table talke how to doe mee a mischief being a poore distressed widow but my trust is in God that he will plead my case for mee and will never suffer the poor and innocent to perish by the hands of ther enemes for of a sunday as I was going to church with too of Capt. Fendlall's folks Mr. Walker hurled stones at me as I was going a long and so hid hemself again which for any thing that I know his master might set him on to mischiefe mee and hee himself wrongs mee by word and I your petioioner shall be ever bound to pray for you.25

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Because the records lack any detail on the Wingbrough case, is it possible to assume that Doughtie used the same type of slander against Wingbrough that he used against Michel? Is it reasonable to assume the second-hand information that Wingbrough was "notoriously bad in her life and conversation" is accurate? If we can assume Wingbrough led a wicked life, then it would have been unlikely she attended church with the same apparent zeal as Michel, and, therefore, unlikely Doughtie could have tried to turn church member against church member. Even if Wingbrough had been inclined toward piety, she would have faced the problem of an overall lack of ministers. There were fewer than fifteen ministers in 1670 for a population of roughly 30,000 people. The population of Northampton County four years before the Wingbrough trial (1653) was only five hundred people. This would have meant Reverend Doughtie had a rather large congregation for one minister that would have made it difficult to keep track of so many parishioners. Thus, Doughtie's legal battle against Wingbrough, founded in his Puritan leanings and his propensity for witch hunting as seen in the Wingbrough and Michel cases, was probably limited to the court and to those within his sphere of influence. There are no other records of ministers involved in so many witchcraft cases in the Chesapeake. Admittedly, two cases would not constitute an overwhelming number of witchcraft cases in New England, but in the Chesapeake during this period the two cases represent forty percent of the witchcraft cases.

As a curious side note to the Michel case, some of the testimony given in court was slightly reminiscent of that heard in Joan Wright's trial (1626). Richard Tarlin testified that he heard one of the defendants in Michel's slander suit, only identified as "Mis Long," say "that the hene and Chickings she had of goodie Michell that the Chickings thearof did die in such a strang manner that she thaught sum old witch or other

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had bewitched them.” After the court determined Michel had failed to prove her case, they heard a case that Mary Doughtie Vanderdonck, Reverend Doughtie’s daughter, brought against Josiah Fendall, the Maryland governor who three years earlier had Edward Prescott arrested for allowing Elizabeth Richardson to be hung at sea for witchcraft. Vanderdonck failed to prove her suit against Fendall for failure to pay for her medical services rendered to two of his servants.27

The first case which tested the Lower Norfolk law aimed at stopping slander was against Ann Godby in 1659. The record reads:

Lower Norfolk: att a Court held the 15th Decemb. AD, (1659,) present at savill Gaskins, colI. John Sidney, Mr. John Porter, Junior, Lt. Colo. Thomas Lambart, Captain Richard ffoster, Capt. ff Emperor, Lt. Thomas Keeling, Br. Edmund Bowman, Whereas Ann Godby, the wife of Thomas Godby, hath Contrary to the order of the Court bearing date In May, 1655, Concerning Some Slanders & scandalls Cast upon Women under the notion of witches hath contemptuously acted in abusing & taking the good name & Creditt of Nicholas Robinson’s wife, terming her as witche, as by severall deposicons appeares. It is therefore ordered that the said Thomas Godby shall pay three hundred pounds of tobacco & Caske fine for her Contempt of the menconed oreder, (being the first time) & also pay & defray the Cost of sute together with the Witnesses Charges at twenty pounds tobacco per day also exec.28

In an already colorful cast of historical characters, Ann Godby stands out as one of the most intriguing. Kathleen Brown theorizes the justices who passed the Lower Norfolk law found their inspiration in Godby. She bases this hypothesis on the fact the justices had met privately a week before passing the law to hear a slander case involving Ann Godby and Mrs. Thomas Daines. Besides being sued for slander against Daines and


Robinson, Godby was also sued for slandering Puritan Elizabeth Loyd in 1648. Besides paying court costs, Godby received fifteen lashes and was forced to beg Loyd’s forgiveness publicly for her actions against Loyd. Brown further speculates that Godby herself was accused of witchcraft on at least one occasion based on a very brief court record which states nothing more than that an unnamed woman was accused of witchcraft in 1655. Not content to lash out verbally at other women, Godby was accused of violently assaulting a man in 1660.29

Among the characteristics which further set Godby apart from her neighbors was her membership in the Society of Friends, otherwise known as the Quakers. In fact, she had been fined fifty pounds of tobacco the first time for not attending Anglican services, and five hundred pounds of tobacco for her second offense. The first Quakers arrived in Virginia in the late 1650s. Quakerism appealed to some Virginians on a number of different levels. It provided an alternative to both Anglicanism and Puritanism, particularly in challenging the Puritan belief that only the elect would go to heaven. The Quakers believed salvation was offered to all men and women, not just a select few. For the individualistic men and women on the early Virginia frontier, perhaps the most appealing aspect was the belief was that men and women did not need an intermediary between themselves and God, therefore eliminating a need for ministers. Above all, the Quakers believed that souls had no ethnicity or gender. Quakers’ belief in egalitarianism put them directly at odds with hierarchal Virginia government and society. While they were pacifists when it came to war, there was nothing in their theology preventing them from disrupting other’s church services, plotting and protesting against the government,

and, in general, vigorously expressing their moral superiority to any who would listen—and particularly to those who would not.\textsuperscript{30}

It would seem Ann Godby and Quakerism were made for each other. Godby could cloak herself in religiosity as a justification for her antisocial behaviors. At the same time, her behavior appeared to non-Quakers as proof Quakers were a threat to the Virginia political and social order. Even if the Lower Norfolk County justices did not have Godby in mind when they passed their witchcraft statute, women like her were certainly the inspiration for it as well as the 1662 “brabbling women” statute which gave frustrated husbands the option of having their gossiping wives publicly ducked rather than paying the fines they had incurred from their wives’ scandalous speech.\textsuperscript{31}

The records are silent as to what was the source of conflict between Godby and Robinson. However, there are several pieces to the puzzle which may raise more questions than provide answers. Using land ownership as one indicator of social position, the Robinsons were higher on the Virginia social ladder than were the Godbys. Nicholas Robinson identifies himself as a planter on the Elizabeth River in his will dated August 1666.\textsuperscript{32} The exact acreage is not recorded, but it is certainly enough for Robinson to be recognized as belonging to the planter class. Thomas Godby, by contrast, had received a patent for only two hundred acres on the Elizabeth River on

\begin{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{31}Synder, \textit{Brabbling Women}, 1-18.

\textsuperscript{32}Lower Norfolk County Ref. Will Book #4, p.22, August 1666.
\end{footnotes}
March 2, 1647. The difference in the two men’s holdings would have been one standard that placed the Godbys well below the Robinsons socially. Another standard that separated the Godbys and Robinsons was the Robinsons’ legal right to possess a coat-of-arms which placed them among Virginia’s fledgling aristocracy. If this were all to the Godby-Robinson story, then it could be dismissed as a simple case of class conflict. However, there is the added dimension of religion. Both Ann Godby and Ann Robinson were Quakers, and this was not the only case that involved Godby and another Quaker. In Godby’s case against Quaker John Johnson, the justices found Godby “unhansom and not becoming a civil woman.”

The conflicts between Quakers and their non-Quaker neighbors have been well documented, but there has been little focus on the problems among Quakers themselves. It is unrealistic to assume they reserved their most obnoxious behavior for only non-Quakers, yet their shared persecution and a commonality of belief must have created bonds among Quakers that should have transcended petty squabbles. Ann Godby’s propensity for getting into conflicts with her neighbors, their religious affiliation notwithstanding, suggests her contentious nature had deeper roots than just her Quakerism.

Equally disdainful of the radical Friends were the Puritans in New England—although their contempt for them was on more ideological reasons than the conservative Virginians. Quakers threatened the Puritan orthodoxy, and, in turn the social and

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34Bruce, *Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*, 112.

political stability of Massachusetts, with the infusion of their egalitarianism into a society whose theological foundations included the belief that salvation was only possible for the elect. Among the Puritan communities most enamored with Quakerism was Salem, Massachusetts. As early as 1658, thirty-four Salem residents were identified as Quakers and were fined for their affiliation with the sect. In an effort to stem conversions to Quakerism, the General Court of Massachusetts passed legislation that allowed for fines and banishment for resident Quakers. The justices of Essex County sought, for what was to them a softer approach to the problem, and that was to fine residents who converted to Quakerism for not attending orthodox worship. In this way, they not avoided anti-Quaker rhetoric, but also maintained their jurisdiction over the populace. The Quakers of Salem, in contrast to Godby, were productive members of their community whose only real characteristic that made them stand out among the Puritan neighbors was their refusal to attend the Puritan church.36

The last of the women to go to court on witchcraft related charges from this period is Alice Stephens. Her case is almost as problematic as the unnamed witch Kathleen Brown speculates is Ann Godby. The entry in the court records for the Stephens case reads, “Alice Stephens accused as a witch but not cleared [sic].”37 Who Alice Stephens was, why she was accused of witchcraft, and what happened to her are lost. She does not appear in any other court records, indentured servants lists, ships’ passenger manifests, or family history websites which are available at this time. No


single explanation can satisfactorily account for her absence in these diverse databases. The likelihood is that Stephens was a young, single servant who never married or had children. She was simply not important enough to for anyone to think of recording any information about her other than a brief court appearance. The lack of information in the court records suggests that even though this was criminal case it was not important enough to merit any more than a single sentence in the official court records. When contrasted to the details presented in civil cases regarding witchcraft accusations, it becomes clear, with the exception of the Wright case (1626), that Virginians were more concerned with the accusation rather than one actually practicing the black arts.

It is not a coincidence that the only known witchcraft conviction occurred during one of Virginia’s most politically unstable eras. The Puritan influence of witchcraft as a heresy made its greatest impact on Virginia popular culture exactly when the Puritans had their greatest influence on Virginia politics. The staunchly royalist colony, however, resisted both Puritan-influenced religion and politics. In the end, the Puritans were never powerful enough to make a lasting impact on Virginia culture. The majority of the Chesapeake colonists welcomed Charles II’s ascension to the throne and a return to politics as usual. Although Virginians slowly began to accept witchcraft as a heresy, maleficium continued to be only a minor concern. Clearly it was used to rid the county of a ne'er-do-well. The real concern regarding witchcraft continued to be first and foremost was how it affected one’s reputation.

The colonists in Maryland during this period shared some of the same concerns regarding one’s reputation with Virginians. Although the original colonization of Maryland had been intended as a refuge for English Catholics, the colonists were more like their raucous southern neighbors than their religious neighbors to the north. One of the major differences between the two colonies was Maryland’s An Act Concerning Religion, better known as the Religious Toleration Act of 1649, which allowed a certain
amount of freedom to Christians to worship as their consciences dictated as opposed to the attempts to maintain an Anglican hegemony in Virginia. While Marylanders were more open to differences in Christian theological stances, they were more like Virginians when it came to witchcraft. Between 1654 and 1712 there were ten witchcraft-related cases. Two of these trials included the inquiries into the executions of Mary Lee (1654) and Elizabeth Richardson (1658) at sea as well as five criminal trials (1665, 1674, 1685, 1686, and 1712), and three civil trials involving slander suits (1654, 1661, and 1702). Of the five criminal trials there were only two convictions; John Cowman (1674), who received a reprieve from execution by the Upper House Assembly, and Rebecca Fowler who was executed in 1685.38

With the exception of Fowler's execution, the Maryland witchcraft trials follow the same type of patterns as those in Virginia. A prime example of this is the Manship-Godson slander suit. In October of 1654, Richard Manship brought slander charges in Maryland's Provincial Court at St. Mary's against Peter Godson and his wife, Jane, for accusing Manship's wife, Elizabeth, of practicing witchcraft. Witnesses Bartholomy Herringe, Margaret Herringe, and John Killy testified in support of the Manships. Their testimonies and the court's decision are as follows:

Bartho: Herringe aged forty yeares or thereabouts Sworne Saith, That Peter Godson and Richard Manship meeting in yor Pettrs plantation, Richard Manship asked the Said Peter Godson whether he would prove his wife a Witch, Peter Godson replyed take notice what I Say, I came to your house where your wife layd two Straws and the woman in a Jesting way Said they Say I am a witch, if I am a witch they Say I have not power to Skip over these two Strawes and bid the Said Peter Godson to Skip over

38Marc Carlson, Historical Witches and Witchtrials in North America, http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/witchtrial/na.html. Those acquitted of criminal charges were Elizabeth Bennet (1665), Hannah Edwards (1686), and Virtue Violl (1712). The civil suits include Elizabeth Manship (1654), Joan Michel (1661), and Katherine Prout (1702).
them and about a day after the Said Godson Said he was Lame, and thereupon would Maintain his wife to be a witch.

John Killy aged twenty five yeares or thereabouts Swome Sayth. That at the house of Phillip Hide, Richard Manship Said to Peter Godson you Said you would prove my wife a Witch, Peter Godson answered Gentlemen take Notice what I Say I will prove her a witch beare Witness you that Stand by. John Killey

Margarett Herringe aged twenty three or thereabouts Swome Saith, That Rich: Manship asked Peter Godson if he p. would prove his wife a witch, and Peter desired them that were present to take Notice what he Said your wife tooke four Strawes and Said in the Name of Jesus Come over these Strawes, and upon this your wife is a witch and I will prove her one.

Whereas Peter Godson and his wife had defamed Richard Manship's wife in Saying She was a witch and Uttered other Slanderous Speeches agst her, which was Composed and Determined by the plft and defendant before mr Richard Preston, Soc as Peter Godson Should pay Charges of Warrants and Subpcenas in these Actions which Richard Manship desired may be Manifested in Court that the Said Peter Godson & his wife have acknowledged themselves Sorry for their Speeches & pay Charges. 39

One might be inclined to dismiss the Manship-Godson case as an example of a simple conflict between neighbors except for the fact on the same day at court the Manships and Herringes testified against Jane Godson, describing how she had called Michael Baisey's wife a “whore and a Strumpett” calling into question the identity of the father of one of her sons. Peter Godson then sued the Herringes for their failure to pay him for treating Margaret Herringe after Phillip Hyde had beaten her. 40 One can only feel sympathy for

39 Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Vol. 10, 399, Maryland Archives Online. October 16, 1654
http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccoll/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000010/html/am10--399.html

40 Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Vol. 10, 398, 400, 402, Maryland Archives Online. October 16, 1654. http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccoll/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000010/html/am10--400.html. The transcript reads: Richard Manship Swome Saith that the wife of Peter Godson related to this Depont and his wife that Michael Baiseys wifes Eldest Son was not the Son of Anthony Rawlins her former husband, but She knew one at
the justices, Captain William Fuller, Edward Lloyd, Richard Preston, Leonard Strong, William Durand, and Richard Eninge, who were forced to listen to this colonial melodrama.

The conflicts between the Godsons, Manships, Herringes, and Baiseys that gave rise to this series of court cases and testimonies are reflective of the inherent social

Maryland that was the father of him, but Named not the man, and that the Said Michael Baisey's wife was a whore and a Strumpett up and Down the Countrey, and Said that Thomas Ward of Kent tould her Soe. Elizabeth Manship Sworne Saith the Same. Margaret Herringe Sworne Saith that the wife of Peter Godson affirmed that Anthony Rawlins Son was not his Son but the Son of another man at Maryland. Whereas Peter Godsons wife hath Slandered the wife of Michael Baisey & Saying She was a whore & a Strumpet up and Down the Countrey, It is ordered that the Said Godson's wife Shall be Committed into the Sheriffs hand untill She Shall find Security for the behaviour which the plft is Satisfied with as he hath declared in Court.

Elizabeth Manship aged fortie one yeares or thereabouts Sworne Saith That your Deponent Comeing home from Peter Godsons found Margaret Herringe lying on the floor Crying out, this Deponent asked her what She ailed, She toulde her this Deponent that Phillip Hyde had beaten her about a log of wood taken from the Garden fence, kicking her and beating her head against the Oyster Shells, her face and head and Side and private places all bruised, And that Phillip Hyde confess that he gave her four Blowes on the head Peter Godson Sworne Saith that he being Sent for to Margaret Herring and found her bruised upon her head and her Side and She Said that Phillip Hyde had done it and that Margaret Herring was in a Violent fever Thomas Gregory Swome Sayth that this Deponent being at Richard Manships Saw there Margaret Herringe lying in a Sad and Sick Condition, and that Deponents wife Staid with her three dayes and three Nights. Richard Manship Swome Sayth that Margaret Herringe Came to this Deponents house, very Sicke, and that Phillip Hyde Confest that he gave her three or four blowes & thrust her up against the Wall. Jane Godson Swome Saith that She this Deponent Saw Margaret Herringe, Sick and bruised in the head and that She affirmed that Phillip Hyde had beaten her.

Peter Godson demanded one thousand four hundred and thirty pounds of Tobacco of Bartho: Herringe for Physick and Surgery impended on his wife, as by Accompt in Court, which Accom hath been Examined by men of the Same facultie and regulated to five hundred and Ninety pounds of Tobacco, It is Ordered by this Court that Bartho: Herringe, Shall pay the Said five hundred and Ninetic pounds of Tobacco to the Said Peter Godson within twentie dayes or Else Execution.

John Ashcomb Sueth for Satisfaction out of Tho: Trumpeters Estate for attendance and provision in his Sickness for his winding Sheet and burying of his Corps, which is allowed to the Said Ashcombe from the Said Estate to the Value of two hundred and fifty pounds of Tobacco. It is ordered that Peter Godson Shall be allowed one hundd and Eighty pounds of Tobacco out of the Estate of Thomas trumpet which is for Physick to him in the time of his Sickness.
disorder in the Chesapeake during the seventeenth-century. There were obvious differences between the two colonies such as Virginia being colonized as a commercial enterprise and Lord Baltimore's more esoteric goal of establishing a colony where Roman Catholics in particular could freely practice their faith without governmental interference. Also, colonization of Maryland did not begin until 1634 putting the development of a Maryland social structure slightly behind the Virginians. Yet, despite these differences, Virginians and Marylanders had more in common with each other than differences that separated them. The evidence in these cases reflects the importance and nature of gossip as well as the fragility of life in the tobacco colonies.

Another feature the Marylanders and Virginians share is a relative anonymity in the historical records. Many of the land records from before 1704 were destroyed in a fire, therefore, making it difficult to place the Manships and Godsons on a social ladder based on land deeds. However, there are other court records of the Manships, Godsons, Baiseys, and Herringes that indicate an even more tangled history than the court records previously cited. The source of the Godson-Baisey conflict may be dated as early as March 1653, when Jane Godson's first husband, Richard Moore, appealed to Governor William Stone to settle a land dispute between himself and Michael Baisey which had escalated to the point of Baisey threatening to burn Moore's home and take his property. In October of 1654, the Manships testified Richard Moore had named his

41Maryland Archives Online
http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000415
/html/am415--44.html.

42Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Vol. 10, March 1653, 330,
http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000010
/html/am10--330.html. The transcript reads: To the Right Worll Capt William Stone
wife, Jane, as the executrix of his estate.\textsuperscript{43} This testimony came only four months after Peter Godson declared in court his intention of marrying Jane Moore, who by this time was a widow, but vowed not to claim ownership of any of the late Richard Moore’s property.\textsuperscript{44} Moore’s will reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
Know all men by these presents that Whereas my Husband Richard Moore being Sick and weake upon his death bed did Call to his wife Jane
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Governour and the Worshipfuil Concill. The Humble Peticon of Richard Moore Sheweth. That Whereas your Petitioner being Molestyd by Michael Baisey and threatned to take your Petitioners Land from him and burn his house and Continually Remaine in Such Language unto the disturbance of yor poor petitionr Your Petitioner humbly Craveth that an Order may be Granted from this Court that the Said Baiseys Lyne may be Laid forth between the Said Baisey and Yor Petitionrs which mr Clarke hath been twice to doe it and he will not Suffer it to be done, That yor Petr may know what properly belong to be his Right that Yor Petitionr may live quietly in his last age. And yor Petitionr Shall pray Upon the Petition of Richard Moore above recited, It is Ordered that the Survey of Anthony Rawings his Childrens Land (being the land Menconed in the Petition) be perfected according to the Certifificate thereof returned and Pattented, And then if the Said Children or any on their behalf have any Cause of Complaint for want of the due quantity they may apply themselves to the Court for releife therein
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{43}Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Vol. 10, 400, Maryland Archives Online. October 16, 1654. http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafie/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000010/html/am10--400.html. The transcript reads: Whereas it appeareth by oath of Richard Manship and Elizabeth Manship that Rich: Moore on his Death bed did ordaine his wife his Sole Executrix and left all at her disposing. It is Ordered that the Said Executrix Shall Exhibit a perfect Inventorie of the Said Richard Moores Estate into the next Court or into the Secretaries office within three months

\textsuperscript{44}Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Vol. 10, July 6, 1654, http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafie/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000010/html/am10--396.html. The transcript reads: Know all men by these presents That Whereas I Peter Godson Chirurgeon intending to Intermarry with Jane Moore of Calvert County in the Province of Maryland widdow, have agreed and doe hereby Consent and agree (in Case the Said Marriage take Effect) not to lay any Clayme to or Intermeddle with all or any part of the Estate late of Richard Moore deceased late husband of the Said Jane Moore menconed in the within written Deed or Conveyance to be by the Said Jane disposed of to her Childrens use, but will Leave the Same to the Said Children accordingly Witnesse my hand this Sixt day of July 1654.
Moore and desired her to bring him the will which he had formerly made and he pused it, and after that he Cancelled it and Caused it to be burnt and made his wife whole and Sole Executor to Sett and dispose of amongst her Children as She will, Richard Manship and Elizabeth Manship his wife being present at the Same time Know all men by these presents that I Jane Moore the wife of Richard Moore deceased doe bind over the four hundred Acres of Land which we now live upon to be Equally Divided betwixt my three Sons, Viz. Richard Moore Roger Moore and Timothy Moore, and they to be of age when they are Come to Eighteen, and the Maids at fifteen, and fourteen head of female Cattell for Seven Children for their use with all the Increase, the Males being taken out of them and as they Come to age or Marry their Shares to be taken out proportionably, and if any of these Children Should dye the Cattell to goe amongst the rest, and for the Land She is to Enjoy it So Long as She the Said Jane doth Live, and then to Come to the Children The marke of Jane Moore Teste Richard Recklesse the marke of George W White

Moreover, Richard Manship and Bartholomy Herringe were apparently close enough for Manship to leave Herringe a canoe in his will which Elizabeth Manship substituted a cow and calf after Manship’s death. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder why the Herringes would testify on behalf of the Manships—or why Jane Godson attacked Michael Baisey’s wife’s reputation. Given that Richard Moore thought enough of the Manships to have them witness the signing of his will, one can speculate the source of the Godson-Manship conflict may have been over the carrying out of Moore’s wishes that his property go to his children, which in turn may have prompted Godson to proclaim no intention of interfering with Moore’s wishes.


46 Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Vol. 10, 400, Maryland Archives Online. October 16, 1654. http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000010/html/am10--400.html. The transcript reads: Be it known unto all men by these presents that I Elizabeth Manship doe resigne over unto Bartholomy Herring my full right amid Title of one Cowe Calfe, which was given unto the Said Bartholomy Herring in Liew of a Cannoe which my Husband Richard Manship, upon his last will and Testamt left March 23d unto Bartholomy Herring as Witness my hand march 1656 the 23d 1656 Signum Elizabeth A Manship
The witchcraft accusation would appear to be lost in this web of accusations and threats. Yet, it is revealing in that it does shed some light into beliefs regarding witchcraft. The invocation of Christ’s name reflects how religion and magic were intertwined with popular beliefs. The records are silent as to the religious beliefs of the Godsons and Manships, but clearly there existed a belief in what contemporary scholars define as sympathetic magic, that is like affects like, in this case stepping over straws leading to lameness, as well as a belief that Christ could be called on whether it be perceived as a form of magic or in a prayer. An eighteenth-century example of a spell-prayer from South Carolina invoked the power of the Trinity to cure a bewitched gun where a hunter was told to "lod your gun in the name of the father, Son, and holy ghost and put the point of the tung [of a dead deer] down the next powder . . . and when you discharge your gun do it in the name of the father, son, and holy gost [sic]."

Although the Manship-Godson case was a civil suit, the records pertaining to it provide more insight into specific witchcraft beliefs than the transcripts for the only criminal case during this period in Maryland. The transcript for this case is as brief as Barbary Wingbrough’s in Virginia. On October 11, 1665, the court record reads, “Elizabeth Bennett for Witch &c: Ret, not presentable.” Who Bennet was and why she

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47 Edward F. Terrar, Social, Economic, and Religious Beliefs Among Maryland Catholic People During the Period of 1639-1660 (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 266-267.


was accused of witchcraft, let alone what was the evidence presented against her was never recorded. There were other Bennetts in Maryland, but it does not appear she was related to them. The overall lack of details regarding the Bennet criminal case in contrast to the more detailed records of the civil Manship-Godson case reflects the importance at least some Marylanders placed on the difference between practicing the black arts and the suspicion of doing the same.

The one exception to the general attitudes in respect to witchcraft in the Chesapeake was the Rebecca Fowler case in 1685. Fowler enjoys the dubious distinction of being the only person formally convicted and executed for witchcraft in either Maryland or Virginia. On October 9, 1685, in Prince George's County, Maryland, Fowler was hung for:

having not the feare of God before her eyes, but being led by the instigation of the Divell certain evill & dyabolicall Artes called witchcrafts enchantments charmes & sorceryes wickedly divelishly and feloniously at Mount Calvert . . . & several other places . . . did use practice & exercise in upon & against one Francis Sandsbury & Several others . . . and their bodyes were very much the worse, consumed, pined & lamed.  

The specific charms may not be detailed in the records, but there is a clear incorporation of the beliefs of witchcraft as a heresy in both culture and law. Because Fowler had been accused of physically injuring Francis Sandsbury and others, the seriousness of the her offenses rose to the level of a capital crime. While Fowler's conviction and execution may seem barbaric by contemporary standards, it should be noted that execution in Maryland for witchcraft was not taken lightly. On February 9, 1670, the Chancery Court passed the following provision taking away the ability of county courts to execute  

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witches and sorcerers, and placing the right to execute the convicted solely in the hands of the Provincial Court thus providing the convicted with a small modicum of hope for a reprieve.

Comiconrs to Enquire by the Oaths of Twelve Good and Lawfull men of your County aforesaid of all manner of felonys Witchcraft Enchantments Sorceries magick Arts Trespasses, forestallings Ingrossing and Extontions Whatsoever and of all and Singu and offences of which Justices of the peace in England Provided that you proceed not in any of the Cases aforesaid to take life on member but that in Every Such Case you Send the prisoners with their Indictmt and the whole matter depending before you to the next Prov’” Court to be holden for this our Province whensoeven or wheresoever holden there to be tryed.  

Fowler’s case reflects the hesitancy of Marylanders to execute a witch. The jury found Fowler guilty, but respited the case. In other words, the jury turned their findings over to the court, but also turned the evidence over to the court while explicitly deferring to the court’s decision if the court should have found her not guilty based on the presented evidence. The court took several days to consider the evidence before agreeing with the jury and ordering Fowler’s execution.

Slightly more details were recorded in the John Cowman case (1674). They are as follows:

That whereas Iohn Cowman being Arraigned Convicted and Condemned upon the statute of the first of King James of England &c. for Witchcraft Conjuration Sorcery or Enchantment used upon the Body of Elizabeth Goodale and no Lying under that Condemnation, and hath humbly

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Implored and Beseeched Us your Lordships Petitioners to Mediate and Interceede in his behalf with Your Excellency for a Reprieve and Stay of Execution—

Your Excellencies Petitioners do therefore accordingly in all Humble Manner beseech your Excellency that the Rigour and Severity of the Law to which the said Condemned Malefactor hath Miserably Exposed himself may be Remitted and Relaxed by the Exercise of your Excellencys Mercy & Clemencie upon so wretched and Miserable an Object And your Petitioners as in Duty bound will pray &c

Signed by Order of the house Robert Ridgley
Upper house february the 17th

The Lieutenant General hath Considered of the Petition here above and is willing upon the request of the Lower house that the Condemned Malefactor be reprieved and Execution Stayed, Provided that the Sheriff of St Maries County carry him to the Gallows, and that the rope being about his neck it be there made known to him how much he is Beholding to the Lower house of Assemblie for Mediating and Interceeding in his Behalf with the Lieu’ General and that he remain at the City of St Maries to be Employed in Such Service as the Governor and Council shall think fitt during the Pleasure of the Governor. M’ Truman Sent with Longs Petition & Lease to the Lower house. 54

The primary interest is not on recording the details of Cowman’s transgressions for prosperity, but rather it is on detailing the mercy shown to Cowman in reducing his sentence to the mere motions of an execution. Like Fowler, Cowman could not be executed by a county court, and when his case was presented to the Upper House Assembly, even though he had already been convicted of sorcery, it is clear that Maryland justices were reluctant to execute him. From the transcripts, it appears that they believed Cowman was guilty of somehow injuring Elizabeth Goodale through supernatural means, but what is conspicuously absent is any mention of a demonic covenant which appears in the Fowler records. As already seen in the previous

Chesapeake records, the absence of details is not significant in itself. In Cowman’s case, even if there is no mention of an infernal compact, it is clear the jurors in his trial believed he employed supernatural powers to maliciously hurt Goodale.

Both the Fowler and Cowman crimes would fall into the broad category of assault and battery at the very least, and at the most attempted homicide. Generally speaking, those found guilty of assault and battery would be fined so many pounds of tobacco depending on the severity of their crime. In cases of homicide, Maryland courts recognized three different levels. The first being felonious, either murder or manslaughter. The second was justifiable homicide that occurred during the performance of a legal responsibility such as an execution. And lastly, there was excusable homicide where a death occurred as an accident or in self-defense where there was no criminal intent.\footnote{Semmes, Crime and Punishment in Early Maryland, 119-141.}

In order to put their death sentences into perspective, it may be helpful to look at the nature of executions in Maryland during the early colonial period. Between 1638 and 1685, fifteen people were executed in Maryland. Eight of the condemned were found guilty of murder, one of piracy, five were hung for unspecified crimes, and Fowler was the only one executed for witchcraft. In fact, she was only one of two women executed with the other being Isabella Yousley who was hung for murder on April 17, 1671. The next execution after Fowler’s did not occur until fifty-three years later, in 1738, an unnamed male slave was executed for an unspecified felony.\footnote{Execution 1608 To July 18, 1797, http://users.bestweb.net/~rg/execution/1-1500.htm.} If it is possible to assume that the level unspecified crimes were on par with murder, then it is possible to assume that Maryland courts saved execution for only the most heinous crimes. Because Fowler was convicted of bewitching several people causing them physical damage, it may be
probable the justices believed her guilty of attempted felonious homicide and thus warranting her execution. John Cowman, on the other hand, had only been convicted of bewitching Elizabeth Goodale—and the nature of the bewitchment was never named thus leaving open the possibilities that he could have cast something as simple as a love spell on her to physically hurting her.\(^{57}\) Whatever the nature of the spell, it is clear it was enough to sentence Cowman to death, but the not serious enough to go through with the execution.

A year after Fowler's conviction and execution, Hannah Edwards was brought to trial on criminal witchcraft charges. The surviving records read, “In May Court 1686 Hannah Edwards indicted for the [witchcraft] and Indictment Concluded Ut ante.”\(^{58}\) Again, the reason Edwards was brought to trial do not survive, however, a clue to her character that may have brought her to trial can be found in her genealogy. Hannah Potts Edwards was the daughter of Dr. John Potts, one of the early Virginia colonists.\(^{59}\) This is the same John Potts who participated the negotiations with the Powhatan after the

\(^{57}\)As a side note on Goodale, she appears in Maryland court records under three different names—Isabella Goodale, or Elizabeth Gibbs, or Elizabeth Goodale, found in Proceedings of the Provincial Court, 1670/1-1675, Volume 65, Preface xxxiv. In February 1668, she brought a complaint against Captain James Neal regarding the length of servitude of her five-year old son Gilbert. Among the justices who heard the case was Lieutenant Colonel John Washington. Found in Proceedings of the Provincial Court, 1670/1-1675, Volume 65, 475, http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000065/html/am65--475.html.


massacre of 1622. Captain William Tucker concluded peace negotiations with the Powhatan in May of 1623 by proposing a toast. Two hundred Powhatan died within minutes from the drink laced with poison by Dr. John Potts, and another fifty were immediately slaughtered. 

It could be despicable behavior ran in their family—and they got away with it judging by Edwards’ acquittal and Potts tenure as Virginia governor from 1628 to 1630.

Whether it was in Virginia or Maryland, the residents of the Chesapeake were more concerned with some semblance of social harmony than they were maleficium, hence the majority of witchcraft cases in this area were slander suits rather than criminal prosecutions. Even with the most severe exception of the Rebecca Fowler’s execution (1685), Chesapeake residents were reluctant to execute convicted witches as evidenced by the jury respiting her case to court and their taking several days reviewing the evidence before sentencing her to death. The leniency shown to William Harding (1655) and John Cowman (1674), with their sentences of a ten lashes and going through the motions of an execution respectively, is an indication of what a low priority the practice of the blacks arts had. Indeed, the more detailed records of the civil suits appear to bear witness that it was the appearance of propriety that mattered the most to Virginians and Marylanders.

CHAPTER 7. GETTING REVENGE

Samson said to them, "Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you."

Judges 15:7

The post-Interregnum years of 1670 to 1680 were among the most turbulent in early Virginian political and social history with the most notable event being Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. Although most Virginians initially welcomed the return of the Stuart monarchy and Sir William Berkeley as governor, it soon became apparent the changes that the crown and Berkeley sought to make were not in what Virginians considered to be in their best interests. One source of discontent was founded in Charles II's attempt to bring the empire under a tighter governmental control. Among the changes that displeased Virginians was a series of navigation acts designed to eliminate the Dutch from the lucrative colonial trade. To the ambitious, individualistic, economically driven Virginians, the navigation acts were a direct assault on their freedom. In addition, some aspects of Berkeley's vision of what Virginia should be were in conflict with many Virginians' dreams of their future. Berkeley's goals were to solidify the evolving hierarchal society, limit imperial control over the colony, and, much to the dismay of many Virginians, Berkeley wanted to diversify the economy from its tobacco-based agricultural system.¹

particularly resentful of those men who had established themselves in public office most of whom were Berkeley’s displaced Cavaliers. These offices became hereditary, further solidifying the aristocracy’s positions of wealth and power. Abuse of office for personal gain was the rule rather than the exception. Tensions between the aristocracy, bound servants, and the lower classes increased as the opportunities for advancement decreased. Adding to this volatile situation was increasing tensions between the Algonquian and the colonists.² It was in this world that Joan Jenking and Alice Cartwright were accused of witchcraft, both of whose cases share a common element of revenge.

The theme of revenge was overwhelming in the case against Joan Jenking (1675). Captain William Carver began the legal proceedings against Jenking with his request that the judges of Lower Norfolk County order an examination of Jenking for the presence of a witch’s teat. The record reads:

Att a Court held the 15th of June 1675. Lower Norfolk. Judges present Captain William Robinson, major Francis Sayer, Mr. George Fouler, Mr. Malachy Thruston, Mr. Anthony Lawson. Upon the Information of Captain William Carver against Joane the wife of Lazarus Jenking Concerning her being familiar with evell spiritts and useing witchcraft &c. It is ordered that the Cunstable of Tanners Creek presincts doe somonds William Porten Charles Egerton Plomer Bray Sarah Porten Joyce Langley Margere Laurance Mary Chichester and Anne Milicent to Repayre to the house of the said Lazarus Jenkings upon the 17th of this instant June and there to make a deligent search concerning the same according to the 118 chapter of doulton, and that If Such thing bee found they to give in their reports upon oath to the next magistrate that Shee may bee dealt with all according to Law in Such cases provided, and further ordered that If Captain Carver shall think fitt hee may bee there also major Sayer hereby Requested to give them their oaths.³

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³William and Mary College Quarterly (series 1) (vol. 2, pp. 163-165) communicated by Edward W. James, 1898.
The “118 chapter of doulton” is a reference to Michael Dalton’s *The Country Justice* (1619). Many of the colonial judges lacked any legal training and, therefore, relied on *The Country Justice* for guidance. In this instance, the judges were referring to the presence of a witch’s teat which Dalton lists as physical evidence against a witch, describing it as, “Their faid familiar hath some bigg or place vpon their body, where he sucketh them.” The use of women to examine Jenking is an example of how the court accepted women’s testimony in such matters as that of experts.

It is difficult to determine, at times, Virginians’ specific beliefs regarding witchcraft because the records are so incomplete, but the presence of a witch’s teat seems to be of great importance to them, although, oddly enough, the function of the teat is to feed familiars and there is no mention of them. When Henry Corbyn testified in a Maryland court he not only found a witch’s teat on Mary Lee when crossing the Atlantic on *The Charity*, as discussed in Chapter 5, but it shrunk back into her body after its discovery. In the Jenking’s case, Carver requested the court to order the same type of examination of Jenking. Later Lower Norfolk judges would order a panel of women to examine Grace Sherwood, the most famous of the Virginia witches, for the presence of a witch’s teat. These examinations are consistent with Jeffrey Burton Russell’s argument that the English witchcraft differed from continental witchcraft in that the English placed a greater emphasis on witches’ familiars even going so far as to name them such things as Vinegar, Pyewacket, and Grizel Greediguts much in the same way one would name a family pet. Yet, the Virginia court records lack any description of a familiar. One explanation for this may simply be that the court recorders did not see testimony regarding them important enough to include in the official transcripts.

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Equally important as the presence of the teat is the absence of spectral evidence that was so predominant in the Salem witchcraft trials. This suggests the unarticulated Virginian beliefs of this period were somewhere in between the extreme of the Puritan belief in a demonic covenant and a witchcraft as a mere practice. Because familiars were not benevolent creatures, even though they are not explicitly mentioned, there is a sense of *maleficium* associated with these beliefs, which in turn re-enforces the criminality of witchcraft. The judges may have ordered Jenking’s examination at the behest of Carver, but there is nothing in the records to indicate the order was carried out or that Jenking was ever brought to trial. This leaves three obvious possibilities: first, the panel of women did not find a witch’s teat, or second, a witch in the presence of a company of rogues was simply not worth the trouble of prosecuting, especially if there was no profit to be gained. A third possibility is the judges knew William Carver all too well to take his charge of witchcraft seriously.

Unlike most of the Virginia witchcraft cases in which a witchcraft accusation arose from a conflict between women, the Jenking case was spurred by a conflict between two men—Captain William Carver and Lazarus Jenking, Joan Jenking’s husband. Lazarus Jenking came to Virginia as an indentured servant on June 8, 1661, with a servitude length of four years. The English agent, Charles Roberts, evidently sold Jenking’s contract to Captain Carver, who in return for buying Jenking’s and ten others’ contracts received the patent for five hundred acres on October 16, 1671. The land appears to have become a source of conflict between Jenking and Carver. On May 15, 1675, Carver took Jenking to court. The next day, the court dismissed the suit and Jenking promptly filed a suit against Carver that was dismissed as well. Within a month of the dismissal of both suits, Carver accused Joan Jenking of being a witch.6 If it may

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6 *William and Mary College Quarterly* (series 1) (vol. 2, pp. 163-165) communicated by Edward W. James, 1898; Crandall Shifflett, Search the Registers of Servants Sent to Foreign Plantations, 1654 - 1686,
be assumed that Carver did not believe she was a witch, then it can be easily argued that Carver’s motivation against the Jenkings was one of revenge for the lawsuit they filed against him.

Other than being Lazarus’ wife, it is unclear who Joan Jenking was. If she fits the typical profile of women in Virginia, then she would have come to Virginia as a young, single servant. There are twelve Joans listed in the Registers of Servants Sent to Foreign Plantations, 1654-1686, none of whom either arrived with Lazarus Jenking or even named Jenking, suggesting that they married in Virginia. Either no destination or Virginia was given for six of these twelve women, thus reducing the possible candidates down to six women. If Joan Jenking came to Virginia as a single servant and married Lazarus after her arrival, then the most likely candidate is Joan Knight from Crewkerne Pill, Somersetshire. Knight’s four years of indentured servitude began on February 19, 1657, putting her within the right time frame to be Joan Jenking. The strongest evidence that Joan Knight and Joan Jenking are the same person is that the owner of Knight’s contract is no other than the mariner William Carver.  

The main character in this story is not Joan Jenking but Captain William Carver, whose title of captain probably came from his being a master and owner of at least two ships. It is not clear when he first came to Virginia but he is identified as early as 1659 as


the master of *The Spread Eagle* in a deposition regarding a voyage from Bristol to Virginia and the Virgin Islands. Carver was certainly living there on October 15, 1663 when Governor Berkeley appointed him a justice for Lower Norfolk County. His relationship with Berkeley appears to have run hot and cold, as evidenced when Berkeley appointed Carver to the Quorum on February 15, 1665, then suspended him on November 25, 1665, and then reinstated Carver on October 15, 1667. Carver served as High Sheriff from 1670-1672 and after which he returned to his seat on the bench; he was also a member of the House of Burgesses in 1665, 1669, and 1672. His navigation skills probably earned him the position as General Surveyor of Highways for the Western and Southern branches of Elizabeth River in 1669. In 1664, Carver paid Henry Goodricke twenty thousand pounds of tobacco for a forty-ton ship called *The Expedicon*. Between 1664 and 1675, Carver received four separate land patents for a total of two thousand six hundred seventy-four acres all in the Lower Norfolk area. In addition to the five hundred acres he received in 1671, he received one thousand three hundred ninety in two separate patents in 1664, and seven hundred eighty four acres in 1675.

By all standards, Captain William Carver was a wealthy and powerful man—yet he was a seventeenth-century Virginian. For all his wealth and power, he still accused Joan

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Jenking of being a witch, probably not because he believed she was a witch, but rather because accusation could be a weapon against Lazarus Jenking. The fact Carver's former servants filed a lawsuit against him must have been an insult to his honor and character, although he should have been accustomed to it since he brought six slander suits to court between 1667 and 1670. There are no records indicating Jenking ever owned any land during this period and this would have placed the Jenkings only slightly higher on the Virginia social ladder than the indentured servants and slaves. The lawsuit must have seemed odious to Carver that someone so low in society would dare to insult someone placed so high in the Virginia social and political arenas as himself. With nothing to sue the Jenkings over, Carver did the next best thing in getting his revenge against them. He went after the only thing they had of value and that was their reputations. In his direct attack on Joan Jenking’s character, he indirectly attacked her husband’s.

The Jenkings were not the only servants with whom Carver had problems. Three of his servants ran away from his Lower Norfolk plantation for thirteen days. As a punishment for this, they each had an extra two years added on to their servitude contracts and were ordered to pay Carver five thousand three hundred sixty-one pounds of tobacco, the sum he claimed it cost him to pursue them. This fee seems rather high when contrasted with a common hangman’s fee of two thousand one hundred pounds of tobacco in this same period. Carver’s ruthlessness in these matters is an example of ambitious Virginia gentleman’s behavior.

It was probably his wealth and power that allowed him literally to get away with murder. While dining with Thomas Gilbert on July 25, 1672, Carver stabbed him to death with a knife. At his trial a month later, Carver testified, “that as for his part he kneweth nothing of It, noe more then the child that is now unborne, nor of any other action that day nor severall days before or after.” Carver went so far as to call prosecutor Richard Taylor a “Cow Killer,” to which Taylor replied, “he was nott a man killer
neyther did he believe that [Gibert] was the first [he killed]." Although Carver was acquitted in Gilbert's murder, it was believed he was capable of murder if he "might get something by it."\textsuperscript{10}

The year 1675 was tumultuous not only Carver and the Jenkings, but for all Virginians. Relationships between the colonists were strained as were those between the colonists and the Algonquian. For those inclined to believe in the importance of omens, there was a series of incidents which later Virginians thought was a portent of what was to be. Thomas Mathew wrote of them in his narrative of Bacon's Rebellion:

About the year 1675, appeared three prodigies in that country, which from the attending disasters, were looked upon as ominous presages. The one was a large comet every evening for a week, or more at south-west; thirty five degrees high streaming like a horse tail westwards, until it reached (almost) the horizon, and setting towards the northwest. Another was, flights of pigeons in breadth nigh a quarter of the midhemisphere, and of their length was no visible end; whose weights broke down the limbs of large trees whereon these rested at nights, of which the fowlers shot abundance and eat them; this sight put the old planters under the more portentous apprehensions, because the like was seen (as they said) in the year 1640 when the Indians committed the last massacre, but not after, until that present year 1675. The third strange appearance was swarms of flies about an inch long, and big as the top of a man's little finger, rising out of spigot holes in the earth, which eat the new sprouted leaves from the tops of the trees without other harm, and in a month left us.\textsuperscript{11}


Mathew does not go into any detail on how Virginians perceived these events only that they were seen as portends of a disaster or disasters to come. In light of this, it is still possible to use Biblical references to understand how Virginians could have interpreted these events. Heavenly bodies, such as the comet, have a long history of being understood as tools with which to predict the future. Complex systems as astrology to singular appearances of astronomical phenomena have been used to foretell a number of different types of events. As to the pigeons, according to folklorist J.R. Porter, there are references in the Old Testament to associate birds with witchcraft and magic.12 Michael Dalton identified the flying, singing, or feeding of birds as a method of divining the future, although he did not go into any of the particulars.13 The strongest evidence for their interpretation of the pigeons as a sign foretelling disaster is their previous appearance before the Powhatan attacked. The flies Mathew describes can easily have been seen as analogous to the locusts that plagued Egypt in Exodus. If it is not clear how some Virginians interpreted these events, it is still significant that they did.

Even Virginians not inclined to see supernatural meanings in natural events saw the deaths of several servants of plantation owner Thomas Matthew at the hands of the Doeg as a portent of a war to come. Retaliatory raids between the colonists, the Doeg, and the Susquehanna escalated to the point that in August 1675 Governor Berkeley appointed several militia officers to investigate the murders. Among those officers was Colonel John Washington, who had called for an investigation into Elizabeth Richardson’s death for witchcraft. Despite Berkeley’s efforts, murders on all sides

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continued, often in the most brutal fashion accompanied with various forms of torture.\textsuperscript{14} The violence did not serve to galvanize the colonists and the Algonquian against each other—on the contrary it exacerbated the differences between the various factions within each group until it erupted into a full-scale civil war known as Bacon's Rebellion. The colonists divided themselves along two lines—those who sided with Governor Berkeley and those who aligned themselves with Nathaniel Bacon, a brash, young aristocrat newly arrived to the colony. Among those Bacon counted as his followers were William Rookings, Jane Rookings' son, and Captain William Carver.\textsuperscript{15}

Bacon's followers had two things in common; first, they detested all the Algonquian not taking into consideration whether they had been friendly to the settlers or not. Bacon's followers tended to come from, but were most definitely not limited to, the lower echelons of Virginia society. The poorer Virginia landowners lived primarily in the frontier areas, and were therefore the most vulnerable to the raids, thus making them distrustful of all the Algonquian. Bacon's followers felt Berkeley was not doing enough to protect them from the raids. By taking a stand with Bacon against Berkeley, they gained the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. They could get rid of their Indian problem while at the same time getting rid of Berkeley.

The second commonality between them was their loathing for Governor Berkeley and his followers, who were known as the Green Spring Faction named after Berkeley's plantation, Green Spring. The diminishing opportunities for advancement fueled already intense resentments. The rigid political conditions of 1675 ensured men like William Rookings, Junior would never accomplish what his father had in twenty years. To fight


\textsuperscript{15}William and Mary College Quarterly (series 1) (vol. 2, pp. 163-165) communicated by Edward W. James.
against Berkeley and his Green Spring faction provided Rookings and others like him what they believed to be the opportunity to return Virginia to a state where ambitious men could make their dreams a reality no matter what their status was at birth. For Rookings in particular, to fight with Bacon allowed him the opportunity to get revenge against men like Burcher who brought his mother to court expecting her to publicly apologize for calling Ann Burcher a witch—an epithet Rookings may have thought Burcher deserved. In a world where reputation and honor were highly valued, it is unlikely Rookings would have forgotten or forgiven his parents’ humiliation at the hands of a Virginian aristocrat.

Why Captain Carver would join Bacon raises a number of questions. He was one of the richest and most powerful men in the colony. Should Bacon fail, Carver would lose everything. On the other hand, should Bacon succeed in ousting Berkeley, Carver would have been even more powerful. The explanation to his decision probably lies in Carver’s personality. He had amply demonstrated that he was greedy, ambitious, and violent. Carver could not resist the opportunity when it presented itself to become even more powerful. Moreover, he could get revenge on Berkeley, who had set him on the Lower Norfolk bench only to remove him then place him back again.

Both Rookings and Carver gambled on Bacon and lost. Each was executed for his participation in Bacon’s Rebellion. Governor Berkeley had the last vengeful action against Carver when wrote of him and his estate,

... I desire that Carvers Estate may bee Secured to help pay the Charge of your County, and If any one Shall presume to Conceale itt, hee Shall bee accopmited to have Conspired with Carver and Soe his Estate bee likewise Subject to Confiscation. Novemb 4th, 1676. Your frend & Servant William Berkeley16

16William and Mary College Quarterly (series 1) (vol. 2, pp. 163-165) communicated by Edward W. James.
One element present in both seventeenth-century New England and Virginia beliefs is associating Native Americans with the Devil. Alexander Whitaker, a Puritan minister, was perhaps the first to link the Powhatan priests with Satan in 1613, but he certainly was not the last.\textsuperscript{17} If the ethnocentric Virginians did not already associate the Algonquian with Satan, the reports of Virginians suffering torture at the hands of the Algonquian before being killed would have certainly held some kind of demonic connotation for them. Whether Virginians in this period associated witchcraft with a Christian heresy, or perceived it as a cunning practice, or saw it somewhere in between, there were some Virginians who saw the Algonquin as having the capability to bewitch people. Thomas Mathew recorded the following story in his narrative of Bacon's Rebellion:

Collo. Mason took the king of the Doegs son home with him, who lay ten days in bed, as one dead, with eyes and mouth shut, no breath discerned, but his body continuing warm, they believed him yet alive; the aforenamed Capt. Brent (a papist) coming thither on a visit, and seeing his little prisoner thus languishing said "perhaps he is pawewawd i.e. bewitched, and that he had heard baptism was an effectual remedy against witchcraft wherefore advised to baptize him Collo. Mason answered, no minister could be had in many miles; Brent replied your clerk Mr. Dobson may do that office, which was done by the church of England liturgy; Coll. Mason with Capt. Brent godfather and Mrs. Mason godmother, my overseer Mr. Pimet being present, from whom I first heard it, and which all the other persons (afterwards) affirmed to me; the four men returned to drinking punch, but Mrs. Mason staying and looking on the child, it opened the eyes, and breathed, whereat she ran for a cordial, which he took from a spoon, gaping for more and so (by degrees) recovered, though before his baptism, they had often tried the same means but could not by

\textsuperscript{17}Richard Beale Davis, "The Devil In Virginia in the Seventeenth Century," in \textit{The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography}, April 1957, vol. 65, no. 2, 131-149.
no endeavors wrench open his teeth. This was taken for a convincing proof against infidelity.\textsuperscript{18}

The episode Mathew described illustrates the adaptation of a number of different beliefs to explain the child's coma and recovery. The English saw the coma as the result of a Native American religious practice they had enough knowledge of to define it as "pawewawd." What is more telling about the Virginians is how they chose to solve the problem through baptism. Rather than their religious differences causing friction, it appears to have brought them together with an Anglican and a Catholic serving as godfathers to the same child. This should not be construed as the action of enlightened men united in their Christian faith over the fate of a poor pagan. This is evident, if for no other reason, in their return to what sounds like a party. The men's attitude, instead, reflects their ostensible Christianity.

The story of the young Doeg's baptism reveals how marginalized witchcraft beliefs were in Virginia. It is evident they did believe that pagan supernatural forces were at work, and that their Christian God could defeat the evil force, but it does not appear to be important to them. Furthermore, it appears their beliefs constitute an incoherent and often contradictory body of thought, ultimately a reflection of Virginia character as a whole. Given that Virginians were an aberration of English colonists in that they lacked a common cultural tradition they could draw on, it is not surprising then that their beliefs in the supernatural would lack a formal, coherent consistency. Rather than seeing the boy's bewitchment in a traditional Christian sense, they saw it in terms of a Native American belief, but they did no more in placing it within their belief system other than acknowledging the superiority of their God. Part of this may be explained as a

reflection of the overall lack of concern about theological matters, but certainly conditions on the frontier were also a factor. With so many life-threatening dangers that could be explained in natural terms, there was little need to bring in supernatural factors. This, in combination with their overall lack of religiosity, indicates the low importance of such matters to them. As seen in this story, drinking punch was of greater importance to the loyalists than was the spiritual warfare taking place over the boy’s body and soul.

In the background of this story was Ann Mason. Often under appreciated in the story of Bacon’s Rebellion are the roles women played, and how their actions changed how Virginians viewed women. Mason differs from many of the loyalist women in that she plays the active role of a nurse. Most of the women who supported Berkeley tended to be passive participants later described as victims the rebels took hostage and abused in the most vile manner, thus supporting their cause as tools of propaganda. One exception to this was Lady Frances Berkeley, Governor Berkeley’s wife, who successfully pleaded her husband’s case in England, returning to Virginia with one thousand troops to quell the Rebellion. The women who supported Bacon tended to be active participants who helped by supplying the rebels with food, shelter, and gunpowder to offering their services to fight alongside the men. One such woman was Sarah Grendon whose husband, Thomas Grendon, was away from Virginia when the Rebellion began, lent her support to Bacon providing his men with gunpowder.19 The result was that women were not looked on the same way after the Rebellion.

In a colony of “rogues, vagabonds, whores, cheats, and rabble of all descriptions, raked from the gutter,”20 independent women from the lower classes were always of


particular concern. Authorities constantly tried to control the behaviors and speech of women such as Joan Wright, Jane Rookings, and Ann Godby. In their efforts to create their vision of a gentrified Virginia, authorities found one of their biggest obstacles to be the contentious frontier women who refused to defer to their social betters. Bacon’s Rebellion provided an avenue for these women to do more than just to speak out against those who thought they were in control. As a result, authorities found new ways to demonize them. Colonel Edward Hill described Bacon supporter Sara Weekes as, “[an] idle, infamous slutt, to the highest degree of robbing, thieving and whooreing, &c.” When Edmund Chisman’s wife, Lydia, pleaded for her husband’s life, she told Governor Berkeley that Chisman had acted on her instigation and she should be executed, not Chisman. For her impassioned plea, Berkeley called her a whore. The demonization of contentious women continued after the Rebellion, and eventually spilled over into the sphere of witchcraft beliefs. These cases involving charges of witchcraft began to take on a much more sinister tone than the previous cases.

The last witchcraft case of this period began with the suspicious death of John Salmon’s baby. Salmon accused Alice Cartwright of having cast a spell on the infant causing its death.

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ordered that shee bee acquitted and her husbands bond given for her apearance to bee given up.\textsuperscript{22}

The Cartwright case reflects the changes Bacon's Rebellion had on Virginia society. In this case, Alice Cartwright, who appears to be higher on the social ladder than the Salmons, was forced to submit to an examination for the presence of a witch's teat, although it is arguable if she would have had to do so before Bacon's Rebellion and the subsequent demonization of strong women. Land records show Thomas Cartwright received two land patents totaling five hundred sixty acres in 1652 and 1664, while the same land records do not list Salmon as having any land at all.\textsuperscript{23} Admittedly, five hundred acres does not place the Cartwrights in the upper echelons of Virginia society, but it does place them higher than the Salmons. In the pre-1676 cases such as the Rookings case (1641), when women from lower levels of society accused women from the upper classes, they were brought to court on slander charges. Alice Cartwright, on the other hand, not only had to answer to what was tantamount to a murder charge, but had to submit to a physical examination as well.

The importance of the witch's teat, maleficium, and the criminal connotations of witchcraft in the Virginia world view are more evident in the Cartwright case than any others to this date. Joan Wright's case (1626) was the closest to the Cartwright case in

\textsuperscript{22}Lower Norfolk County Records, Orders, Jan. 16, 1678-79; Philip Alexander Bruce, \textit{The Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century} (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964, original publication New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 282.

\textsuperscript{23}The Library of Virginia, Land Office Patents, June 17, 1664, Land Office Patents No. 5, 1661-1666 (v.1 & 2 p.1-369), p. 425 (Reel 5) http://eagle.vsla.edu/cgi-bin/lonn.gateway?bib=0019-87860&conf=010000+++++++-+; October 18, 1664, Land Office Patents No. 5, 1661-1666 (v.1 & 2 p.1-369), p. 403 (Reel 5) http://eagle.vsla.edu/cgi-bin/lonn.gateway?bib=0019-87960&conf=010000+++++++-+
that Gieles Allingtone mentioned that his baby had died after Wright had been turned away from its birth. The difference between the cases was that Allingtone might have thought there was a connection, but Salmon outright accused Cartwright of having a hand in the infant’s death.

Most infanticides during this period were usually associated with unwanted pregnancies involving servants or single women. For servants, bearing a child could add an extra year or two to their service, but some may have found relief in childbearing from their normal work routines. More than twenty-five percent of the homicide cases in Maryland between 1637 and 1675 were infanticides leading to the execution of two of the four women found guilty. During the same period in Lower Norfolk County, violent crimes accounted for eleven percent of all cases brought to court while sexual offenses accounted for thirty percent of all crimes.24

The death of the Salmon baby obviously was not any more typical of infanticides of this period than was blaming the child’s death on maleficium. Little more is known about the particulars of the case other than that Cartwright was acquitted on the basis of the absence of a witch’s teat. One possible inference is that it was believed Cartwright’s familiar, acting as her agent, had killed the child. When an examination of Cartwright failed to prove the existence of a familiar, i.e., the absence of the teat from which the familiar would have needed to feed, it became necessary to acquit her. It is impossible to ascertain with any real degree of certainty what exactly was the role of familiars in Virginia witchcraft, since the records are silent on the matter save the importance placed on the teat. What is possible to say is that there is nothing in the records regarding the teat before the investigation of Mary Lee’s execution for witchcraft at sea in 1654 suggesting an evolution in their beliefs.

24 Horn, Adapting to a New World, 346-357.
The evolution of their beliefs continued through the 1670s where it was not religion but politics that influenced witchcraft beliefs. The experiences from Bacon’s Rebellion forever altered how Virginians looked at each other, and especially how the gentry viewed the lower classes. In the earlier years of colonization during the periods marked by high mortality rates, it was cheaper for planters to buy the contracts of white indentured servants rather than buy African slaves, since the odds were that both servants and slaves would die fairly soon after arriving in the colony. Bacon’s Rebellion and declining mortality rates changed that. Increasingly, planters sought to rid themselves of potentially troublesome white indentured servants, and in the process to cut down the number of free Euro-Americans, and replacing them with African slaves. The changes, however, extended far beyond the increasing number of slaves in the colony. The Baconians paid dearly for their participation in the Rebellion. Both men and women suffered the loss of their property and good name. The verbal attacks on women were often in the form of accusations of sexual promiscuity.\(^{25}\) When these attitudes were extended into witchcraft accusations, the charges, such as those against Alice Cartwright, began not only to reflect Puritan influences, but to become increasingly politicized.

CHAPTER 8. THE WITCHCRAFT OF YOUR MOTHER

How can there be peace as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound? 2 Kings 9:22

The witches of Westmoreland County (1694/1695) mark a departure from the typical Virginia witches. It is probably a safe assumption that the Reverends David Lindsay and Francis Doughty thought—if not testified—that William Harding (1655) and Barbary Winbrough (1657) were in league with Satan even though the court recorders did not mention it; and that Alice Cartwright was accused of killing a child (1679) through maleficium. Each of the cases since Mary Lee’s case in 1654 seems to have increasingly dark overtones, particularly the ones after Bacon’s Rebellion. This was especially true in the Dunkan-Money civil cases of 1694/1695. Although these were not criminal cases, the records for them are among the most extensive criminal or civil witchcraft accusations in Virginia (transcripts are at the end of the chapter).

Henry and Dorothy Dunkan accused John and Elizabeth Dunkan in 1695 of being Lucifer’s minions. Along with William Eale, they had accused Phyllis Money, Elizabeth’s mother, the year before of being the witch of Yeocomoco (a fort on the Potomac). In addition, they most often referred to John’s and Elizabeth’s children as imps. They claimed Elizabeth literally reeked of “hell fire and brimstone.” John and Elizabeth retaliated by suing Henry and Dorothy for “damnably plotting a most wicked contriveing utterly to ruin the[ir] good names, fames and reputation.”¹

The dynamics of these cases makes them among the most interesting in Virginia history. They represent a nearly complete break from the common English view of witchcraft as a practice rather than a heresy. The reason for this probably lies in the fact

¹Westmoreland County, Virginia, Order Book 1690-1698, Aug. 28, 1695, p. 188.
that the Dunkan family was from originally from Scotland where witchcraft was heavily
associated with the devil that would explain the vileness of the charges. According to
one estimate, there were approximately one thousand witchcraft executions in England
from 1542 to 1736, while during the same period in Scotland, with a population of about
one fifth of England’s, there were approximately four thousand executions. Moreover,
the Money-Dunkan lawsuits occurred three years after Salem. At a time when the New
England Puritans wanted to distance themselves from the atrocity of the Salem
executions, Henry and Dorothy Dunkan appeared to be ready to see Elizabeth burn at the
stake. Because Scots saw witchcraft as a heresy, the form of punishment was burning at
the stake, albeit some of the convicted were mercifully strangled before the burning. The
English form of execution for a criminal witchcraft conviction was hanging. Even the
convicted witches who were executed as a consequence of Matthew Hopkins’ witch
hunts in the 1640s were hung, not burnt, as would have been the normal form of
execution for those condemned by an ecclesiastical court.

The sensational, Puritan-like character of the charges, that do not appear to be a
part of the traditional Virginia witchcraft beliefs, seem to have been beliefs shared by the
parties named in the suits. The transcripts from the Money-Eale trial are almost two and
a half pages long in comparison with the criminal conviction records of William
Harding’s trial, that only amounts to a few sentences. The majority of the descriptions in
the Money-Eale transcripts are not about Money’s supposed witchcraft but how she and
her family suffered as a consequence of the allegations. For example, Money claimed
that as a result of Eale’s witchcraft accusations, she lost the “love, favour, and good will
of Her Neighbors” and she had been brought into “danger of forfeiting . . . her life.”

\[\text{2} \text{Carol Buckley, “Matthew Hopkins, Witchfinder General,” http://www.sealedknot.org/knowbase/docs/0027_WitchGen.htm.} \]

\[\text{3}\Westmoreland County Records, Orders Nov. 1, 1694.\]
Granted this was a defamation suit, yet the length is extraordinary by Virginia standards. The overall implication is that Money must have believed to some extent the charges she made against Eale that she and her family had suffered because of Eale’s accusations. Therefore, at least the people involved in the Money-Dunkan cases shared some witchcraft beliefs that had common elements with the Scottish/Puritan beliefs, suggesting a common background. But the justices appear not to have shared these beliefs. They awarded the Moneys and Dunkans a total of fifty pounds of tobacco. In fact, the three witnesses in the Dunkan trial were paid a total of six hundred forty pounds of tobacco. The awards were probably just a token, given the paltry amount of tobacco and its value in the European market at the time. An economic depression set in during the 1670s and 1680s and lasted until approximately 1715 due to an overproduction of tobacco. This led to increased prices of land and servants. Planters were unable to pass the increased costs of tobacco on to the consumers and were thus forced to absorb the costs themselves.⁴ Therefore, in the end, the court’s awards really did not amount to much, and were unquestionably nothing near to what the Moneys and Dunkans had asked for in damages. The fact that the witnesses were paid more than the plaintiffs received indicates that the value placed on a witness’ appearance in court was far more important than the anguish the Moneys and Dunkans suffered over the witchcraft accusation. Indeed, the nominal awards of the plaintiffs appear more of an insult than a recompense for the tarnishing of their reputations.

Scottish witchcraft beliefs were introduced into English culture and law with the ascension of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603 as James I. The king believed he had been the target of witchcraft in 1590 when he was returning from Denmark with his bride, Princess Anne. Their ship encountered foul weather, and that a

⁴Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 143-144.
conspiracy of witches was convicted and executed for causing the storm. This episode sparked James’ interest in witchcraft, and in 1597 he published his own work on the subject, *Daemonologie*. James’ Calvinism was reflected in the work in which he argued that those not of the elect would not only follow Satan but some would actually worship him. He ordered his subjects to seek out these enemies of Christ. The clergy spearheaded the investigations, often taking on the task themselves of examining and torturing the accused. An accusation was all that was required for an arrest and examination. The accused were always encouraged, sometimes through torture, to name other witches. As to the nature of the witchcraft trials, in Salem the judges were supposed to act in behalf of the accused, in Scotland until circa 1620 counsel for a witch was perceived to be a protector of a heretic. Prosecutions ebbed and flowed peaking during periods when the Presbyterian Church was the recognized form of church government. By contrast to the English witchcraft traditions, that recognized a legal difference in levels of sorcery ranging from the least offensive practices of cunning men and women to those who entered into a heretical covenant with Satan, the Scotts only recognized the heretical form.\(^5\)

Despite the differences between English and Scottish witchcraft, the Money-Dunkan suits are similar to the Salem trials in that they occurred after the major periods of Scottish prosecutions of witches (1590-1597, 1640-1644, 1660-1663).\(^6\) It is not so


\(^6\)George F. Black, “A Calender of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland, 1510-1727,” 142.
exceptional that American trials occurred so late in the history of witchcraft prosecutions. In the modern era, popular images of witchcraft trials and executions tend to limit them to images of deranged priests burning witches at the stake in medieval Europe. The reality is, however, that most of the executions for witchcraft occurred after the Reformation by Protestants.\(^7\)

In Europe, the last executions for witchcraft took place in Germany in 1775, Spain in 1781, Poland in 1793; and Ruth Osborne, a woman thought to be a witch, was killed by a mob in 1751 in Hertfordshire, England.\(^8\) As late as 1787, a mob in Philadelphia stoned to death a woman accused of witchcraft even as the Constitutional Convention met.\(^9\) In 1765, a protester against the Stamp Act placed a hex on a Philadelphia commissioner handling the stamps, cursing him to endure rheumatism, pox, and the gout.\(^10\) Although court-ordered executions did not take place after 1692, laws against the practice of witchcraft remained in force in America as late as 1794. Rhode Island was the last colony to pass an act that would punish people who practiced witchcraft in 1730. When there were no specific laws against witchcraft, English law held for the hanging of convicted witches. George Webb addressed the Virginia


magistrates in 1736 to remind them that they should prosecute witches. The famous legal authority William Blackstone was a vocal supporter of the prosecution of witches.  

The inclusion of Blackstone as an educated man of this period illustrates the problem of not only assuming that American prosecutions took place too late, but also among too educated a populace, particularly in Salem. While Massachusetts colonists may have been better educated than their Virginia counterparts, it is still a seventeenth-century education, where a belief in witchcraft, as Perry Miller argues, "was... not only plausible but scientifically rational." Popular conceptions of education may be compared with those of superstition. Conventional wisdom would suggest an educated person would not believe in witchcraft. However, this assumption displays a type of chronocentrism. A seventeenth-century education is fundamentally different from a twentieth-first century education in terms of explanation. A striking example this is Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*. Mather explains events in terms of God's providence or retribution; God would not be found as a causal agent in a twentieth-first century textbook on meteorology. As Herbert Leventhal, author of *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment*, has shown knowledge on subjects that twentieth-first century Americans would consider marks of the uneducated such as astrology were, in fact, marks of an educated seventeenth-century gentleman (although this was limited to

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natural astrology rather than judicial). Therefore, if an educated populace such as the Puritans could understand witchcraft as scientifically rational, then certainly the Virginians could accept it as a reality in their worldview. Placing the Money-Dunkan cases within this context illustrates how the aberration of a heretical form of witchcraft came to the Virginia courts in a period perceived as late in the era of witchcraft prosecutions.

The first few lines in the transcript of the Dunkan trial held in August of 1695 are strikingly different from other court transcripts. They are as follows:

Henry Dunkan and Dorothy his wife were summoned to answer John Dunkan and Eliza. his wife in an action of defamation. John and Eliza by Simon Robins their attorney say that John and Eliza were both born and bred in this county and have ever since lived in this county. Henry and Dorothy damnably plotting a most wicked contriveing utterly to ruin the good names, fames and reputation of John and Eliza., their children

To begin with, John and Elizabeth have an attorney, a character missing from the other trials. Their attorney, Simon Robbins, immediately establishes that John and Elizabeth are native Virginians. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' genealogy records show Elizabeth was born in 1652 and John in 1648, making them forty-three and forty-seven years old respectively at the time of the trial.

**Notes:**


15 Westmoreland County, Virginia, Order Book 1690-1698, August 28, 1695, page 188.

16 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Family Search, http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/default.asp International Genealogical Index v5.0
John’s and Elizabeth’s longevity must have seemed remarkable in a colony where at times the mortality rate was as high as eighty-five percent. Even with the high number of deaths, Virginia’s population rose from approximately 7,190 (1653 census) to 58,040 (1699 census). During those years Westmoreland County’s population rose from 695 to 2,541—almost tripling in the Dunkans’ lifetime. Colonists who settled in the county during the middle of the century came primarily from Bristol, Plymouth, Somerset, Shropshire, Bedfordshire, Middlesex, and London—not areas of high witchcraft activity with the exception perhaps of London. That John and Elizabeth had been “born and bred in this county and have ever since lived in this county” would have put them at an advantage on a number of different levels.

John and Elizabeth Dunkan knew how to navigate in the ever-changing Virginia cultural waters. By virtue of having lived their entire lives in Virginia, they were active participants in the emerging, distinctive Anglo-American culture. They represent a change in how some Virginians thought of themselves. No longer were they English first and Virginians second; now they were Virginians first. By this period in Virginian history, the colony was in transition from its early chaos to stability. The social mobility that had been a hallmark of the first decades had given way to a rigid Virginia-English social hierarchy.

The period between 1660 and 1720 marked the rise in status of a native-born elite slowly replacing the English-born gentry that had dominated the political and social spheres. By the 1690s there were more Virginia-born members in the House of Burgesses than there were English-born members, although the highest of the colony’s
appointed officials were still sent from England. Each group held the other in disdain. The English viewed Virginia as the least desirable of all the British colonies; only those with nowhere else to go would even consider migrating to Virginia. Native-born Virginians were seen as worse than the immigrants; they were thought to be biologically, intellectually, socially, morally, and culturally inferior to the English. While Virginians did agree on some points such as a general lack of education among the populace, they countered that Virginians studying abroad would return with less learning and a greater taste for luxuries. This attitude reflects an increasing sense of chauvinism among native Virginians. They still looked to their English roots as the basis of their society, but their strength came from being tempered on the frontier.

Although the Money-Dunkan witches were not the last in Virginia courts, they are an indicator of changes in Virginia thought in culture in the approximately seventy years from when Joan Wright was brought to trial (1626) to their suits at the end of the century. The features of this distinct Virginia culture are the shift from the perception of witchcraft from a practice to a heresy. The perception of witchcraft as a heresy demonstrates how non-traditional English values were incorporated into Virginia thought. The Scottish and Puritan witchcraft beliefs are clearly evident in the charges against Money and the Dunkans. However, the judges awarded the Moneys only fifty pounds of tobacco and the Dunkans only forty of the forty thousand pounds of tobacco they had asked for in damages. While outside influences had an impact on Virginians, they did not override their English cultural foundations.

One aspect that needs to be addressed here is the influence Presbyterianism in these cases. It appears from the records whatever influence it may have had was minimal.

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to non-existent as an organized church. In his book, *Damned Souls in Tobacco Country: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (2000), Edward L. Bond does not even mention Presbyterianism in his study. Phillip Alexander Bruce devotes little more than two paragraphs to the denomination in his book, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*. Not surprisingly, Presbyterians’ first foothold in the colony was in Lower Norfolk County in 1692. Ten years later there were only four Presbyterian churches in the whole colony. This is not to suggest they did not have any influence on Virginians’ religious beliefs, only that as an organized religion it was not there to fan the flames of witchcraft accusations.

The first of the Money-Dunkan defamation suits pitted the Moneys against William Eale on Nov. 1, 1694. Phyllis Money claimed her neighbors would not keep company with her or her husband, their credit and good name had been injured, and their very lives were in danger over the malicious gossip spread by Eale. Among the rumors he spread were that Money had bewitched Henry Dunkan’s horse causing the horse to bolt, and in the process injuring Henry. In addition, he claimed Money had taught her daughter, Elizabeth, to be a witch, who in turn, taught her husband, John, to be a wizard. Not content to speak only with the Dunkans on this matter, Phyllis claimed Eale spoke with others too. In the end, the Moneys were awarded fifty pounds of tobacco and Eale

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22There are no records available at this time regarding William Eale. The only Eale to show up in this area roughly in the same period is Samuel Eale who appears not only to have been dead before the trials but he only had one child, a daughter. The trial transcripts are in Westmoreland County, Virginia, Order Book 1690-1698, November 1, 1694, page 155.
was ordered to pay for the costs of the law suit. Once again, the court-ordered award was nothing more than a token.

One of the most intriguing aspects of this case is the charge that this family was related by blood, marriage, and witchcraft. The belief that witchcraft ran in families was present in both the Old and New Worlds. In Salem, as previously noted, Sarah Good's four-year-old daughter, Dorcas, was imprisoned and fettered in the belief she was a witch like her mother. The question in many of these cases was how did it run in families. Was it hereditary? Or was it taught from family member to family member as Eale claimed in the case of Money and the Dunkans?

There is evidence supporting both theories. Witnesses at a trial in Maidstone, England, in 1652 called for the burning of the accused witches rather than the accustomed hanging. The witnesses believed the burning of the witch and her blood prevented her from passing on her "evil" to her offspring. Children of witches could be dangerous for other reasons. Whether they had learned the black arts at their parents' knee or inherited the ability to bewitch through their parents' blood, the children of a convicted witch still posed a threat to society. The shadow of a possibility of retaliation always existed. Other social factors were certainly at play in England, where witches and their accusers were rarely related. One example is some accused witches were from the margins of society without a family with means to protect them.

The dynamics of the family helps account for witchcraft in other ways too. One of the most obvious questions is were Henry and John related? Duncan family records

[Notes]

23Westmoreland County Records, Orders Nov. 1, 1694.

24Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 464.


26Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 561.
indicate they were both sons of Peter Dunkan of Westmoreland County, Virginia. Dorothy’s father was Nicholas Money, and his brother, Hugh Money, was Elizabeth’s father, making Elizabeth and Dorothy first cousins as well as sisters-in-law.27

Familial relationships were often confusing and convoluted during the seventeenth-century. As stated in chapter two, the main features of Virginia society during this period included gender-skewed demographics and high mortality rates. The shortage of women made it difficult to establish families. While widows and spinsters were practically non-existent, twenty to thirty percent of the men died as bachelors and twelve to fourteen percent died as widowers.28 Threats from the Powhatan, and fear of the rising number of African slaves, and indentured servants made it almost a necessity for widows to remarry as soon as possible after their husbands’ deaths. The result was often tangled family relationships. The combination of high mortality rates with remarriages left many children in the care of a step-parent. There are a number of examples of children from previous marriages growing up in families with no blood relation to either the husband or wife. In Middlesex County, Virginia alone, more than half the children had lost one or both parents by their thirteenth birthday and nearly seventy-five percent by the time they were twenty-one. Half the children of the colony could expect to spend part of their lives with a step-parent.29 To make matters worse for historians and genealogists, children would sometimes take the name of an adoptive


28Horn, Adapting to a New World, 206.

father. Others dropped the formal distinctions such as brother-in-law or stepbrother in favor of the less formal "brother," a word that was also used to describe friends, neighbors, and business associates. All sorts of other relations were sometimes just referred to as cousin. 30

Incredibly, these conditions produced a strong sense of family and kinship. The concept of a stable, collective kinship network within an area transcended the transitory nature of the individual family. 31 These kinship networks initially evolved in a pattern similar to those of other immigrants; family members tended to settle near each other. Families frequently owned adjacent tracts of land. Newcomers more often than not chose to settle in areas near established relatives. Those without relatives usually settled in areas near their spouse's relatives. 32

There were numerous advantages to this pattern of settlement on the frontier. Marriage itself meant a rise in social standing, even for those on the bottom rungs of the social ladder. It was the first step in having a vested interest in the community. The Virginia Company and the local authorities had always encouraged marriage even if they failed to provide more eligible women for the settlers or ministers to officially marry couples. As the colony grew, the closeness of relatives provided a sense of security in a chaotic world. Familial relationships encouraged more interaction between individual families. The importance of inclusion and exclusion of gossip networks was seen in Joan Wright's case (1626). Survival at times literally meant dependence on one's neighbors, and gossip networks helped build bonds between neighbors. In this case, families would


31Horn, Adapting to a New World, 216.

probably be in closer contact than mere neighbors. Many thought it was easier to trust a relative than a stranger. Court records indicate it was commonplace for relatives to witness each others’ legal documents such as property transactions and wills. Moreover there are numerous examples of adults who made provisions for nieces, nephews, and stepchildren that suggest relatives were more likely to help each other. They defined Virginia society by designating one’s place in society, his or her relationships to others, one’s responsibilities, and a sense of security. Through time and continual marriages, remarriages and births, these kinship networks continued to expand into the eighteenth-century. Sometimes potential community conflicts were set aside in order to maintain peace within a family, although this was not the case with the Dunkans. 33

It is evident that the Dunkans, the Moneys, and Eale had been at odds with one another for a long time. More than likely the defamation charges were just part of an ongoing dispute. The Dunkans presented evidence in their trial potentially more damaging to Dorothy Dunkan than her allegation of witchcraft. The transcript reads:

Dorothy severall tymes declared shee would burn John's house and fire his plantation and ruine all that he had, saying (glorying and vaunting in her villany and wickedness) for shee helped George Hanks to burn a house in Coane and nine or ten hogsheads of tobacco in it. 34

The crime of arson was one of the most serious in Virginia. Hugh R. Rankin writes, “Probably the most dreaded sound (other than a savage war whoop) in the eighteenth century was the clamor of the fire bell in the night.” Arson not only meant the destruction of property but the loss of life as well. Authorities passed a law in 1684


34Coan is a city in Northumberland County. Like William Eale, there are no available records on George Hanks at the present time.
stating that if eight or more people conspired and carried out an act of arson in which any building storing tobacco in it were destroyed, they would be “deemed, declared and adjudged to be traytors, and suffer pains of death, loose and forfeite as in the case of high treason.”35 While it cannot be ascertained with any degree of reasonable certainty that the barn burning incident had anything to do with the plant-cutting protests of 1682, it is worth mentioning here. Tobacco overproduction had reached such levels in April of 1682 that local government officials, in a bid to stabilize the market, requested some of the growing plants to be destroyed. “Rabble” took it to the limits, destroying nearly seventy-five percent of the plants in the fields of Gloucester and fifty percent in New Kent Counties alone before the protesters could be crushed.36

The link between arson and witchcraft may not be as implausible as it seems; Keith Thomas links the two as means of retaliation available to the poor and powerless against those in authority.37 Albeit John and Elizabeth Dunkan never directly accused Dorothy Dunkan of being a witch, they hinted at it with phrases such as “glorying and vaunting in her villany and wickedness” and calling her and Henry “apt instruments of the Devill.”

The available records are silent as to the origins of the animosity between the Dunkan brothers and their wives, although a common source of fighting between family members is usually over money and/or land. Although the Dunkans do not appear among the planter families, they must have had a comfortable existence. It appears their father, Peter, was among the early settlers in Westmoreland County, which was formed in


36 Morgan, American Slavery: American Freedom, 286.

37 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 533.
1653. It is doubtful, but not impossible, that he was one of the one hundred fifty Scottish prisoners of war transported to Virginia in the early 1650s after the defeat of Charles II at Worcester. Peter received a patent for one hundred forty acres on the “south east side of the Nominy River beginning upon the northeast point of Floods Creek” on July 2, 1669. It is not clear whether Peter left land to all his sons, but he did leave land to John. When John died, he left his son Peter the land he inherited from his father Peter.

By the time of the Dunkan-Money trials, English settlements had pushed beyond the Fall line, leaving Westmoreland County with a wide buffer between it and the frontier. Common practice at the time was if a couple did not inherit or could not afford land they simply moved west. Both John’s and Henry’s families were living in Westmoreland County, suggesting they may not have needed to move. Of course this does not eliminate land and money as a possible source of conflict, but it does lead one to believe the brothers were probably yeomen farmers. This lack of class distinction between the accusers and accused is not only consistent with the general witchcraft accusations in the post-Bacon Rebellion Chesapeake, but it is also consistent with seventeenth-century Scottish accusations. Unlike the traditional model where the

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accused is from the margins of society, Lauren White’s study of Scottish accusations indicates that they tended to rise from quarreling neighbors from the same social group.⁴²

If land was not apparently a source of the conflict between the two families, then there is a clue that money which may have been the source of the conflict. A year before the witchcraft slander suits John brought a civil suit against Henry over a debt of three thousand pounds of tobacco. The record raises more questions than answers. It reads:

Henry Dunkan was summoned to answer John Dunkan in an action of debt that he render unto him 3000 pounds of tobacco. John by Simon Robins his attorney saith that by a bill under the hand of Henry 3 Sept. 1694 hee obliged himself to pay 3000 pounds of tobacco if Henry should perform what Mr. Benjamin Blanchflower and Mr. William Paine should think fitt to be done about their plantation affaires and fully compleat the same by the last of March following. Benjamin Blanchflower and William Paine did make a writeing awarding for the end of their difference what was to be done by John and Henry. Henry by Arthur Spicer his attorney saith that hee hath fully performed the award. Because the plaintiff could not make out his declaration but failed to prosecute the same, dismist.⁴³

Even if the records are unclear as to the exact nature of the conflict between the two brothers, what the records do indicate is an ongoing feud between them, and it escalated into a series of witchcraft accusations.

Because the Virginians did not formally define their beliefs in a written form, the primary way the beliefs were shared was through gossip. This is consistent with the way English cunning folk passed their beliefs from one another or from generation to generation. This model helps to explain similarities between the accusations against Joan


Wright (1626), Joan Michel (1661), and Elizabeth Dunkan (1695). Among the specific accusations against each of these women was that they had bewitched animals—some even to the point of death. Wright’s and Michel’s powers seem to have been directed at only killing chickens. In Wright’s case, it was early enough in the colonization of Virginia that there simply were not enough bigger domestic animals there to bewitch, although there was the implication she either bewitched wild animals or Sargent Barry’s gun so he could not kill any game. Conditions had changed by the time of the Dunkan case so that Dorothy Dunkan could make the accusation that her cousin Elizabeth had “bewitched her cow and . . . that shee made the birds of the air to fall by her witchcraft.”

The court’s finding in favor of John and Elizabeth may have put a legal end to the accusations against Elizabeth and her mother, Phyllis Money, but probably did not end the fighting between the families, although no other documents have come to light to support either supposition. The witchcraft accusations in these cases are a departure from the typical Virginia cases in that they do not reflect the class differences that are a hallmark of the majority cases. Even though these are the only known Virginia cases to involve family members against each other, they are typical of the post-Bacon Rebellion cases in that women who are accused of practicing witchcraft are demonized. It is difficult to ascertain whether any of the women involved somehow stepped out of the traditional roles for women with the exception of Dorothy Dunkan, who was implicated in an arson case. It may be assumed, however, because Westmoreland County was still a frontier in the late seventeenth century that most women did step out of traditional roles to some degree out of necessity. Whether this played a role in the Dunkan-Money cases is debatable, but even if it did not, the demonization of non-traditional women was

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44 Westmoreland County, Virginia, order book 1690-1698, Aug. 28, 1695, p. 188.
already present in Anglo-Virginian culture. Further complicating these cases was the presence of Scottish beliefs that were not predominant in Virginia. The result is that aspects the Dunkan-Money cases reflect both typical and atypical Virginia witchcraft cases.

The Dunkan versus Dunkan transcript is as follows:

Henry Dunkan and Dorothy his wife were summoned to answer John Dunkan and Eliza. his wife in an action of defamation. John and Eliza. by Simon Robins their attorney say that John and Eliza. were both born and bred in this county and have ever since lived in this county. Henry and Dorothy damnably plotting a most wicked contriveing utterly to ruin the good names, names and reputation of John and Eliza., their children, Dorothy about the beginning of July last at the house cow pen of the plantation of Henry in the presence and heareing of severall of his Majesty’s liege subjects did declare of Elizabeth these words: Eliza., John Dunkan’s wife, is a witch and has bewitched her cow and that she stink of hell fire and brimstone and that shee made the birds of the air to fall by her witchcraft and said to her husband Henry, be ruled by mee and draw some of her blood of that witch (meaning Eliza) who had bewitched her cow and she stink of hell fire and brimstone and that shee made the birds of the air to fall by her witchcraft and said to her husband Henry, be ruled by mee and draw some of the blood of that witch (meaning Eliza) who had bewitched her cow. And some time after at the same cow pen did utter to Elizabeth damnable, wicked and scandalous words . . . and bade her goe down to Yeocomoco to the witch her mother . . . which most horrible and damnable facts and crimes, were the said Eliza really guilty of as they were charged upon her by Dorothy, should make her liable to no lesse punishment than burning to death by the laws of England.

And some short time after Henry went up to John’s house and abused Eliza with greivous and scurrillous named and terms, calling her severall tymes witch and saying that hee defyed all her witchcraft and witches workes and further declared that hee valued not what shee could doe so long as hee did not say hee would prove her a witch, and at severall other tymes and places Henry and Dorothy (as apt instruments of the Devill) have horribly defamed and malitiously scandalized Eliza. calling her a witch and her children witches imps, seldom or never calling them by any other names, whenever they spoke about them. Dorothy severall tymes declared shee would burn John’s house and fire his plantation and ruine all that he had, saying (glorying and vaunting in her villany and wickedness) for shee helped George Hanks to burn a house in Coane and nine or ten hogsheads of tobacco in it.
And John saith that in his dealings he hath already felt some of the sad effects of the scandalous and slanderous words of Henry and Dorothy. John and Eliza say that such wicked doings is contrary to the peace of our Sovereigne Lord the King and to their damage 40,000 pounds of tobacco.

The defendants by their attorneys demurred in law for that the plaintiffs declaration above consisting of several causes of action rendered the same so uncertain that they could not plead to the same.

The demurrer was overruled and the defendants by their attorneys said they were not guilty. The Sheriff returned Samll. Thomson, William Paine, John Tramell, Thomas Chancellor, Jacob Lucas, James Hardwick, Robert Stanford, Thomas Pennell, William Paine, Abraham Smith, John Higgens and John Tucker, being sworn do Wee find for the plaintiff damages ten pounds of tobacco.

Jacob Lucas being summoned to give his evidence in a suite between John Dukan and Henry Dunkan on behalf of the plaintiff and having attended as above, order as above per 240 pounds of tobacco.

John Pendergrasse being summoned to give his evidence in a suite depending between John Dunkan and Eliza his wife and Henry Dunkan and Dorothy his wife on behalf of the plaintiffs and having attended five days, ordered John Dunkan doe pay him 200 pounds of tobacco as above.

Charles Dunkan having attended as above, order per 200 pounds of tobacco as above.

Peter Hipsley being summoned as above and having attended three days, order John Dunkan doe pay him 120 pounds of tobacco.

The badly damaged Money-Eale transcripts are as follows (illegible words have been replaced with a?):

William Eale of this County aforsaid was attached to answer Hugh Money and Phillis his wife of the County aforsaid of ? that whereas the said Phillis now is a good and faith full loyal subject of our Sovereign Lord and Lady the King and Queen and as such from the? of her ? by all the tyme aforsaid ? of ? accounted ? of God alwayes to have before her Eyes And from all maaor of Wilbury saith craft or any such like wicked ? wholly her self has lost by reason ? not only obtained ? good will of all her neighbours good ? Colony But also to her And all ? in no wise Subject to the Rigour of the Law for such like ? William Eale ? not ignorant of the ? the happy ? And ? the said Phillis and ? not only intending to deprive the said Phillis of her good name Estimacon the sd aforsaid And to bring ? Phillis ? oppinion of all her neighbours and others their Majesty's good faith full Subjects But also he has brought the anger of ? and soo fering in

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45Westmoreland County, Virginia, Order Book 1690-1698, Aug. 28, 1695, p. 188.
or about the month of January in the year 1693 (to wit) at the hous of Henry Dunkin in the County aforsaid Communicacion with the good and faith full? of this Colony And in? of? such good and faith full? only infamous and words (that is to say) Shee the said Phillis was a witch And has bewitched Henry Dunkin hors and made him start and the said Henry Dunkin? and also that shee and the said Phillis had her daughter (John Dunkin’s wife) to bee a Witch who had also taught her said husband to bee a Wizard And the said William out of the same said? infamous? words at divers other tymes and places did when and in the said Phillis witchcraft or also such like wicked and base Act had vomitted or? or any thing that might the said William or any other thereof any reason of which saying affirming publishing the of the said false? aloud infamous words at aforsaid the said Hugh and Phillis Are not only? by hurt and? said Phillis good name amongst theirneighbours and others to whom? of the said Phillis (on part was unknown (who before the speakeing and publishing of the said words also to keep company comfort and have familiarity with the said Phillis) but also to bring her of soo fering her life and aforsaid reson whereof the said Hugh and Phillis Doe in fact say they are? And damage have to the value of twenty thousand pounds of Tobacco whereupon they bring such And the said William Eale by Willoughby Allerton his attorney comes and defends the injury not guilty of the scandalous words above supposed by him to bee spoken And him self upon the sd Allerton And?. Therefore so the Sheriff that bee should? both [plaintiff] and [defendant] being? And the Sheriff haveing returned? (to wit) John Newton and Alexander? the said William Eale or his?46

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46 Westmoreland County Records, Orders Nov. 1, 1694.
CHAPTER 9. DISQUIETING DREAMS

Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men . . . even then
you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions . . .
Job 7: 13-14

Three years after the Dunkan case (1695) in Princess Anne County John and
Anne Byrd brought defamation suits against Charles Kinsey and John Pitts for
"scandalously defaming" them. The Byrds, it seems from the testimonies, had a fondness
for preternatural outings. The problem was that their preferred form of transportation
was their neighbors. Charles Kinsey and John Pitts, claimed one or both of the Byrds
had ridden them around the neighborhood and professed themselves to be witches. The
transcript of the trial reads:

**Princess Anne:** At a Court held the 8th Day of July, 1698. Justices
present Coll. Anthony Lawson, Mr. Benjamin Burrough, Captain John
Thorowgood, Mr. Edward Moseley.

John Byrd and Anne, his wife Suing Charles Kinsey in an action of
Defamation setting forth by their petition that the said Kinsey had falsely
and Scandalously Defamed them saying that the said Anne did ride him
from his house to Elizabeth Russells, and that by such his Discourse she
was reported and rendered to be a witch, or such like person, praying one
hundred pounds Damage with cost; The Defendant for answer
acknowledging that he had Spoke words saying that he either dreamed or
had such appearances, &c. The whole matter being put to a Jury who
bring in their Verdict as followeth: We of the Jury doe find for the
Defendant's mocon It is Ordered that the Jury's Verdict be Recorded, and
judgement is granted upon the same, the Suite be Dismist with Cost als
Exn.

John Byrd and Anne, his wife suing John Pitts in action of
Defamacon Setting Forth by their peticon the Defendant had falsely &
Scandalously Defamed them, saying they had rid him along the Seaside &
home to his own house, by which kind of Discourse they were reported &
rendered as if they were witches, or in league with the Devill, praying
100£ Sterling Damage with Cost. The Defendant for answer
acknowledgeth that to his thoughts, apprehension or best knowledge, they
did serve him Soc; The whole matter being but to a Jury who bring in their
Verdict as followeth. We of the Jury do find for the Defendant. Hugh
Campbell foreman &c. Upon the Defendant's Mocon It is Ordered that the
Jury’s Verdict be Recorded, and Judgement is granted upon the Same, that the Suite be Dismist with Cost als Exn.¹

Like the majority of Virginia witchcraft cases, the records on the principal parties involved in this suit are scant at best. Genealogical sources show that John Byrd was born in Surry County in 1645. He and Anne and four sons: John born in 1670 in Bertie County, North Carolina: Thomas (1672 in Virginia): Edward (1674 in Virginia): and William (1676 in Virginia).² This would make John fifty-three years old at the time of the trial and Anne middle-aged. The records do not suggest they were related to William Byrd, founder of the Byrd family dynasty in Virginia.

The Byrds were not the only ones to be accused of riding their neighbors. Their fellow Princess Anne County resident, the most famous of the accused Virginia witches, Grace Sherwood, was in the same court less than two months after the Byrds suing Anthony and Elizabeth Barnes. The transcripts from the Sept. 10, 1698 trial are as follows:

James Sherwood and Grace his Wife suing Anthony Barnes and Elizabeth his wife in an action of Slander setting forth by their petition that the said Elizabeth had wronged and abused the said Grace in her good name & reputation saying the said Grace came to her one night and rid her and went out of the key hole or crack of the door like a black Catt &c prays Judgment for 100£ sterling damage with Cost: to which the Defendant pleadeth not guilty. The whole matter being put to a Jury who bring in their Verdict as followeth Wee the Jury find for the Defendant francis Sayer fforeman, Christopher Cocke Otho Russell, mark Powel, Thomas Walker George Warington Robert Benny Robert Richmond John Keeling Thomas Hall Henry Spratt Adam Hayes upon the Defendants

¹Princess Anne County Records, Orders July 8, 1698 as quoted in William and Mary College Quarterly (series 1) (vol. 2, pp. 59-60).

motion it is Ordered that the Juries Verdict be Recorded and Judgment is granted upon the same that the suit be dismissed.

It would appear from the testimonies that Sherwood was a more accomplished witch than the Byrds, since she could shapeshift into a black cat.

The form of bewitchment described in these testimonies falls into the very broad category of the “nightmare hag.” In fact, the word nightmare comes from the Old English word *mare* or *mara* which was an evil spirit, usually an incubus or succubus, who rode or in some other way tortured their victims while they slept. Charles Kinsey’s statement that he did not know if he actually experienced or merely dreamt that Ann Byrd had ridden him is typical of a nightmare hag encounter as is the description of Grace Sherwood leaving through the keyhole or crack in the form of a black cat. Modern sleep experts call this phenomenon sleep paralysis. It occurs when an individual wakes up during a state of deep, dreaming sleep that during this stage of sleep the brain temporarily paralyzes the body. Sleep paralysis occurs when the body is still paralyzed but has not yet stopped dreaming.

The use of sleep paralysis as a means to explain bewitchment is an example of how some historians approach the subjects of witchcraft and magic. These historians recognize the legitimacy of the experiences people attributed to the supernatural. They argue, however, rather than assuming that the supernatural as the causal agent of the source of these experiences, modern science can provide more insightful explanations.

Popular among the biological theories for bewitchment is Linda R. Caporeal’s convulsive ergotism. According to this hypothesis, the afflicted’s symptoms maybe

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explained through ergot poisoning. This parasitic fungus (*Claviceps purpurea*), found in cereal grains, particularly rye, produces symptoms in its convulsive form consistent with descriptions of the afflictions suffered by witchcraft victims. These include “crawling sensations in the skin, tingling in the fingers, vertigo, *tinnitus aurium*, headaches, disturbances in sensations, hallucinations, painful muscular contractions leading to epileptiform convulsions, vomiting, and diarrhea.” Additionally, sufferers experience a number of psychoses and stimulation of involuntary muscles. The ergot is introduced into the system through the ingestion of contaminated cereal products. Caporeal, whose article focused on the Salem witchcraft trials could conceivably be applied to other witchcraft cases such as the nightmare hags, argues that conditions were such that probably all the rye harvested in Salem in 1691 was infested with ergot to some degree. Furthermore, the highest degree of ergot contamination would have been found in the swampy meadowlands of western Salem Village. Residence patterns indicate the majority of the afflicted and the accusers were from this area, and the witches and defenders were from the drier, eastern part of the village. The fact that spectral evidence played such an important, albeit controversial, role in accusations and convictions bolsters Caporeal’s argument that ergot induced hallucinations were the catalyst for the witchcraft hysteria.

Additional evidence may be found in the descriptions of the afflicted’s physical complaints:

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6 The gangrenous form causes dry gangrene in the body’s extremities with the eventual falling away of those parts. There are records describing these symptoms that are also linked to witchcraft in Europe.

Accusations of choking, pinching, pricking of pins, and biting by the specter of the accused formed the standard testimony of the afflicted in almost all the examinations and trials. The choking suggests the involvement of the involuntary muscle fibers that is typical of ergot poisoning; the biting, pinching, and pricking may allude to the crawling and tingling sensations under the skin experienced by ergotism victims. Complaints of vomiting and “bowels being pulled out” are common in the depositions of the accusers. The physical symptoms of the afflicted and many of the other accusers are those induced by convulsive ergot poisoning.

According to Caporeal, among the significant events that led the community to believe that witchcraft was afoot was the baking of a witch cake. Made from rye meal and the urine of one of the afflicted, it was to be fed to a dog. The records do not indicate how the dog reacted, but it is assumed that witchcraft was already suspected as the source of the manifestations. The psychological and sociological factors present in Puritan culture gave a framework in which to understand the physiological symptoms and the hallucinations. If one is disposed to believe in the maleficium of witchcraft, then the symptoms of ergotism are apparently consistent with bewitchment. This is particularly significant in regards to the heavy emphasis placed on spectral evidence in the Salem criminal trials. Descriptions of preternatural visions ranged from identifying the specters of specific individuals, their imps which ranged in appearance from ordinary animals to the extraordinary, to finally distortions of the mundane. One man testified that he saw quivering, jelly-like objects in his chimney that he claimed had cast the “evil eye” on him.

As enticing as Caporeal’s ergot poisoning hypothesis may be in explaining the events in Salem, Nicholas P. Spano and Jack Gottlieb cited numerous flaws with it in

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their article, "Ergotism and the Salem Witchcraft Trials." One of their strongest criticisms is that the victims suffered en masse from social cues. These include reactions to the reading of certain Biblical passages, culturally appropriate responses to stimuli such as falling into a fit when an accused witch approached them, and shared visions. Spano and Gottlieb write, "The afflicted girls were responsive to social clues from each other as well as from the accused and therefore were able to predict the occurrence of each other's fits." Furthermore, if it is difficult to accept the proposition that the afflicted shared the same experience at the same time, it becomes even more incredible when viewed in the context of the nature of hallucinations versus perceptual distortions. Because isoergine, an ergot alkaloid, produces effects similar to those of LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), it is possible to employ psychological studies on the effects of LSD. These studies show that individuals tend to experience perceptual distortions such as auras, rainbows, an undulating appearance around objects or individuals, and changes in depth perception. Only when they close their eyes do they see individuals or objects. Records from the Salem trials indicate that the afflicted did experience visual distortions, but en masse they also saw the specters of the accused witches, their imps, or objects such as coffins.

More discrepancies with Caporeal's hypothesis may be found in the testimonies of the unafflicted. While convulsive ergotism does produce pinching or prickling sensations, it cannot account for the visible bite and pinch marks left on the afflicted as described by witnesses. Though Caporeal does not address this particular facet, in her defense it could be argued that these are merely psychosomatic expressions of a

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psychotropic experience. Furthermore, studies of convulsive ergot poisoning indicate a correlation between contracting ergotism with a deficiency of vitamin A. Given that vitamin A is found in fish and dairy products, it is highly unlikely any of the Salem witchcraft victims in a farming community near the sea would have lacked for any of these foods in their diets.\(^{12}\)

If, then, as Spano and Gottlieb have argued, that ergot can be dismissed as an explanation for Salem, can it be dismissed as another possible explanation for the Virginia nightmare hags other than sleep paralysis? Of course, one would have to assume there was a source of ergot. The Dismal Swamp occupies a portion of the southwest area of the county providing the conditions needed for ergot growth. Even if ergot was present, Princess Anne County is on the Chesapeake Bay, and, therefore, the individuals involved in the cases probably consumed a fair amount of fish which would provide vitamin A which would act as an antidote to the ergot. In fact, they probably depended more on seafood than cattle during this period. In 1695, an epidemic swept through Virginia killing over 100,000 head of cattle, prompting the Virginia lawmakers to authorize the destruction of any wandering, unbranded cattle. All of this aside, if one was inclined to find a biological explanation for the nightmare hags, one would not be limited to ergot.

Studies of the ingredients of medieval European witches' "flying ointments" show they contain psychotropic ingredients from the nightshade or **Solanaceae** family of plants. Extracts from these plants produce altered states of consciousness that are impossible to reproduce without them. The uniqueness of the experience, coupled with the belief in the reality of witchcraft, would undoubtedly have led people to conclude they had indeed been bewitched. Members of the Solanaceae family include tomato,

eggplant, Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*), datura (*Datura stramonium*), henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*), and, most importantly in Virginia, potato and tobacco.\(^\text{13}\)

The psychoactive alkaloids in these plants could easily be absorbed through the skin. One of the hallmarks of Solanaceae induced intoxication is the inability to distinguish hallucinations from reality. Studies comparing LSD intoxication with that of Solanaceae derivatives indicated subjects using LSD could differentiate between hallucinations and reality whereas the subjects using the Solanaceae derivatives could not.\(^\text{14}\) The availability of Solanaceae plants and the intoxication characteristics make it a better candidate than ergot poisoning as an alternative to sleep paralysis as a biological explanation for the symptoms suffered by the victims of the nightmare hags.

Among the most recent of biological explanations is Laurie Winn Carlson’s encephalitis lethargica hypothesis. The infection causes inflammation of the brain which in turn causes an increase in white blood cells in that area. This causes the brain to swell resulting in the destruction of nerve cells and hemorrhaging in the brain. Symptoms include headaches, fever, confusion, memory loss, slurred speech, and hallucinations. Reactions vary from individual to individual and each epidemic appears to have its own specific symptoms and degrees of severity. The epidemics can be either viral or bacterial based and have been associated with measles, chicken pox, rabies, and Cruetzfeldt-Jacob (mad cow) disease.\(^\text{15}\) Although very little has been written about the cattle epidemic of 1695, however, if it were Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), then it could be


posited that the accusers were suffering from a form of encephalitis, given that it can have an incubation period of as long as eight years.\textsuperscript{16}

The utilization of biological explanations is limited in the understanding of witchcraft in that it only can account for offering possible explanations of the symptoms of bewitchment. It falls notably short in providing a context for these beliefs. The failure to include the social dynamics leaves one with only a two dimensional understanding of witchcraft.

An acceptance of visions as symptoms of bewitchment was part of the corpus of witchcraft and magic beliefs brought to the New World. Elizabeth Barnes’ allegation that Grace Sherwood shapeshifted into the form of a black cat is reflective of one of the powers attributed to a witch. Fifteenth-century Europeans believed the witch's ability to turn himself or herself into an animal came from a special ointment which also gave them to power to fly to their sabbat meetings.\textsuperscript{17} It was believed witches could also turn their neighbors into animals as well. Albeit the court records do not suggest that anyone other than Sherwood took on a different form, there is an implication that if Barnes, Kinsey, or Pitts were not specifically turned into animals, they were at the very least ridden as if they were animals.

The accusers’ descriptions of these experiences and John Pitts’ testimony that he believed the Byrds were in league with the Devil are both consistent with conventional beliefs associated with witchcraft. This should allow for the incorporation of witchcraft beliefs from outside of Virginia to be used to better understand how Virginians understood these experiences. It would be better to use Virginians’ own writings on the


subject, but since very little of that exists, the closest material on the subject comes from either Old England or New England.

With that caveat in mind, no matter what the physical cause of the experiences, they fall under the broad category of specters. The most common definition of a specter is it is the image of the witch. However, a witch's specter is the Devil assuming the image of a witch. The main implication of this is that the Devil can only feign the shape of the individual who has entered into a covenant with him; making it impossible for him to arrogate the image of an innocent. The Devil, in the form of the witch's specter and with the consent of the witch, had the ability to assault individuals and/or their property at the witch's bidding. Specters were not necessarily associated with the physical location of the witch. Examples of this may be found in the records of the Salem witchcraft trials. In the case of the minister George Burroughs, he was in Wells, Maine at the same time his specter was said to have assaulted girls in Salem. Or—as during Goody Hobbs' trial—Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam claimed to see her specter on a roof beam, but could not see her physical body which was in front of them. A specter should not be confused with a familiar or imp. These preternatural animals are gifts from the Dark Prince to the witch or wizard when they signed their covenant with him.

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Even though witchcraft was associated with Christianity by the seventeenth century, the origins of familiars and specters predated the introduction of Christianity in Europe. Witches' familiars were probably small creatures in European folklore such as dwarves, fairies, and trolls. As Christianity became the dominant religion, these creatures were transformed into minor demons. A witch's specter was most likely a pagan spirit, collectively known as bonae mulieres, who were believed to wander through people's homes at night, and were left offerings of food and drink. In 743, the Church outlawed this practice, assuming these spirits to be demons. Furthermore, it is believed that the witch's origins may also be traced, in part, to a "blood-drinking night spirit" known as the striga or stria.22

The most infamous use of specters as evidence was in the Salem witchcraft trials (1692). Because of English legal precedent, spectral evidence was accepted in the colonies before the 1692 Salem trials in New England and as late as 1698 in the Grace Sherwood case in Virginia.23 George Lyman Kittredge lists twenty-two trials dating from 1593 to 1683 in which spectral evidence was presented in either examinations or witchcraft trials in England, but it was considered additional proof of witchcraft.24 The problem of the admissibility of spectral evidence in New England witchcraft cases, especially in the Salem trials, depended upon which statute should be applied. The English statute, which the colony was under, did not specify evidentiary standards or procedures in witchcraft cases. The law merely prohibited the "practise use or exercise of Witchcrafte Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie." It did provide for the death penalty in

22Godbeer, The Devil's Dominion, 53.


cases where the victim was "killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined, or lamed." The Massachusetts statute of 1641 stated that "If any man or woeman be a witch, (that is hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit,) They shall be put to death." With the arrival of Governor Phips and a new charter, an act was passed stating that all laws under the old charter were in effect as long as they were not in conflict with English law. Therefore, the Massachusetts law could be applied, although it was as equally vague as the English law when it came to the admissibility of spectral evidence.\(^{25}\)

An unusual aspect of the Salem witchcraft trials was that the court suspended the customary two witnesses required for conviction. Only one witness was required to convict an individual of witchcraft. Given that it was difficult to find any witness to a behavior that was clandestine in nature, the judges, particularly in Salem, were willing to accept a single victim's testimony to the presence of a specter engaging in criminal activities, and visible only to the victim.\(^{26}\)

If the applicability of the laws and standards of admissibility of spectral evidence caused some confusion, the question of defining witchcraft did not. Certain beliefs pertaining to witchcraft undoubtedly came with the Puritans from England. Furthermore, the Puritans also had written texts they could rely on to confirm any suspicions regarding witchcraft. Among the texts in New England were Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus, or Full and Plain Evidence concerning Witches and Apparitions* (1681) and William Perkins' *Discourse of the Damned Act of Witchcraft* (1608). Among the points Glanvill re-enforced in the second edition of *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1689) was the reality of spirits. He wrote:


That I am thus very industrious and zealous to support the belief of Spirits and Apparitions, and of whatever is true that contributes thereto, may seem strange to some, and therefore to want an apology; yet considering the Saducism of this Present Age, and Atheism too if you will, it were a great negelect in me, or any one else of my Profession, not to have a great zeal and indignation against the stupour and besottedness of the men of these times, that are so sunk into the dull sense of their Bodies, that they have lost all belief or conceit that there are any such things as Spirits in the World.27

This passage also emphasizes that not to believe in the reality of spirits links the nonbeliever with atheism. Thus, spirits—including witches’ specters—and witchcraft were a reality in the Puritans’ world view, and at the heart of the judges’ concern with the Devil was the spiritual dynamics of conversion or the resistance to conversion.28 These concerns elevated the importance of spectral evidence.

Relying on previous English trials as a guide did not always prove fruitful. The witchcraft cases brought before Sir John Holt, Chief Justice of the King’s Bench from 1682 to 1710, for example, resulted in acquittals.29 However, the Puritans could look to Sir Matthew Hale whom they considered a great authority on laws and evidence regarding witchcraft. His work on the witchcraft trials in Suffolk (published in 1684) aided in the diagnoses of witchcraft in the 1688 case of John Goodwin’s children of Boston and later in the Salem witchcraft trials. The conformity of behavior between the


bewitched in England, Boston, and Salem left no doubt in the Puritans’ minds that malevolent witches were in their midst.\textsuperscript{30}

Even with these sources, the Salem judges were left to their own devices on how evidence, particularly spectral evidence, should be introduced and evaluated. In response to the situation, the judges turned to a variety of treatises on the subject. The most referred to was Michael Dalton's \textit{The Countrey Justice} (1618). Dalton warned his readers that because witchcraft was practiced in secret, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find actual witnesses who could testify to the conjurations in court. In light of this, Dalton enumerated and elaborated on other types of evidence, including spectral, to indicate proof of guilt. Among the other types of evidence was the existence of a witch's familiar. The best evidence of all was a voluntary confession.\textsuperscript{31}

Unfortunately for the accused, the Salem judges placed more credence in the spectral evidence than anything else—even to the point of disregarding admonitions upon placing such a heavy reliance on it and the call for corroborating evidence. Precedents such as the reprieve that Massachusetts governor Simon Bradstreet granted to Elizabeth Morris in 1680 on the grounds that spectral evidence was not sufficient to find her guilty of witchcraft were ignored.\textsuperscript{32} The combined bias of the judges and the inability of the accused to have access to legal counsel left the accused in a no-win position.\textsuperscript{33}

Even more unfortunate for the accused was that there was no defense against spectral evidence. William Stoughton, the lieutenant governor and chief justice, believed that the Devil could not take the shape of an innocent person. Therefore, once

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30}Thomas Hutchinson, \textit{The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936 reprint) 17-18.
\item \textsuperscript{31}Payne, Defending against the Indefensible, 67-68.
\item \textsuperscript{32}Godbeer, \textit{The Devil's Dominion}, 176.
\item \textsuperscript{33}Payne, Defending against the Indefensible, 69.
\end{itemize}
an individual was accused on the basis of spectral evidence, he or she could be convicted of witchcraft, offer a confession, or, as in the case of Giles Corey, refuse to enter a plea. As Thomas Hutchinson put it, "No body was safe. The most effectual way to prevent an accusation, was to become an accuser; and accordingly the number of the afflicted increased every day..." One accused woman, Susanna Martin, used the Bible in her defense. She argued that if the Devil could assume Samuel's shape, he could assume anyone's shape. Her argument was not strong enough to withstand over thirty years of accusations from her neighbors concerning her supposed conjurations. She was convicted of witchcraft and executed on July 19, 1692.

To return to the Byrds' and Sherwood's cases, Virginian justices were not as impressed with spectral evidence as were the Salem judges. One explanation for the Virginia judges' dismissal of the suits was that they came in the wake of Salem when even Puritan judges wanted to distance themselves from witchcraft cases. Although Virginia witchcraft beliefs were evolving throughout the seventeenth century slowly adopting more Puritan-like characteristics, it was a very selective, limited adoption. Virginians traditionally never took witchcraft as seriously as the Puritans, and when they did they looked for the physical evidence of the witch's teat rather than evidence of an elusive specter. In fact, these are the first and only Virginia cases in which anything like a specter is presented as evidence.

The accusations in the next case were reminiscent of Joan Wright's case (1626). The records read,

Princess Anne Co. Att a Court held the 10th of September 1698.
Coll. Anthony Lawson Mr. Benony Burrough Mr. Evan Jones Captain

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34Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay*, 23.

Like Wright, Sherwood was accused of bewitching plants and animals to death, however, the significance of their deaths was very different. By 1698 the mortality rates were in a decline so that the deaths of the pigs and cotton could be seen more as malicious action rather than a threat against survival. The most glaring difference between the two cases is that Wright was criminally prosecuted for witchcraft while the Sherwood case was a civil defamation suit.

Grace Sherwood is the most famous of the Virginia witches, in part, because she was involved in more witchcraft cases than any other Virginian. Besides the two civil defamation suits in 1698, Sherwood was involved in a criminal case in 1705/1706. Some of the records of the criminal case were destroyed in a courthouse fire leaving open the question of whether Sherwood was found guilty. What is known is that she died in Princess Anne County in 1740, well after the criminal investigation, suggesting that if any charges were brought against her they were dropped.37

36 William and Mary College Quarterly (series 1) (vol. 2, pp. 59-60); Princess Anne County Records, Orders September 10, 1698.

The criminal charges against Sherwood began with the Sherwoods bringing assault and battery charges against Elizabeth Hill on October 7, 1705. Sherwood claimed Hill had “Brused Maimed & Barbarously Beaten” her. The Sherwoods asked for fifty pounds sterling in damages, and a jury awarded them twenty shillings sterling—a substantial amount of money during a period when the primary currency was still tobacco. The Hills retaliated against the Sherwoods by bringing criminal witchcraft charges against Sherwood, claiming she had long been suspected as being a witch. On February 7, 1706, a panel of women testified that in their physical examination of her they found “Two things like titts wth Severall other Spotts.” Oddly enough, the forewoman of the panel of women was Elizabeth Barnes, the same Barnes Sherwood had filed a defamation suit against the previous year for calling Sherwood a witch.38

The next court records regarding this matter do not occur until May 2, 1706. It would seem that the Princess Anne County judges chose to do nothing more in the Sherwood matter despite what Hill thought was a preponderance of evidence against Sherwood. Not content to follow the justices’ lead and let the matter drop, Hill petitioned Attorney General Stevens Thompson claiming Sherwood had bewitched his wife. Thompson then ordered the Princess Anne County Court to conduct an investigation of Sherwood’s “House & all Suspicous places Carefully for all Images & Such like things as may any way Strengthen the Suspicion.” Apparently the investigators found “Severall Evidences ag' her” making it appear the charges were valid, but another month passed before anything was done. It was reported on June 7, 1692 that even though a previous panel of women had testified they had found suspicious spots on Sherwood, another panel of women had been called to examine her and they refused. The court ordered the second panel of women to be charged with contempt and dealt with the utmost severity.


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according to the law. A third panel of women was ordered to examine Sherwood, but the court could not find anyone willing to examine her. It was at this point Sherwood offered to be ducked to prove her innocence. However, the justices felt the weather was too bad to duck, and fearing for her health, postponed the test until the weather was better. On July 10, 1706, the justices ordered Sherwood to be taken to John Harper’s plantation to be ducked. They instructed the sheriff to put her in water over her head but to “alwayes having Care of her life to p’serve her from Drowning.” The records of what happened after that were lost in a courthouse fire.39

The likelihood is if there were any charges against Sherwood they were dismissed. Princess County Court records show her will was probated in 1740 indicating she was neither executed nor banished from the county. While the Sherwood cases pale in comparison with the New England witchcraft cases, collectively, the cases represent the most vigorous prosecution of an accused Virginia witch. Sherwood was the only Virginian whose case went beyond the county level to involve the colonial attorney general, yet, even with this in mind, there is an overall impression that those involved were merely going through the motions of an investigation. After all, the first panel of women testified there were several suspicious spots on Sherwood that had been enough evidence to execute Mary Lee at sea (1654), but only enough evidence against Sherwood to order another examination. The only person who seems remotely interested in prosecuting Sherwood was Luke Hill who went beyond the Princess Anne justices in an effort to seek justice against Sherwood who he claimed had bewitched his wife. However, Hill’s motives must come into question given that he was forced to pay twenty shillings sterling restitution for his wife, Elizabeth, assaulting Sherwood.

Elizabeth Hill’s physical attack on Grace Sherwood indirectly put Luke Hill in the position of defending his position of being his family’s patriarch. Even among the lower classes Hill’s physical attack on Sherwood must have been perceived as inappropriate, therefore, Hill had to find a way to excuse his wife’s actions while preserving his reputation. What better way to do this than to play on Sherwood’s reputation as a witch? Hill’s employment of the supernatural excuses both his wife’s behavior and his inability to control it.

As with so many of the seventeenth-century Virginians, very little of who the Hills and Sherwoods were ever recorded. The only genealogical information recorded regarding any of them is Grace Sherwood’s father was John White, a carpenter, and the Sherwoods had a son, James. It appears from the lack of land patents granted to the Sherwoods before the time of their trials that their fortunes came from Grace’s father left to them in his will.

In the name of god amen I John White being sick in body butt of p’tfect memory blessed be god doe apoint this to bee my last will and testam’ Imp’ I give my Soule to Almighty god and to Jesus Christ by whoes death and passion I hoope to have Remission of all my sines, my worldly Estate as followeth, Item I give unto my Loving Sone In Law James Sherwood all my Land. Item I give unto Jn°. Sevell one Cow and Calve, and hayfer of 2 years old, and one Iron pott, Item I give unto mary Sevell one Cow and Calfe, Item I give unto James the Sone of James Sherwood, one two year old hayfer, Item I give unto Jn°. Cevell my great gun, Item I give unto Edward Atwood Srg’. One Cow Calve to Run w’th the Increase on James Sherwoods Land and the sd James Sherwood to Look after them after his owne. I likewise make the sd James Sherwood my Sole Exequetor Signed Sealed In the p’sence of us this 9th day of feb 1680 Alexand’ Keeling Jn° Coperhew. John White & Seal

proved in court 11th may 1681
Test: Wm Porten Cl Cur.40

The land mentioned in the will was one hundred ninety five acres in lower Norfolk County granted to White in 1674.41 There are no records the Hills owned any land before or during the time of the trial.

The Byrd and Sherwood witchcraft cases are the last ones of this period. Elements in the cases reflect a continuity of a minor concern with the presence of witchcraft within the community as well as the adaptation of limited Puritan beliefs in the corpus of Virginia folk beliefs. However marginal witchcraft beliefs were in Virginia culture, after Sherwood's trial they fell into obscurity as Virginia entered the eighteenth-century. The instability that had been a hallmark of the seventeenth-century gave way to an increasingly rigid social structure as well as lowering mortality rates, less skewed gender demographics, an increased incorporation of African slaves into the labor force, and the rise of an intellectual climate in which the practice of the black arts was met with derision rather than fear.

CHAPTER 10. DRIVING OUT THE MOCKERS

Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.

Proverbs 22:10

The reality of witchcraft in seventeenth-century Chesapeake was that the witches and sorcerers were lost in a sea of rogues, vagabonds, thieves, and cavaliers. In a society comprised of those from the margins of all levels of society, the use of supernatural means to obtain one's goals was seemingly no more odious than those who used other nefarious means to realize their ambitions. In fact, it was often the most ruthless of the colonists who not only survived but achieved any measure of success. Captain William Carver of Lower Norfolk County, Virginia, is a prime example of a successful Chesapeake planter who stopped at nothing—including murder—to become one of the richest, most powerful men in Virginia before losing it all by casting his lot with Nathaniel Bacon in his unsuccessful bid to replace Royal Governor Sir William Berkeley. There was little need to look to the supernatural as a source of the ills in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake when there were other explanations for their misfortunes such as the Powhatan, famine, disease, not to mention common criminals.

It was not, as Phillip Alexander Bruce suggests, that Virginians were not as superstitious as the New England Puritans. All arguments aside that employing the idea of superstition as an interpretive tool to explain witchcraft beliefs in the seventeenth-century North American colonies gives one an inaccurate understanding of the believers, it is clear that residents of the Chesapeake did believe in the reality of witchcraft, magic, specters of some sort, and omens. Virginian Thomas Mathew described how the appearances of a comet, and swarms of pigeons and insects were all seen as portents of
disaster the year before Bacon’s Rebellion.¹ However, it was the supernatural’s place in the worldview of the southerners that was markedly different from the Puritans in the north. The two primary factors for this difference were, first, their belief in witchcraft as a practice rather than a heresy, and second, their religiosity that lacked the fervor of the Puritans. The few historians who have studied witchcraft in the Chesapeake are in agreement that there is a lack of records indicating any covenants with the Dark Prince, although Virginians and Marylanders did believe Satan was present in their colonies either in the form of the Powhatan or as the instigator of the most heinous crimes. Those who migrated to the Chesapeake, who came from all parts of England, and tended to share the traditional English belief that witchcraft as a practice rather than the East Anglican Puritans’ belief of witchcraft as a heresy. Therefore, the traditional models of witchcraft used in the study of sorcery in New England are of little value when applied to the southern practitioners of the black arts. The differences between the two colonies were so vast in so many aspects that it is necessary to examine witchcraft from a different perspective. If they were more similar than they were different, then there should be similar patterns of development that, of course, there is not.

Given that both colonies were English, one would expect the colonists to share some common beliefs with their fellow subjects in their mother country—although perhaps expressed a bit later because of the distance between them. When it came to witchcraft, the majority of the trials in Virginia occurred after 1646, and the first witch hung in New England was in 1647, with the infamous Salem trials taking place in 1692.

In contrast, the most intensive witch hunts in England were conducted from 1644 to 1646 under Matthew Hopkins. It is estimated that approximately two hundred women were executed in East Anglia alone as a result of Hopkins’ prosecutions. In addition, it was not until his investigations and prosecutions that evidence of a written covenant with the Dark Prince appears in British court transcripts. Prosecutions for witchcraft declined after 1646 when Hopkins was forced to retire. The executions, which were more numerous in that two-year period than in the previous hundred years, resulted in a lack of support for criminal prosecutions from the populace. Among the consequences of Hopkins’ witch hunts was the slow incorporation of some of the Puritans’ beliefs into popular English culture and the legal system.

One strain of evidence for this infusion may be found in the evolution of Chesapeake witchcraft trials. As seen in the first witchcraft-related case, there is a sense of *maleficium* in Joan Wright’s trial (1626), but absent from the testimonies is any specific suggestion of Wright being covenanted with Satan. Later cases, such as the investigation into Mary Lee’s execution at sea (1654), include descriptions of the presence—and in Lee’s case the disappearance—of the witch’s teat. Even with this inclusion of a more Continental belief, the Chesapeake courts still tended to follow more closely the traditional English beliefs without seeking any direct evidence of demonic compacts. When the Dunkans and Moneys tried to introduce the radical Scots witchcraft beliefs into the Virginia courts, the judges responded by recognizing that the plaintiffs

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had been slandered, but ordered the witnesses in the case be paid more than the amount they awarded the Dunkans and Moneys. This is, with the sole exception of Rebecca Fowler’s execution in 1685, the typical southern reaction to a witchcraft charge was one of dismissal. Perhaps the strongest evidence of the lack of concern over witchcraft was the Southerners’ propensity to reserve the punishment of execution primarily for murder. The only other two criminal convictions for sorcery were that of William Harding (1655), who was sentenced to ten lashes and given two months to leave the county, and John Cowman (1674), who was sentenced to be executed but was instead ordered merely to go through the motions of being hung.

Virginians’ particular sense Christianity, which gave them a wide berth when it came to sin, must be taken into account in regards to southern witchcraft. The Virginia Company and Sir William Berkeley, the most influential of the seventeenth-century Virginia governors, sought to establish the Church of England as the official church of the colony. With an overall lack of clergy for those inclined toward piety, and those ministers who were there were often as depraved as their flocks, forced Virginians had to adapt to the circumstances. The initial response of the Virginia Company was to set guidelines for Christian behavior through the passage of Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall in 1610. While in Maryland, the Catholic population was so sparse that Lord Baltimore saw to the enactment of the Religious Toleration Act in the hope of luring pious Christians to his colony. Those who settled in Maryland were more like the Virginians, facing the same type of problems, following the same types of economies, and the same degree of religious devotion in practice even if they had different official policies. The fires of religious controversy that plagued Old and New England were
almost entirely absent in the South during the seventeenth century. The worst period of religious strife occurred during the 1650s in Maryland where a coalition of Puritans twice attempted to overthrow Lord Baltimore's government. The first failed when Oliver Cromwell ordered the restoration of Baltimore and the return of the Religious Toleration Act; the second failed with the ascension of Charles II to the throne.

Even the Chesapeake witch hunters, the Reverends David Lindsay and Francis Doughtie, had little impact on the religiosity of Virginians and Marylanders or on their legal system. Only William Harding (1655) was convicted of sorcery as a result of Reverend Lindsay's instigation. The court's allowance of two months for Harding to leave the county can hardly be counted as a victory for Lindsay. The importance of Doughtie's influence in Virginia is evidenced in the court records for Barbary Wingbrough's witchcraft trial in 1657. The entire transcript reads, "Barbary Wingbrough arraigned for a witch, but acquitted." In the case of the Quakers, the most infamous of the women to be brought to court was Ann Godby. Given her predilection to get into confrontations with other Quakers, it would seem Godby was more of a typical cantankerous Virginian than she was a fanatical Quaker. For so many of the participants in the witchcraft trials, the most basic information, such as their religious affiliation, is unknown. A prime example of this is in what is probably the most convoluted of the witchcraft cases, the Manship-Godson case in Maryland (1654). If there were any records of their affiliations, these documents have either been destroyed or lost.

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In his narrative of Bacon’s Rebellion, Thomas Mathew, told the story of how two planters became the godfathers of a young Deog boy who appeared to be dying at the time of his baptism. This story reflects the planters’ sense of religiosity in that one of the planters was an Anglican and the other a Catholic. One should not be misled into believing this is an example of an ecumenical celebration in the fellowship of Christ—on the contrary. While the planter’s wife nursed the child, the men appeared to have returned to a party. When the child recovered, they understood this to be proof of Christ’s victory over paganism, but their response is ethnocentric rather than devotional. This story does serve to illustrate the Southerners’ sense of Christianity shared by the majority of Virginians. The religious strife that was present in Old and New England had little impact on Virginia. Governor Berkeley had tried impose an Anglican hegemony on the populace, but in the reality of practice most Virginians followed what little religious conscience they had. Often overlooked in this story is Ann Mason, the planter’s wife who nursed the boy back to health.

If southerners were nothing but pragmatic in their adaptations to their New World, then how they chose to cope with the skewed gender ratios must to be taken into consideration. Throughout the seventeenth-century, gender ratios ranged as high as six men to one woman and as low as three to one. Twenty to thirty percent of men died bachelors and twelve to fourteen percent died as widowers, while widows and spinsters

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were almost nonexistent.\(^6\) Even as late as 1696, remarriages after the death of a spouse were shockingly quick by contemporary standards. As noted earlier, the meats served at the wedding feast of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Danneline were leftovers from the funeral of her late husband, John Smith.\(^7\) With so few women in the Chesapeake, a woman’s questionable character was less of a concern than was her availability. Given the ruthlessness of the successful planters, one can only wonder if having a wife skilled in the black arts might have had an appeal to men who saw this as giving them a competitive edge in their cutthroat world. Not to mention to execute a woman for something as minor as a little sorcery may have seemed unconscionable to the bachelors and widowers of the colonies.

Occasionally a woman such as Joan Wright (1626) would come under suspicion of possessing supernatural powers. Her seeming ability to predict deaths set her apart from the other rabble—certainly not that of an amazing feat when one considers the high mortality rate. The *maleficium* she was accused of practicing threatened the very survival of Kecoughtan with the deaths of hens, plants, and the inability to kill any game. When it came to blaming someone for their problems, the colonists were all too well aware that the Virginia Company placed profits first and the colonists’ survival second—especially after James I’s revocation of the Virginia Company Charter in 1624. The company had failed to provide sufficient provisions and shelter for the immigrants, thus literally

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\(^7\)Phillip Alexander Bruce, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1910), 299.
sending these men and women to their deaths. However, it was Wright’s ability to predict deaths as well as her admission to possessing some knowledge of witchcraft left Wright in the position of being suspected of being a sorceress. Furthermore, her age and caustic personality were contributing factors in setting her apart from a community that was trying to recreate England on the frontier.

No matter how much the colonists had hoped to establish an English colony in the Chesapeake, they probably could never have conceived how the frontier would subvert their values. It was, in fact, the great social leveler. The rich, poor, planters, servants, and slaves all faced the same dangers and lived in the same squalor during the early years of colonization. Those of noble birth were no more immune to starvation and disease than were the poor. The Englishmen and women would have to tame the frontier before they could transplant any semblance of conspicuous material wealth, and the fledgling aristocracy would have to establish and maintain their positions of authority before they would receive the deference they thought they deserved. Hence, they began to place an increased value on their reputations to the point of the absurd—where else would a widow sue a woman for slander after the woman made a disparaging remark about her late husband? Many of the civil witchcraft cases before Bacon’s Rebellion (1676) reflect the need for Virginians to maintain an air of propriety about themselves.

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The appearance of propriety was particularly difficult for the parvenu. Men like William Rookings, Sr. had to prove themselves worthy of their newfound positions in society. Successful planters during this period were analogous to the English monarchy making Virginia patriarchs dominant over and responsible for those of his household including his family, servants, and slaves.\(^1\) For all of Rookings’ success, he was still dependent on the fledgling aristocracy to maintain his status in the colony. This was no more apparent than when his wife, Jane, accused planter George Burcher’s wife, Ann, of being a witch (1641). Rookings needed to demonstrate to the community in general and the fledgling aristocracy in particular that he had control over his wife as proof of his worthiness to have a vested interest in the colony. George Burcher needed to validate his place in the community by setting upstart former servants in their place with the not-so-gentle reminder not to speak ill of their social betters.

Jane Rookings was, in many ways, a typical woman on the Virginia frontier. Her contentious nature was shared by women from all levels of society from Lady Frances Berkeley down to African slaves. Landon Carter referred to his slave, Nelly, as Mrs. Impudence because of her outspokenness. Virginia women’s propensity to speak their minds often got them into trouble. The most common reason women went to court for was slander suits. English women made up approximately one fifth of the population during the 1630s, but were the instigators in more than half the slander suits. The type of slanders women engaged in was often gender specific. When the target was a man,

women often used the same types of verbal attacks men would use against each other. However, when the target of malicious gossip was a woman, then women would generally attack a woman’s reputation in regards to her sexual behavior. The civil cases involving witchcraft accusations during this period, such as the Rookings-Burcher case, mark a departure from the more common remarks regarding a woman’s licentiousness.

There is an implicit acknowledgment of the power of women’s speech in all of the slander cases—not just the ones involving witchcraft. Gossip was far more than just idle chatter between loquacious women. The absence of newspapers or any other effective means of communication on the frontier elevated gossip as a way to pass on valuable information from plantation to plantation. It is in this context that women’s speech acted as a tool of empowerment in both the political and social arenas. In a world where a disproportionate value was placed on reputation, gossip could destroy the good will of neighbors upon whom survival was dependent. Although maleficium may not have been of primary concern to many Virginians, to be associated with it was not a chance most were willing to take. In addition, it was not Jane Rookings’ place to speak ill of her social betters like Ann Burcher.

Women were not the only ones to get into confrontations that involved witchcraft accusations. It would appear from reading the transcripts of the investigation of Elizabeth Richardson’s execution at sea for witchcraft on the Sarah Artch (1658) that the

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instigator of the investigation, John Washington, cared only that justice be served in regard to this unwarranted death. Closer inspection reveals that this was only another instance of many legal confrontations between Washington and his brother-in-law, Edward Prescott, the owner of the Sarah Artch. Richardson’s life and death becomes obscured in the bids for power between Washington and Prescott, and Maryland’s Governor Josiah Fendall’s bid for legal supremacy over Virginia’s courts. Even if there had been a genuine concern over Richardson’s execution at sea, as well as Mary Lee’s (1654) and Katherine Grady’s (1658) executions at sea, it would have been undermined by the recognition of the captain’s supreme authority at sea. Far from civilization and the institutions that help to maintain a society’s stability, a ship at sea is a world unto itself. Because of its vulnerability to a number of deadly threats, it was imperative for a captain to maintain control of his crew and passengers in order to ensure the safest passage possible. The threat of a mutiny would have easily been sufficient grounds for a captain to acquiesce to the execution of a woman whom the passengers and crew believed posed a threat to their survival. Therefore, any investigation into these women’s deaths would have inevitably led to the captains’ acquittal.

The value Virginians placed on authority was particularly evident in Joan Jenking’s case in 1675. Captain William Carver accused Jenking of being a witch, and when a panel of women failed to find a witch’s tit, the case was dismissed. Carver was one of the richest and most powerful men in Virginia at this time. When he brought a formal accusation against Jenking, the court had no choice but to investigate even though Carver had the most unsavory reputation of having literally gotten away with murder. Jenking, on the other hand, was a former indentured servant—a servant whose contract
had belonged to Carver. And just as the witchcraft accusation against Elizabeth Richardson was lost in the Washington-Prescott feud, the accusation against Joan Jenking was lost in the crossfire between Carver and her husband, Lazarus, with Carver resorting to any means available to him to get the best of Jenking. A year later, Carver would lose everything—including his life—in Bacon’s Rebellion.

Women’s place in Virginia society changed after Bacon’s Rebellion. The characteristics that had served women well enough before 1676 demonized them after the Rebellion. With Governor Berkeley’s victory over the rebels came a new sense of social order. Planters sought to replace indentured servants with African slaves in an effort to keep the population of fractious, poorer Europeans down to a minimum. Witchcraft charges may have still been peripheral to larger problems between neighbors, or as in the Dunkan-Money cases between family members, but the charges began to take on darker tones. Part of this is certainly from the incorporation of Puritan beliefs, but it is also due in part to the changing values in the Chesapeake. The wilderness had been subdued to some extent in the tidewater region, and the problems facing the colonists were slowly beginning to subside. The Powhatan had been pushed farther west with the poorer planters acting as a buffer between them and the tidewater planters. Gender ratios were less skewed, the mortality rates were beginning to level off, the colony was slowly reproducing itself, and vestiges of material wealth began appearing outside of Jamestown. In other words, the Chesapeake was beginning to approach the English ideal the planters were striving to create.

As class distinctions became more rigid and formalized, the characteristics women employed to build this new world no longer had a place in it—planters’ wives
could now afford to be ladies. The survival skills that enabled Jane Rookings to survive and become a success became associated with the rebels, a fact that may be due, in part, to her son, William Rookings, Jr., having been one of Bacon’s lieutenants. The loyalist women were portrayed as helpless victims of the rabble who had sought to destroy their way of life in Governor Berkeley’s propaganda about the rebellion. The ideal of submissive women was carried through the post-rebellion period, making a strong woman an aberration in the idyllic setting of a genteel plantation. Certainly a lady of stature would never engage in the practice of the black arts thus relegating sorcery to the lower classes. Given that the lower classes were demonized in general, and lower-class women were demonized in particular, it is only natural that sorcery would become much more sinister than it had been in the past. An example of the transformation is seen in that it may have been hinted that Joan Wright (1626) had a hand in a baby’s death, but Alice Cartwright was accused outright of having used black magic to kill a baby in 1679.

By the time of the Byrd and Sherwood trials (1698/1705) class differences were no longer a feature of witchcraft trials thus relegating them to the lower classes. It is also in these trials that evidence regarding the nightmare hags first appears in the court transcripts, but there is still no mention of a demonic covenant. It is tempting, and at times very useful, to integrate information from the biological sciences as an interpretive tool as a way to understand the symptoms of bewitchment. The application of biological information affirms the legitimacy of the bewitchment experience, but explains it through non-supernatural means. In the case of the nightmare hags, contemporary research into sleep paralysis provides a unique insight into the accusers’ experience. This phenomenon occurs when an individual wakes up during a state of deep, dreaming sleep. The brain
temporary paralyzes the body, but the individual is still dreaming. Descriptions from the Byrds' and Sherwood's neighbors of their nocturnal rides dovetails with the descriptions of sleep paralysis, therefore, offering a more natural explanation for the experience.

Other biological explanations are more problematic—among the most popular are the ones that explain the bewitchment experience through the ingestion of hallucinogenic substances. The most commonly used explanations include ergot and nightshade poisoning.13 Evidence from studies of these hallucinogens can be quite compelling as a way of dismissing the historical characters' explanation for their experiences. The problem is, in that many of these studies, they only take into consideration the symptoms and the accessibility of the hallucinogens to the victims. The cultural and historical context of the bewitchment is set aside for a scientific explanation.

The proponents of the poisoning theories often ignore the cultural context that ultimately defines the experience. In other words, if someone believes he or she is bewitched, then they will experience symptoms consistent with their witchcraft beliefs. As Nicholas P. Spano and Jack Gottlieb noted in their response to the convulsive ergot hypothesis, the victims reacted to specific cultural cues such as being relieved of their symptoms at the reading of certain Biblical passages.14 While this and their other criticisms are not impossible as that it could be argued that these are merely


psychosomatic expressions of a psychotropic experience. Nonetheless, it is still highly unlikely the symptoms could be suspended with a mere cultural cue.

Yet, these explanations ultimately reveal more about us than they explain the bewitchment experience. The use of hallucinogenics as a way of rationalizing the experience first appeared during the 1960s—coincidentally at the same time LSD became a popular recreational drug. Additionally, there was a failure to recognize the difference between the world we live in and that of the historical characters—particularly in regard to ideas of consumption. In their pre-pasteurized world, they were more susceptible to different kinds of poisonings than we are today. A case of accidental ergot poisoning may be unique to us, but their experiences of becoming ill from bad food would not have been unique to them. Granted, some cases of poisoning may have been blamed on sorcery, but it is unlikely that all cases would have been.

Clearly, by the time of Grace Sherwood’s last trial in 1705/1706, Virginian justices wanted little to do with witchcraft cases. The fact that Luke Hill had to push for a criminal investigation is an indication that the judges would just as soon have let the rabble sort out the own problems rather than letting themselves be drawn into these sordid affairs. It is obvious that Hill pushed for the criminal investigation only after he was forced to pay twenty shillings sterling to Sherwood for damages Hill’s wife inflicted on Sherwood during a physical altercation. This form of restitution was quite a substantial sum in a colony where the primary form of currency was still tobacco. A courthouse fire destroyed the records regarding the outcome of the case, but whatever it was Sherwood was still alive until 1741, indicating that even if she was criminally convicted of being a witch, she was not executed.
In the end, witchcraft was peripheral on the Chesapeake cultural landscape. Nevertheless, the study of it does provide a new and different insight into arguably the most colorful of the English colonists in North America. From the very beginning of colonization in the Chesapeake, its character was always an aberration in comparison to the other colonies. The lack of a common regional tradition from which to draw upon, left the colonists constantly negotiating what it meant to be English and what values were to be transplanted in their new world. This translated into a state of constant adaptation as they were tempered by their experiences on the frontier. Their shared common goal of economic success, rather than a strong shared religious belief as was present in the other colonies, shaped their world views in such a way that their religiosity lacked the fervor of the Quakers in the Middle Colonies and the Puritans in New England.

The original goals of this study were to place the witchcraft trials into a historical context and to trace the evolution of beliefs pertaining to witchcraft. In order to do this though, it was necessary to question the traditional models of understanding American witchcraft. The two primary models challenged in this study is the assumption all English colonists believed witchcraft to be a heresy, and the second was to reexamine the feminist model which holds that it was the poor, marginal women who were most vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. This study has by no means exhausted the types of interpretations of the cases, but instead merely a beginning of understanding witchcraft in colonial America from a different perspective.
1. Table of Chesapeake Witches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Defendant</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Verdict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1626</td>
<td>Joan Wright</td>
<td>Kecoughtan, Virginia</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1641</td>
<td>Jane Rookins</td>
<td>Lower Norfolk, Virginia</td>
<td>civil, accused</td>
<td>Rookins apologized, paid court costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ann Burcher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>Mary Lee</td>
<td>at sea</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>hung at sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>Elizabeth Manship</td>
<td>St. Mary's City, Maryland</td>
<td>civil, sued</td>
<td>Godson apologized, paid court costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Godson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1655</td>
<td>unnamed woman (possibly Ann Godby)</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1655</td>
<td>Alice Stephens</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1655</td>
<td>Elizabeth Bennet</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1655</td>
<td>William Harding</td>
<td>Northumberland County, Virginia</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>ten lashes, two months to leave the county, paid court costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1657</td>
<td>Barbary Wingbrough</td>
<td>Northampton County, Virginia</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1658</td>
<td>Elizabeth Richardson</td>
<td>at sea</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>hung at sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1658</td>
<td>Katherine Grady</td>
<td>at sea</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>hung at sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>County/Land</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1659</td>
<td>Ann Godby</td>
<td>Lower Norfolk</td>
<td>civil, accused</td>
<td>paid three pounds tobacco and court costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>County, Virginia</td>
<td>Ann Robinson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1661</td>
<td>Joan Michel</td>
<td>Charles County</td>
<td>civil</td>
<td>failed to prove her case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1674</td>
<td>John Cowman</td>
<td>St. Mary’s City</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>sentenced to execution, but received a reprieve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1675</td>
<td>Joan Jenking</td>
<td>Lower Norfolk</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>case dismissed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>County, Virginia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1679</td>
<td>Alice Cartwright</td>
<td>Lower Norfolk</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>County, Virginia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1679</td>
<td>Paul Carter</td>
<td>Accomack County</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Rebecca Fowler</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>executed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1686</td>
<td>Hannah Edwards</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1694</td>
<td>Phyllis Money</td>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>civil, sued</td>
<td>Eale apologized, paid fifty pounds of tobacco and court costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>County, Virginia</td>
<td>William Eale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1695</td>
<td>John and Dorothy Dunkan</td>
<td>Westmoreland County, Virginia</td>
<td>civil, sued Henry and Dorothy Dunkan</td>
<td>Henry and Dorothy Dunkan paid ten pounds of tobacco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Accused</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Additional Details</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1695</td>
<td>Nell Cane King</td>
<td>Queen County, Virginia</td>
<td>accused Cane of riding her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1695</td>
<td>Eleanor Morris</td>
<td>Queen County, Virginia</td>
<td>accused Morris of sorcery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698</td>
<td>Anne and John Byrd</td>
<td>Princess Anne County, Virginia</td>
<td>civil, sued Charles Kinsey and John Pitts claimed Byrds had ridden them</td>
<td>case dismissed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698</td>
<td>Grace Sherwood</td>
<td>Princess Anne County, Virginia</td>
<td>civil, sued Anthony and Elizabeth Barnes saying that she had ridden them</td>
<td>case dismissed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698</td>
<td>Grace Sherwood</td>
<td>Princess Anne County, Virginia</td>
<td>civil, sued John and Jane Gisburne, saying they claimed she had bewitched their pigs to death</td>
<td>case dismissed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1702</td>
<td>Katherine Prout</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>civil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1705</td>
<td>Grace Sherwood</td>
<td>Princess Anne County, Virginia</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1712</td>
<td>Virtue Violl</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>acquitted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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