



The Devil's Disciples: The Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials

Professor Peter Charles Hoffer

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"A superb legal scholar, Hoffer provides an excellent discussion of the procedures and evidence used in the trials. He reveals that grand juries demanded more tangible evidence of witchcraft than the assertions of afflicted adolescent girls before issuing indictments. Hoffer then demonstrates that, in determining the guilt of the accused, the trial juries essentially followed the lead of the judges, who were insufficiently prepared for witchcraft cases." -- *American Historical Review*

"Hoffer's central argument is persuasive and significant... [He] furthers understanding of Salem witchcraft by comparing it to allegations of satanic abuse and child molestation in our own time. Without denying the existence of child abuse today or the importance of exposing it to public view, Hoffer compares the Salem witchcraft hysteria to the collective fantasies of victimization that have overtaken United States communities in recent years... [He] demonstrates the continued relevance of the Salem episode and its important place in American history." *Journal of American History*

"Reads like a good novel... You cannot wait to see what happens next, even though the verdicts were passed in 1692."-- *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*

Mention the term *witch hunt*, and Salem, Massachusetts, springs to mind--and with it the power of superstition, the danger of mob mentality, and our natural fear of gross injustice. For more than a year, between January 1692 and May 1693, the men and women of Salem village lived in heightened fear of witches and their master, the Devil. Hundreds were accused of practicing witchcraft. Many suspects languished in jail for months. Nineteen men and women were hanged; one was pressed to death. Neighbors turned against neighbors, children informed on their parents, and ministers denounced members of their congregations. How could a settled community turn so viciously against itself? Why were certain persons accused and condemned while others were not? And why did the incidents of Salem occur where and when they did?

Approaching the subject as a legal and social historian, Peter Charles Hoffer offers a fresh look at the Salem outbreak based on recent studies of panic rumors, teen hysteria, child abuse, and intrafamily relations. He brings to life a set of conversations--in taverns and courtrooms, at home and work--which took place among suspected witches, accusers, witnesses, and spectators. The accusations, denials, and confessions of this legal story eventually resurrect the tangled internal tensions that lay at the bottom of the Salem witch hunts.

"This engaged account of New England's most notorious crisis fuses scholarly craft and chutzpah with the skills of a master story teller. The author's expertise as a legal historian, coupled with explorations of oral culture and informed conjectures on such topics as Tituba's origins and 'recovered' memories of child abuse, give *The Devil's Disciples* a distinguished place in the ever-lengthening line of Salem witchcraft studies."-- Michael McGiffert, Editor, *William and Mary Quarterly*

"Hoffer offers us a balanced, smoothly written book which helps the reader understand how the judges and jury members framed the testimony of frightened and frightening young women. It is a bright, well-informed study."--Timothy H. Breen, Northwestern University

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