



The King's Christian Collegiate Model United Nations



The Salem Trials - Restoring Peace in Salem

Emilia Illner - February 25-26th, 2022



Dear Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour to welcome you to the eighth annual King'sMUN Conference: Voices of the Voiceless. Since the debut of the King'sMUN conference in 2013, we have striven to create a conference that enables students to push past their comfort zones, connect with their peers, and learn more about the world around them.

Model United Nations (MUN) is a youth simulation of the United Nations where students have the chance to debate the world's greatest issues, problem-solve, and produce creative resolutions with their peers. Throughout my MUN journey I have developed my critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, and communication skills, which have transferred into many different avenues of my life and which I attribute to many of my successes in high school.

We are living in a time where certain people groups are marginalized and discriminated against based on prejudice and unjust systems. At King'sMUN we strive to lift the songs of those who are oppressed and listen to the stories and experiences of those whose mouths have been sealed for far too long. This year, the theme of the King'sMUN conference is Voices of the Voiceless. I hope you take this to heart both during the conference and as you move forward into your future.

These past few years have, without a doubt, been ones of hardship and challenge. The COVID-19 Pandemic has built many barriers not only between countries, but within countries, communities and families. At King'sMUN we acknowledge the past to live actively in the present, but look to the future with hope. One thing the COVID-19 Pandemic has not taken away is our creativity and will to connect to one another. With a range of committees branching from tutorial to advanced, and real to fictional, delegates with all levels of experience have an opportunity to collaborate with peers and grow as young leaders and changemakers at King'sMUN, despite the current predicaments.

Once again, I am extremely excited to greet each and every one of you at the eighth annual King'sMUN conference. Myself and the King'sMUN Secretariat look forward to seeing you on Friday, February 25th and Saturday, February 26th, 2022.

Sincerely,
Arianna Mastrotonardo
Secretary-General, 2022
King'sMUN

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A Brief History of The Salem Trials

A Witch Issue

In 1692, the Massachusetts Bay Colony executed 14 women, five men, and two dogs for witchcraft. To set the scene, 17th century Salem was a bustling town with a heavy Puritan influence. Belief in the supernatural was not uncommon during this time period, which led to extreme paranoia as well as misdirected religious fervour ending in a justice system valuing repentance over truth. The early stages of this soon to be known “witch hunt” began in 1692 when two young girls, Betty (9-years-old) and Abigail (11-years-old), began to act “increasingly strange”. Their behaviour, originally described as juvenile delinquency, consisted of pitching fits, screaming, contorting their bodies, and complaining of pinching sensations. Yet this behaviour was not subdued by the young girls. It spread to many other women throughout the town and the cause of this behaviour could not be medically diagnosed. William Griggs, the local doctor, believed that the physical and physiological effects that were being experienced could only be explained by witchcraft. The newly distinguished witchcraft issue within the town of Salem left the town's people eager to catch its culprit and to evict the devil himself.

Accusations

The marginalized members of the community became the first suspects; however, that pattern did not stay consistent, with many high status women being convicted as the believed evidence of a supernatural presence grew. As women contracted these illnesses, more women began to be accused. The hysteria grew out of control and it ultimately became a point and shoot case in which anyone could be found guilty.

The Trials

The toll of being identified as a witch really only began during the trial period. The trials of the newly identified witches went on for weeks, and consisted of incredibly informal hearings, prosecutors, defendants and convictions. Defendants were forced to defend themselves without aid, while “victims” could prosecute women on the bases of “spectral evidence” - essentially a claim of witnessing or being the subject of an attack. As to those who confessed or persisted in their innocence, justice would be served differently than expected. Those who confessed, oddly enough, were spared vengeance; however, those who insisted on their innocence met harsher outcomes, their fate usually ending in death. Death by hanging was the most common means of justice, and as the hearings played out and rumours spread, witch hunting spread throughout the Bay Colony.

An End to an Era

On October 29th, Governor Phips of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who had been somewhat absent throughout the hunting and trialling period, ceased its continuation. He ordered for the proceedings to immediately end, and went on to ban the use of spectral evidence. Phips then also pardoned those in custody, and by May 1693 he was able to end all trials. So what drew this sudden engagement in the trials from the Governor in the first place? Ironically enough, the accusations of witchcraft ended up extending to include his own wife, which must have been a stroke too personal, despite the previous nineteen persons having been hanged, and another five having died in custody. All in all, it is overtly possible that without the accusation of Mrs. Phips, the hunt for witchery could have gone on for much longer, and quite possibly extended even further than Massachusetts.

Restoring Peace in Salem

Victims

After prisoners were granted amnesty in 1693, the town went quiet, everything seemed to have been treated as if it were water under the bridge. Accusers and judges went on to their regular duties as working citizens, displaying minimal remorse, and certainly no acknowledgment of wrongdoing. There was a clear conscience that prevailed, and if any blame were to arise it was compensated by declaring it had merely been an incident of the “trickery of Satan”. That the townspeople had been “tricked by the Devil” was the most common belief, yet the victims and their families felt as if they had been tricked by their neighbours. Victims had lost loved ones and property during the trials, which they would likely never see again. The victims and their families’ livelihood had been stripped out of their hands, and their attempts to regain social standings or financial/victim compensation took years if not already failing.

Accusers

Naturally most of the accusers in the Salem trials went on to lead fairly normal lives. Many of the women eventually married and had families. Records do not reveal what happened; however, some did attempt to make amends for their previous wrongdoings with formal apologies in their roles during the trials.

Compensation - The Enlightenment

The real compensation for the Salem Trials began in the century that followed with The Enlightenment Era. During this timeline social and political changes, which took place throughout the American Colonies, lead to a redefinition of traditional thinking including superstitions, supernatural beliefs, etc. The intellectual and scientific movement emphasized reason and rationality. Puritan faith was suddenly diminishing, the hysteria between God and the

Devil became less and less, leading to the thought of witches to being an almost laughable subject and ceased to provoke fear. The Enlightenment Era ultimately eliminated the witch hunts and those who may have been prospects. A newly emerging medical field, based on the latest scientific theories, left no place for healers and home remedies (which had been a target of witchcraft accusation) in mainstream society. In fact, the modern stereotype of the witch being an ugly, toothless, old hag really only began during the eighteenth century. With its previous image reassembling an eccentric woman who symbolizes power and was believed to be doing the Devil's work —quite similarly a reflection of the type of Women who stood trial in Salem only a few decades earlier.

Impact

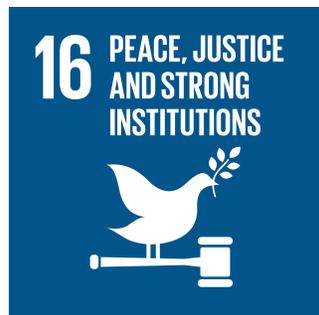
The impact of the enlightenment and promotion of intellectual thinking did ultimately impact the main group that had become the most vulnerable during the witch hunting, women. The Enlightenment changed all aspects of what life looked like for the average woman. Life became increasingly limited during this century, the home became her life, the housewife would be her name. The implicit loss of status eliminated the projection of the beautiful and powerful woman, yet it did end up protecting her from the possibility of further hunting. But could she have been safe, peace kept throughout the colony without diminishing the power of women? Thankfully there are efforts being made to effectively bring together standardized ways of impacting the livelihoods of the members of society who often find themselves in vulnerable situations. An SDG that would specifically relate towards a better Salem and further the restoration of peace, SDG 16. SDG 16 is there to:

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”,

and unfortunately many of these resolutions previously stated had been abandoned during the Trial time. SDG 16 is an engine for progress and an enabling tool for society and would have been a valuable tool for members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, more specifically the women of their community. The issues withstood during the witch hunt do not only encapsulate the need of SDG 16 but it also signifies links to other SDGs including SDG 4, quality education reiterating back to the common belief of the supernatural which ultimately lead to the witch hunts; and SDG 5, gender equality that would ensure women's equal leadership opportunities, which could have changed the history of women in Salem.

Questions To Consider

- Was this an issue of gender equality? There were men who had been accused and imprisoned during this time period.
- Do you think that the Salem Witch Trials would have taken place if the accusations started in a community where religion was less central to everyday life?
- Were there any political, racial, or religious motives behind this crisis? Did anyone gain from it?
- Do you see any similarities between these trials and an issue that the world is facing in the current time period?
- How can we learn from these events?
- How could these events have been avoided, or better compensated for?
- What may have induced the sudden outbreak of the unknown illnesses?
- Was there a deeper message when it came to the way defendants were punished?



Additional Information

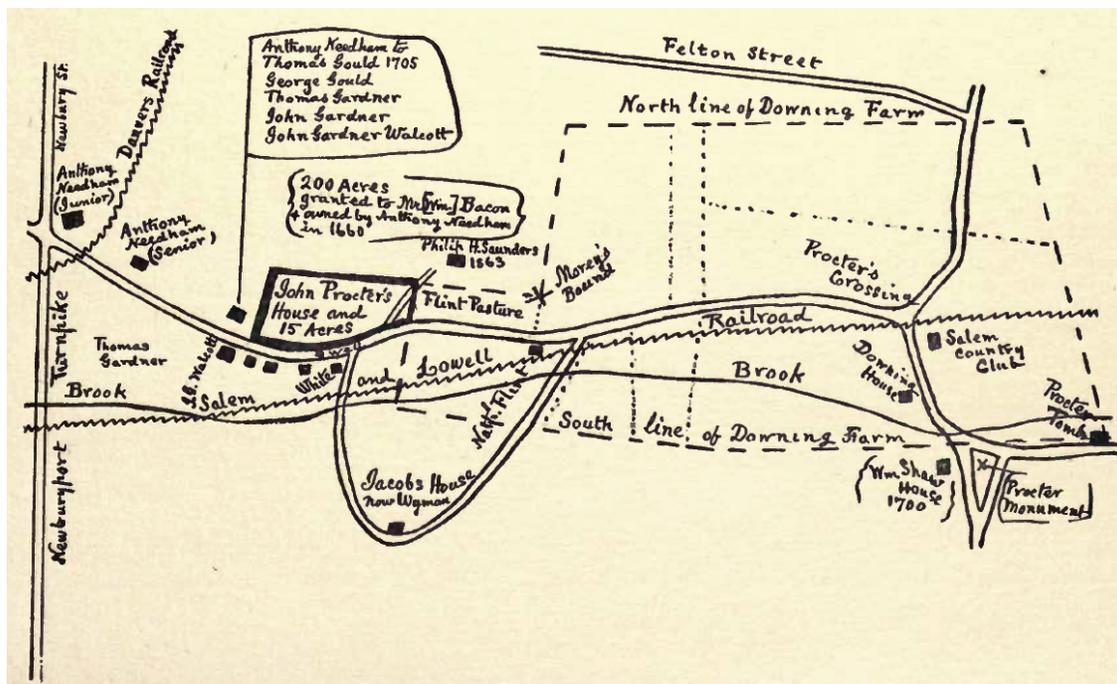
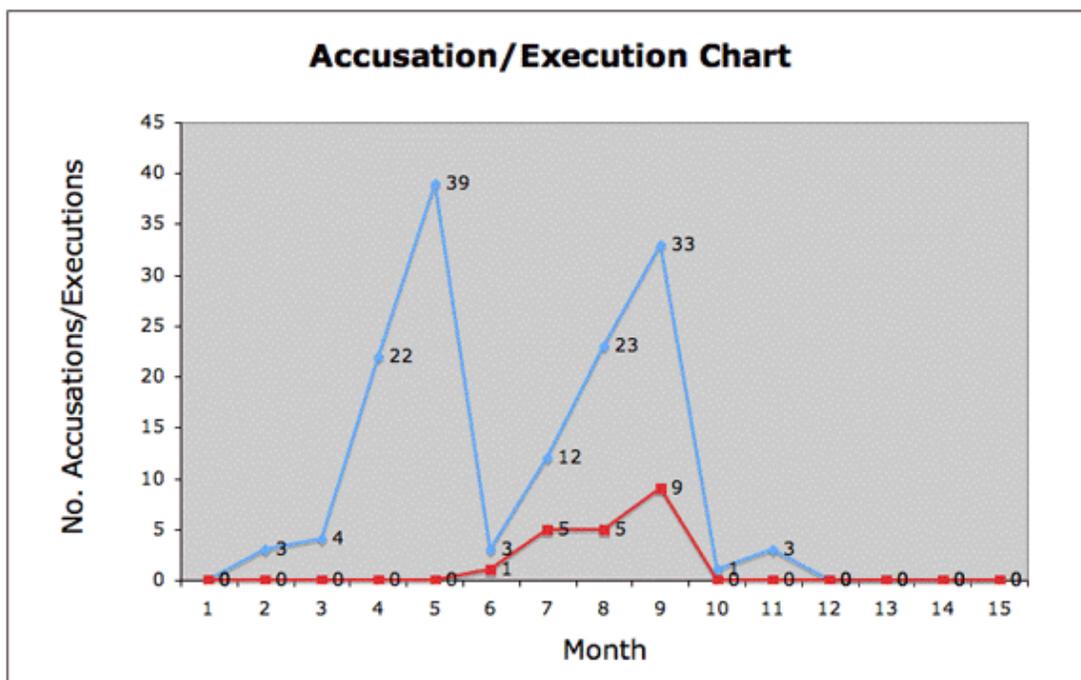


Figure 1 (Top): Accusation/Execution Chart. Figure 2 (Bottom): A Map of Salem, Massachusetts.

Resources

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