

AGENTS OF THE DEVIL?:
WOMEN, WITCHCRAFT, AND MEDICINE IN EARLY AMERICA

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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This thesis argues that early American women healers were especially vulnerable to witchcraft accusations because their positions of power threatened patriarchal society and their colonial communities. Colonial society already viewed early American women as more susceptible to witchcraft than men because they believed women were more vulnerable to temptations by the devil. In particular, women healers faced accusations of witchcraft because they had it within their power to cure or to hurt. Women healers were involved in early American witchcraft trials as character witnesses and inspectors for witches' marks. However, their abilities to recognize witchcraft-induced illness, injuries, and deaths contributed to the fears of their neighbors who did not possess such skills. Because of their power and influence, women healers represent a prime example of revolutionary women who acted as agents of change within their own lives. This thesis contributes to scholarship through a complex look at women healers' specific involvement in early American witchcraft trials as opposed to women in general.

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Dedication

To my grandparents,
Richard and Barbara Miles and Shirley Parker
for sharing their stories of the past with me

And

For my grandfather,
Fred Edward Parker
(August 6, 1926 - November 5, 1987),

The true reason I am a historian.

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Foreword

Many of the edited primary sources used in this work have been adapted to modern English language usage. Other sources underwent no changes. Throughout this work, quotations will directly match the text from which they came. The abbreviation, *sic*, commonly used by scholars to mark changes in original spelling, is not used.

Introduction

Saved by Grace: The Complexities of Early American Witchcraft Trials

Grace Sherwood, the Last Accused Witch Healer

The first and last people tried and condemned for witchcraft in America were women healers, the last being Grace Sherwood of Princess Anne County, Virginia. Before the accusation of witchcraft, Grace White had not been a person of any historical significance. She was the only child of a carpenter named John White. In 1680, she married James Sherwood at Church Point. As a wedding gift, her father gave the newlyweds fifty acres of farmland. They had a successful marriage. The couple produced three children—all boys. Their names were John, James, and Richard. James's and Grace's good fortune did not go unrecognized. Several of their neighbors watched and grew jealous as Grace and her husband's business thrived. Like most rumors, the gossip began in secret. Unbeknownst to the couple, they had made enemies. Before she would be charged as being a witch, some of Grace's neighbors expressed their belief that her crops were too healthy and that theirs were not. Unofficially, they blamed her for problems they were experiencing with their own farms.¹

¹ Marc Carlson provides a chronological table with information about those accused of witchcraft in America. This table verifies the first and last accused condemned witches by both date and name. The Virginia Historical Society corroborates the same, verifying such information about Grace Sherwood.; Marc Carlson, "North America," *Historical Witches and Witchtrials in North America*, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/witchtrial/na.html>; Virginia Historical Society, "Grace Sherwood: 'The Witch of Pungo,'" *Collections and Resources*, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/grace-sherwood-witch-pungo>; "Grace Sherwood," *Ferry Plantation House: An Historical Site in Virginia Beach, VA*, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://ferryplantation.org/grace-sherwood/>; Bob Perrine, "Old Donation Church History: The History of the People and The Three Churches of Lynnhaven Parish, Today Known as Old Donation Episcopal Church," *Old Donation Church*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://1bob9.blogspot.com/2009/06/old-donation-history.html>; Belinda Nash and Danielle Sheets, *A Place in Time: The Age of the Witch of Pungo* (Virginia Beach: W.S. Dawson Co., 2012), 87-89.

The sudden death of Grace's husband only contributed to the rumor mill. After twenty-one years of marriage, James passed away. On Monday, August 15, 1701, he died mysteriously, although he had reportedly been in good health. After burying James, Grace drew additional unwelcome attention to herself when she did not remarry. She broke with custom again when she continued to own and work her land without a man. To make matters worse, the unconventional woman had been known to wear men's clothing while working the farm. In addition to working her own farm, Grace worked as a midwife and herbalist.

Her work as a healer further added to the rumor mill. Eventually it would sow the seeds of her demise. Among the midwife's biggest critics were Luke and Elizabeth Hill who in 1705 blamed her for the death of their first child. Shortly after her miscarriage, Elizabeth Hill attacked Grace, her midwife. After the assault, Grace sued Hill for attacking her and slandering her good character. With what seemed like good fortune, she won the suit.²

Not long after Grace won her case, she had the misfortune of being the midwife of Elizabeth Barnes who not only had a miscarriage, but also, in 1705, charged Grace as being a witch. Purportedly, Grace used magic to enter Elizabeth's home through a keyhole. Once inside, she jumped on Elizabeth's back, causing blood to flow and the death of her child. She then left the injured woman through the keyhole. Elizabeth laid on the floor the entire night. Her husband found her unconscious the following morning. After relating to her husband her tale of how the witch's attack caused the miscarriage, the couple went to the constable and formally

² At this time, wives could not legally own property. Typically, widows with grown male children would receive one-third of the late husband's estate.; Cynthia A. Kierner, "Grace Sherwood: The Virginia Witch," in *Virginia Women: Their Lives and Times*, eds. Cynthia A. Kierner and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 17, 21-22; Perrine, "Old Donation Church History."; Nash and Sheets, *A Place in Time*, 89-91, 108-109, 111-112; Monica C. Witowski, "Grace Sherwood (ca. 1660-1740)," *Encyclopedia Virginia, A Publication of Virginia Foundation for Humanities, in Partnership with Library of Virginia*, accessed March 12, 2017, http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Sherwood_Grace_ca_1660-1740; Nash and Sheets, *A Place in Time*, 109.

charged the midwife. Upon becoming aware that Grace Sherwood had been accused of causing Barnes's miscarriage, Elizabeth Hill seized on the opportunity with her own allegation of witchcraft. At the Lynnhaven Parish, before the entire congregation, Grace declared her innocence, "I be not a witch ... I be a healer."³ In response, Boush, the senior warden of the community, asked the congregation if anyone would speak on Grace's behalf. The room remained silent. In the absence of anyone saying anything else, the matter was dropped.⁴

That did not stop Elizabeth Hill who persisted in her belief in Grace's guilt. Luke Hill supported his wife and the couple pressed the idea of searching Grace's home for evidence of witchery. In the face of their persistence, the judge had no choice but to listen to his plea. Hesitantly, the constable and sheriff arrived at Grace's home. They searched for objects possessed by witches. These items included talismans and charms, which could wield magical properties to harm others. They also hunted for cookbooks of mysterious herbs used in concoctions. All the while, Grace displayed no power or control over the search of her home. While in custody, she awaited their discoveries. Surprisingly, the constable and sheriff found nothing abnormal.

The Hills did not retract their accusation and insisted Grace's body be inspected for witches' marks. On June 7th, 1706, the Jury summoned several women to search Grace Sherwood's body. Conflicted, some of the women chosen as inspectors did not show up to the examination. Clearly, Grace had some friends and perhaps some admirers. The sheriff had to threaten them with legal punishment if they refused to inspect Grace's body. Intimidated by the sheriff and afraid for their own reputations they promptly arrived for the next appointed

³ Nash and Sheets, *A Place in Time*, 126.

⁴ Nash and Sheets, *A Place in Time*, 106-108, 126; Jonathan P. Cushing, Record of Grace Sherwood's Trial for Witchcraft, Collections of the Virginia Historical and Philosophical Society, vol. 1, Richmond, 74; Nash and Sheets, *A Place in Time*, 120.

inspection date. To Grace's dismay, Elizabeth Barnes was pronounced forewoman of the female panel selected to inspect her body.⁵

At ten o'clock on the morning of July 10, 1706, crowds gathered at the Princess Anne County Courthouse to witness the inspection of Grace Sherwood. Grace, a middle-aged colonial woman, was an exhibition on display for all her neighbors to see. Against her will, she had to stand in the center of the room, feeling alone in a crowded space. There was no place for Grace to hide her body or her shame. Twelve respectable women, led by Barnes, circled around Grace, pointing to and prodding her skin. As forewoman, Elizabeth Barnes used her position to her advantage. After the exam, the women found Grace to be a witch. If they had found nothing, no one would know of Grace's trials. She lived in a time when people truly believed in witches. Two women, with common distaste for Grace, turned her seemingly perfect world upside down. Unfortunately, her life is like that of other women healers accused of witchcraft, in that through helping others, her kindness made her vulnerable to envy, betrayal, and condemnation.⁶

Inspiration and Contribution to Scholarship

Colonial American women healers played significant roles during the seventeenth and eighteenth century witchcraft trials as people who the community respected but also feared for their power over life and death. They could choose to heal people or hurt people under the guise of healing. Furthermore, if a woman failed to uphold the social expectations of a successful healer, she became more likely to be accused of witchcraft. Despite this, colonial American communities expected women healers to care for others because they believed women more nurturing than men. Colonial courts also called women healers as character witnesses and to inspect accused witches' bodies for marks of the devil or witches' marks.

⁵ Cushing, Record of Grace Sherwood's Trial for Witchcraft, 74-75.

⁶ Cushing, Record of Grace Sherwood's Trial for Witchcraft, 74, 77.

The significance of women healers accused of witchcraft in America is a debatable topic. Historian of English witchcraft, David Harley, argues scholars have wrongfully exaggerated the role of midwives in witchcraft trials to push a feminist agenda. Because laypeople trusted midwives to attest to the true paternity of children and serve as character witnesses in court, he believes seventeenth century communities respected their midwives too much to accuse them of witchcraft.⁷ Historian Lucinda McCray Beier disagrees with Harley in that she finds English practitioners more vulnerable to witchcraft for using magical methods to heal.⁸ American historian, Carol F. Karlsen agrees that respect for women's healers allowed them to take place in witchcraft trials through examining the accused for witches' marks. Because women healers had knowledge of women's bodies, American colonists trusted them to recognize supernatural evidence.⁹ Conversely, American historian Rebecca J. Tannenbaum explains that women healers were more likely than other women to be blamed as the causation for disease, miscarriages, and still births. If a woman failed in her healing methodology, then one may perceive that she intentionally harmed someone or made a sickness worse under the guise of healing.¹⁰ Though a few scholars have touched on women healers' roles in witchcraft trials, few have focused on the subject for the entirety of their work. Scholars have completed even less research on early American healers' involvement in witchcraft trials than they have those in Europe.

Women healers' unique involvement in early American witchcraft trials and accusations is rather intriguing and largely ignored. Specifically, this thesis focuses on North American

⁷ David Harley, "Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife Witch," *Social History of Medicine* 3 (1990): 1.

⁸ Lucinda McCray Beier, *Sufferers & Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge: 1987), 24.

⁹ Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987), 12-13.

¹⁰ Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling: Women & Medicine in Early New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 125-129.

rather than European witch trials because scholars have neglected to analyze the significance of women healers' roles in American witch trials. Exploring women healers' influence in the American trials will be this thesis's contribution to scholarship, which also explains that women were particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations because colonists had the preconceived notion that women were more susceptible than men to being tempted by the devil. This ideology, paired with occupational women healers stepping outside their normative gender roles, led them to suffer the brunt of witchcraft accusations because their medical skills and decisions to heal or to hurt others disrupted patriarchal society.¹¹ This project analyzes secondary sources on witchcraft, early American healthcare, women's roles, and aspects of early American culture. Sources contain information on Puritan lifestyle, religion, economics, and social class within the colonies. Primary sources include diary entries, medical manuals and cookbooks, court records, and collections of correspondence. Paired with secondary source materials, these first-hand accounts described how colonists perceived healers and witchcraft in early America.

Research Questions

This thesis answers the following questions: Were Colonial American women normatively expected to diagnose, treat, and nurse the sick? How did they learn to do these things? What methods did they use? Were any of these methods associated with magical/ witchcraft beliefs or practices? Were women more likely than men to be accused of witchcraft in Colonial North America? Were some or many of the women accused of witchcraft in Colonial North America occupational healers? Were women healers more likely than other women to be formally accused of witchcraft? To what extent did victims of witchcraft suffer from witchcraft-induced illness or death? Who determined the origins of their ailments and how was this determined?

Historiography

¹¹ Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 12-13.

The thesis consults secondary source material in the forms of monographs, chapters in edited collections, and journal articles. Sources are further categorized based on content. The major themes of this thesis's secondary source material are witchcraft and colonial healing. Sources on witchcraft offer much information on accused witches. The main scholars on early American witchcraft are Elaine G. Breslaw, Carol F. Karlsen, John Putnam Demos, and George Kittridge. The strengths of these sources are that they explain why women were accused of witchcraft more than men and trace the origins of colonial American witchcraft beliefs in European folklore and Christian religion. Such works also demonstrate the behaviors and practices associated with witchcraft and devil worship. The weakness of these sources lies in their brief mention of women healers' roles in early American witchcraft trials. Because not much is explained about their contributions to early American witchcraft trials, this thesis consults secondary sources on colonial healing methods.¹²

The primary historians consulted for women's roles in colonial healthcare are Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Judith Walzer Leavitt. In their works, they touch on colonial society's expectations for women to heal their families and community members. They also address the significance of women's involvement and men's lack of participation in childbirth through most of the eighteenth century. The strengths of these sources lay in their comparisons of men's and women healers' curative techniques. The authors explained well the ways women learned to heal. Like sources on witchcraft, the weakness of these monographs is that little is said about how women healers were involved in early American witchcraft trials.¹³

12 See Elaine G. Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic: Health Care in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Elaine G., Breslaw, ed., *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*; John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and Culture of Early New England*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

13 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1991); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1758-1812* (New York: First

Historians Keith Thomas, Lucinda McCray Beier, and Elaine G. Breslaw specifically write of cunning folk's involvement in witchcraft trials. Cunning folk practiced white, or good, witchcraft including protecting people from evil spirits for fortune telling. Therefore, they best recognized evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses, injuries, and deaths, recognized evidence of witchery because they also practiced magic. Cunning folk could also be healers. The strengths of Keith Thomas's and Lucinda McCray Beier's works is that they explain well the connection between cunning folk and magical healing methods. However, their works mainly focus on European examples. While Elaine G. Breslaw briefly discussed cunning folk in one American monograph on colonial healing, another monograph focuses specifically on one cunning person involved in an American witchcraft trial.¹⁴

Colonists derived stereotypes for practicing witchcraft from the idea of *maleficium*. Karlsen explained that New England colonists adopted the European idea that witches caused harm to people and property. They thought witches could cause injury through *maleficium*, harmful magic, though how they accomplished this varied. One did not have to physically touch to cause harm. A witch's threats or complaints against another could have been interpreted as a curse. Such actions may have been purposely perceived as *maleficium* to cast blame on a person. Furthermore, colonists believed witches had 'animal familiars' to do their bidding, so even if a woman did not directly harm someone, her will to do so would still be achieved.¹⁵

Vintage Books, 1991); Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Child-Bearing in America, 1750-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

14 Keith Thomas, "Cunning Men and Popular Magic," in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 215-252; Beier, *Sufferers & Healers*; Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*; Elaine G. Breslaw, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

15 Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 7-11.

Scholar George Kittredge agreed with Karlsen's theory on *maleficium* and stated "Every malady that baffled the doctors was ascribed to witchcraft."¹⁶ However, Kittredge believed that "it was the doctrine of *maleficium*, and nothing else, that made the witch-creed terrible," whereas Karlsen spoke of many other factors, such as the economy.¹⁷ Because it was difficult for colonists to prove whether someone was truly using *maleficium*, they desired the accused to confess. From 1620 to 1646, many English and a few colonial American witchcraft accusations were informal and never carried to court. From 1647 through 1663, New England witchcraft accusations became serious matters that were taken to trial. Colonists more often identified negative or abnormal behaviors as evidence of witchcraft. Colonists considered fits of rage, speaking things one would generally not say, and speaking of a personal relationship with Satan as evidence of witchery. Often colonists viewed those who suffered fits and expressed victimization as innocent. In such cases, they often accused others of witchcraft and established doubt about the accused people's character. By the 1660s, accusations and executions had lessened, but those who were indicted over the next twenty years were frequently treated worse. Suspected colonists were seldom accused only once.¹⁸

Discussion of Primary Sources

While primary sources varied in types of documents, most of those used in this thesis come from edited collections by scholars and historians of witchcraft. Primary sources throughout the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries reflect colonists' beliefs about witchcraft, gender roles, and healing. These sources include court documents, depositions, sermons, pamphlets, memoirs, diaries, and collections of correspondence. The sources highlighted many different

¹⁶ George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 5.

¹⁷ Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 5; Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 77-116.

¹⁸ Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 13-14, 19-31.

aspects of this work's research questions, including gender roles, religion, economy, healing methods, and evidence of magical practice. Many sources explained how women's significant involvement in early American witchcraft trials as well as colonial ideas about witchcraft derived from European, particularly English, perceptions of magical practice. Because the colonists believed very similarly to Europeans about witchcraft and women's susceptibility to sin, this work consults many European sources as well as colonial American sources.

Sources on Witchcraft

Published works, such as Dominican priests Heinrich Kramer's and Jacob Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), described common evidence of witchcraft and women's vulnerability to temptation by the devil. There is also a lot of misogynistic rhetoric describing men's beliefs that women were inherently sinful and lustful.¹⁹ Witchcraft literature published during the time contemporaneous with American witchcraft trials also influenced colonists' ideas about witches and magical practice. For example, Puritan ministers, William Perkin's 1608 *A Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft, So Far Forth It Is Revealed in the Scriptures and Manifest by True Experience* and Cotton Mather's 1692 sermon, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* followed the *Malleus Maleficarum*'s argument that women were more likely than men to be tempted by the devil.²⁰

From pamphlets, colonists also developed ideas about how witches used magic to harm others. George Gifford, an Essex Minister, warned in his 1592 *A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*, that entertaining magical practices, such as visiting a cunning person, made

¹⁹ Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, "Malleus Maleficarum," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 21-22.

²⁰ William Perkins, "A Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft, So Far Forth as It Is Revealed in the Scriptures and Manifest by True Experience," in *The Salem Witch Trials Reader*, ed. Frances Hill (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 5; Cotton Mather, "Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 296.

one more vulnerable to being tempted by the devil.²¹ In 1584, English skeptic, Reginald Scott discussed images and incantations used by confessed witches. However, he argued that witches derived no power from these practices. Instead, he argued that witches gained power from people's fear.²² Seventeenth-century physicians, such as Northamptonshire native, John Cotta, also did not believe in witches' possession of supernatural power and argued that all illnesses and injuries were naturally caused.²³ This thesis uses European works, especially English, to explain how ideas of witchcraft were carried over the Atlantic Ocean to the American colonies. However, the weakness of these sources is that, while much of colonial beliefs about witchcraft were the same, some also differed.

Sermons, such as Cotton Mather's 1693 "The Wonders of the Invisible World," and 1689 "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions" demonstrated colonial thought on witchcraft. These sermons also addressed gender roles and the belief that women were more susceptible to sin than men.²⁴ The weakness of these sources is that they were written by men. Though men delivered these sermons to men and women, many were misogynistic in nature and do not reflect colonial women's perceptions of their vulnerability to sin.

Sources on Healing

Pamphlets, and particularly self-help manuals, are used to describe colonial healing methods. Likewise, *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*, reflects an eighteenth-century woman

21 George Gifford, "A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes," in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*, ed. Marion Gibson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 64.

22 Reginald Scott, "The Discoverie of Witchcraft," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. by Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 36.

23 John Cotta, "The Trial of Witch-craft shewing the true and right methode of the Discovery: with a Confutation of erroneous ways," in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*, ed. Marion Gibson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 92.

24 Cotton Mather, "The Wonders of the Invisible World," in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*, ed. Marion Gibson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 218; Cotton Mather, "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 44.

healer's experience in her Hallowell, Maine community. Such sources have strength in that they generally represented colonial healing methods. However, the weakness of most self-help manuals used in this thesis is that they were written by men. In comparison, Martha Ballard's diary proves that she had some similar and some different healing methods than her male contemporaries, particularly during childbirth. The limitation of using a source like Ballard's diary is that journals written by colonial women are difficult to find. Despite this, Ballard's diary is fairly reflective of colonial women's lives.²⁵

Representation of Women Healers in Colonial Court Documents

Court documents, and especially depositions, are very important sources for both detailing who suffered early American witchcraft accusations and why. The strength of court documents is that they represent men and women who suffered witchcraft accusations and those who accused others of magical practices. These sources also provide evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses, injuries, and deaths. Many of the witnesses recalled seeing their neighbors cause harm to people or animals or use magic in their everyday lives. The weakness of these sources is that there are far more accusations of witchcraft than there are testimonies of those who were accused of witchcraft.²⁶

Because women healers were respected as character witnesses and for their roles in identifying witches' marks, this work consulted testimonies confirming their communities' trust in them. This includes works such as Elizabeth and Mary Brewster's 1653 testimonies that, when a midwife searched a recently hanged witch's body for witches' marks, another woman,

²⁵ *Martha Ballard's Diary Online, 1725-1812* (Cambridge, MA: Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College, 2000).

²⁶ This thesis consulted edited collections of court documents. See Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbam, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, 3 vols. (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977); Richard Godbeer, *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011); David D. Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991).

Elizabeth Staples, condemned herself to suspicion of witchcraft for remarking that the witch's teats were just like hers.²⁷ Overwhelming evidence in the form of trial transcripts prove women healers particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. An example can be found in John Winthrop's 1658 recollection of a Charleston, Massachusetts woman, Margaret Jones, who claimed to practice safe and successful healing methods, though others blamed her for intentionally causing them pain.²⁸

Men and women healers alike also used witchcraft accusations to rid themselves of competitors, such as in the case of Dr. Phillip Reade, a physician who travelled throughout Massachusetts and in 1669 gave a deposition accusing Ann Burt, a woman healer, of causing people pain by magical means.²⁹ *Maleficium* served as the connection between American beliefs about witchcraft and women healers' involvement in witchcraft trials. Fortunately, Grace Sherwood was the last known case of many women healers accused of witchcraft. Yet, her persistence in defending her reputation and healing profession remains reminiscent of colonial women healers who were accused of witchcraft before her. Colonial women healers' legacies carried on through the Revolutionary Era women that lived after them, acted as agents over their own lives, and disrupted colonial society.³⁰

Chapter Descriptions

27 Elizabeth and Mary Brewster on the search for teats," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 79.

28 "John Winthrop on Jane Hawkins as healer and midwife," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 20.

29 "Phillip Read on the sickness of Sara Townsend," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 186.

30 Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 6-9.

The first chapter of this thesis, “The Devil and His Mistresses: Early American Women and Witchcraft,” argues that colonial women were more vulnerable than men to witchcraft accusations because society taught that women were more likely to sin and be tempted by the devil. This chapter covers a brief history of the devil and colonial perceptions of witchcraft based on European literature and, in particular, English witchcraft trials. This chapter is divided in three main sections covering the importance of religion, reputation, and economy in affecting one’s vulnerability to witchcraft accusations. The second chapter, “Colonial American Women: Homemakers and Healers,” covers colonial society’s normative expectations for women to be healers of their families, neighbors, and community members. Because colonial society thought women naturally more nurturing than men because of their ability to bear children, women frequently practiced lay medicine.

The third chapter, “Early American Healers: Witnesses to Witchcraft,” explores positive ways women healers were involved in early American witchcraft trials. This chapter argues that healers participated in witchcraft trials by recognizing evidence of magic, treating magically caused illnesses and injuries, and inspecting accused witches for witches’ marks. Colonists often referred to Native American cunning folk who they believed to be reliable in determining evidence of witchery because they associated the native population with the devil. Though men and women healers were involved in witchcraft trials, only women healers inspected bodies for witches’ marks, to protect women’s modesty. The fourth chapter, “Women Healers as Witches: Magical Methodology and Patriarchal Threat,” looks at colonial women healers who suffered witchcraft accusations and why. Women healers suffered more witchcraft accusations than any other demographic because they possessed more knowledge of healing than anyone else in the colonies. Though community members respected women healers and midwives, they also feared

their vast knowledge of curatives and the power they seemingly had over life and death. The concluding chapter, “The Woman Witch: Healing for the Devil?” summarizes the main arguments of each chapter and explains the ways scholars can further research colonial women’s involvement in healing and witchcraft trials. Colonial society viewed women as agents of the devil, but they were really their own agents.

Chapter 1

The Devil and His Mistresses: Early American Women and Witchcraft

Introduction. The Devil and His Witches

It is not surprising that American colonists feared the devil and his loyal witches because they reflected the values and culture of their European counterparts. Though historians do not know the total number of accused witches in Europe and America, historians estimate that women represented four-fifths of those executed for their crimes. Women also made up an overwhelming majority of accused witches in the American colonies. Sadly, American women would suffer witchcraft convictions through the early eighteenth century. Though both men and women entered covenants with the devil, colonists accused women more often than men because women more likely to have worse reputations than men, suffer economic hardships, and be tempted to sin.³¹

Historians of North American witchcraft agree that Puritans targeted women more than men but disagree on the reasons why. Some scholars believe that colonists accused women of witchcraft more than men because they thought women more likely to fall to the devil's temptation and sin. Others argue accusations of women stemmed from economic disparity between them and their wealthier neighbors. Historians remain divided on why colonial society condemned so many widowed witches. Some think colonists accused widows more because, without husbands to care for them, they relied on the community to supply their needs. Additionally, historians believe that Puritans first considered gender to determine the true identities of witches based on religious teachings that women sinned more easily and often than men. Though motives for Western witchcraft accusations varied, a nonnegotiable aspect of

³¹ Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, xii.

witchcraft lore is the origin of witches' magic with the devil himself.³² Christians believe the devil is Lucifer, a fallen angel and leader of hell. Satan, a tempter and deceiver, persuaded Eve, the first woman, to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God told Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree or she would die. However, the devil appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent and convinced her that eating the tree's fruit would make her like God. Eve ate the fruit, and when death did not come, she convinced Adam, the first man, to eat it as well. Adam and Eve felt guilty for disobeying God and hid in the Garden of Eden. Infuriated that Eve and Adam had disobeyed his order, God found them and demanded to know who had encouraged Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. After Eve's confession that the devil had coaxed her to eat the fruit, God punished her and Adam for their sin by making them leave their Garden of Eden. God divulged to Eve that all her female descendants would feel pain during labor and childbirth. God also informed Adam that male descendants would have to struggle and work to grow crops. Now sinners, Eve's and Adam's children would also be born into sin. The devil would continue to tempt all the people of the world forever.³³

The biblical book of Genesis informed later literature concerned with the Fall of Man and warnings of Satan's power. German Dominican priests, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), or the *Hammer of Witches*, taught that God first allowed the Devil's temptation to warn Christians to be ever wary of evil's presence. They counseled, "Devils, therefore, by means of witches, so afflict their innocent neighbours with temporal

³² Reflecting Reputation, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Women*, 27-28; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 228-233; For economic motives, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 77-116; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 376; Emerson W. Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 96, 119; Concerning widows, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 71-76; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 24, 72, 75, 359; Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 127-128; Concerning religious motives for witchcraft accusations against women, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 120-125.

³³ Genesis 2:1-25, 3:1-24 (King James Version).

losses.³⁴ They also explained that “The devil is more eager and keen to tempt the good than the wicked although in actual practice he tempts the wicked more than the good because more aptitude for being tempted is found in the wicked than in the good.”³⁵ Kramer and Springer described women as particularly wicked and susceptible to witchcraft. They believed that, because God created Eve with Adam’s rib, all women are flawed and more likely to deceive men. They declared, “Therefore, a wicked woman is by her nature quicker to waver in her faith and, consequently, quicker to abjure the faith, which is the root of witchcraft.”³⁶ In his *A Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft, So Far Forth It Is Revealed in the Scriptures and Manifest by True Experience* (1608), William Perkins, a Puritan minister from Cambridge, explained, “His [the devil’s] first temptation in the beginning, was with Eve a woman, and since he pursueth his practice accordingly, as making most for his advantage.”³⁷

Just as the devil turned into a serpent to tempt Eve, the devil could become many other bodies and shapes. In a 1647 pamphlet, Englishman Matthew Hopkins, a witch-hunter, claimed that “He [the devil] appears to them in any shape whatsoever, which shape is occasioned by him through joining of condensed thickened air together, and many times doth assume shapes of many creatures. But to create any thing he cannot do it, it is only proper to God.”³⁸ Constantly afraid of Satan’s influence, Christians ingrained this biblical story, the Fall of Man, in their psyche and did everything possible to avoid the devil. Puritan Christians believed God had control over all things. Though God punished the devil by cursing the serpent to slither on its

34 Kramer and Sprenger, “Malleus Maleficarum,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, 21.

35 Kramer and Sprenger, “Malleus Maleficarum,” 22.

36 Kramer and Sprenger, “Malleus Maleficarum,” 291.

37 Perkins, “A Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft, So Far Forth as It is Revealed in the Scriptures and Manifest by True Experience,” in *The Salem Witch Trials Reader*, 5.

38 Matthew Hopkins, “The Discovery of Witches,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 39.

belly, he also allowed the devil to test one's religious faith. Despite this, Puritans did not welcome the devil's temptations as a method for proving their spiritual strength.³⁹

American witchcraft reflected popular witchcraft lore detailed in European pamphlets and depositions on witchcraft. By the sixteenth century, English ministers began specifically addressing women's fallibilities in their sermons and writings. Because Eve, a woman, contributed to the Fall of Man, Puritans became very involved in trying to control women's roles within their marriages and communities. In 1547, a proclamation stated that London women should stay at home to avoid temptation rather than work public jobs. Many men felt that women possessed some inherent evil and warned them to avoid being angry, prideful, and deceitful.⁴⁰ Though social reputation and financial securities played into witchcraft accusations, women suffered most witchcraft accusations by virtue of their sex. Failure to adhere to Puritan moral standards reflected the potential for women to be tempted by the devil like their ancestor, Eve. Purity and virtue represented standard characteristics for women to follow. This ideology stemmed from the biblical book of Proverbs 31: 10-31, which praised King David's wife, Bathsheba for being loving, helpful to her husband, skilled, wise, kind, and a good moral example to her children. Cotton Mather, warned women of worldly temptations in his 1692 sermon *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*. He declared, "Such things as these [temptations] are enough to make a virtuous woman to discard such dancings from among the things of good report; and leave them either to the pagans, whose manner it was to dance in the worship of Bacchus [Roman god of drunkenness and wine]."⁴¹ Concerning Eve, he insisted "It may then be

³⁹ Gen. 3:14; Robert Muchembled, *A History of the Devil: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, ENG: Polity Press, 2003) 21-26; K. David Goss, *Daily Life During the Salem Witch Trials* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2012), 1-5.

⁴⁰ Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 160-161.

⁴¹ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 11-50; Proverbs 31:10-31; Cotton Mather, "Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion," in *Witches of the Atlantic World*, 296.

said of a virtuous woman that she is a religious woman; she has bound her self again to that God, whom she had by the sin and fall of her first mother departed from.”⁴² After sexualizing women, Mather suggests that the biblical king, Solomon, had many concubines not only because he lusted for their bodies but also because he could not find one virtuous woman. He suggested that women should strive to be virtuous because so few moral women existed. Ultimately, he concluded that “the handmaids of God would go so as to distinguish themselves from the handmaids of the Devil.”⁴³

Samuel Willard, a Puritan minister, also delivered sermons about Satan’s temptation of women to evil. On March 22, 1692, Willard explained that in the Fall of Man story, the serpent acted as a figure of speech for the deception the devil caused. Willard listed pride, discontent, malice, lying, blasphemy, seduction, and murder as some of the many evil traits that the devil could pass on to women. Many of these same traits appeared in American witchcraft trial transcripts. Willard defined seduction as “improving of our wit to draw others into sin, to study devices, and lay fears to entrap their souls withal.”⁴⁴ He warned of murder “of soul or body, by endeavoring to ruin them. All these are specially satanical sins, by them the fallen angels made themselves devils and they that live in them.”⁴⁵

In another sermon from April 19, 1692, Willard explained that women are more likely to be tempted by the devil than men because Eve ate the forbidden fruit first and then convinced Adam to do the same. Willard explained, “The last instrumental cause of the Transgression, was the *Woman*. She is reckoned among the instrumental cases because the devil in the serpent first

42 Mather, “Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion,” 297.

43 Ecclesiastes 7:28; Mather, “Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion,” 297-299.

44 Samuel Willard, “Sermon 52, March 22, 1692,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 301.

45 Willard, “Sermon 52, March 22, 1692,” 301.

tempted her and by her the Man.”⁴⁶ First, William examined the traits of virtuous women and pointed out that, as Adam’s helpmeet, Eve should have encouraged him to be obedient to God rather than eat the fruit. Secondly, Willard taught that, because Eve lusted before Adam, women who lust for flesh, food, or any other material belongings are more likely to be tempted by Satan. Incidentally, those who confessed to entering a covenant with the devil, usually did so because he promised them something in return. Thirdly, Willard gave reasons why women are seducers. Because Eve gave into the devil’s wishes in the Garden of Eden and convinced Adam to do the same, women are more likely than men to fall to the devil’s temptations and convince others as well. Relatively, many witchcraft case depositions claimed other women tried to convince them to sign the devil’s books. In a final warning, Willard suggested, “The Consideration of this will tell us, what need we have to be very wary to our selves, lest Satan should use us as tools to draw one another into sin; and so become under devils each to other.”⁴⁷

Agents of the Devil

Just as God possessed the ability to fill the minds of Christians with moral values, the devil could permeate their thoughts with evil. While God mustered his righteous followers on earth, Satan recruited his evil minions as witches by promising them power. Dating back at least to the fifteenth century, women consulted witches for help with overcoming sickness or ensuring love. Kramer and Sprenger taught that “All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. . . . Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils.”⁴⁸ An anonymous author also wrote in the pamphlet, *The Wonderful Discovery of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, Daughters of Joan Flower near Beaver Castle:*

46 Samuel Willard, “Sermon 53, April 19, 1692,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 301.

47 Willard, “Sermon 53, April 19, 1692,” 302.

48 Kramer and Sprenger, “Malleus Maleficarum,” 292.

Executed at Lincoln, March 11, 1618 (1619), that the devil promised the Flowers' daughters that they could "command what they pleased" in exchange for their service as his witches.⁴⁹ In the same way the Devil had promised Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would give knowledge equal to that of God, he also ensured people that, by serving him, they could change the course of their lives for the better.⁵⁰

Colonists' conceptualization of the devil derived from Europe, though they had some peculiarly American ways of dealing with witchcraft accusations. For instance, colonists associated demonic practices with Native American societies and feared their influence on virtuous people. They believed Native Americans worshipped the devil, also called the "black man," and turned themselves into animal familiars.⁵¹ Colonists were not unified over the diversity of witchcraft lore, but there was a consensus belief in the reality and power of Satan. In Europe, a witness's testimony or a confession to entering a pact with the devil ensured that a person would be killed for being a witch. Published in London, Joseph Glanvill wrote in his 1681 "Saducismus Triumphatus: or Full and Plain Evidence concerning Witches and Apparitions in order":

That it cannot be imagin'd what design the Devil should have in making those solemn compacts, since persons of such debauch'd and irreclaimable dispositions as those with who he is supposed to confederate, are pretty securely his, antecedently to the bargain, and cannot be more so by it, since they cannot put their Souls out of possibility of the Divine Grace, but by Sin that is unpardonable.⁵²

49 "The Wonderful Discovery of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, Daughters of Joan Flower near Beaver Castle; Executed at Lincoln, March 11, 1618," in *The Salem Witch Trials Reader*, ed. Frances Hill (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 9.

50 Kramer and Sprenger, "Malleus Maleficarum," 21.

51 Linnda R. Caporael, "Ergotism: The Satan Loosed in Salem?," in *The Salem Witch Trial Reader*, ed. Frances Hill (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 261; James E. Kences, "Some Unexplored Relationships of Essex County Witchcraft to the Indian Wars of 1675 and 1687," in *The Salem Witch Trial Reader*, ed. Frances Hill (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 273.

52 Joseph Glanvill, "Saducismus Triumphatus: or Full and Plain Evidence concerning Witches and Apparitions in order," in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*, ed. Marion Gibson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 237.

In the North American colonies, particularly in Salem, Massachusetts, court systems usually gave accused witches the benefit of the doubt by trying to prove they committed witchcraft-related crime. Unlike in Europe, if American colonists confessed to entering a pact with the devil, the court usually showed mercy to the defendants for being honest and spared their lives.

Just as Christians congregated for church service on God's proclaimed holy day, the sabbath, the devil's witches had their own day of worship. The witches' sabbath first occurred in Waldensian lore during the early 1400s and accompanied Europe's first witch trials.⁵³ Treatises such as the French *Errores Gazariorum*, written anonymously in 1430, claimed that the devil instructed witches to have sexual intercourse with each other on their sabbath. In the 1440s, Frenchman, Martin Le Franc, secretary to anti-pope, Felix V, also illustrated his poem, *The Champion of the Ladies*, with a woman heading to the witches' sabbath meeting, riding a broom. On the witches' sabbath, Christians presumed that witches stripped their clothes and danced naked. Other times, they believed witches would worship the devil, sometimes as animal familiars, including goats or cats.⁵⁴

In North America, witches usually transformed into black cats, a color that signified evil. The Springfield, Massachusetts court examined Mary and Hugh Parsons for witchcraft in March 1651. The court appointed respectable townsman, Thomas Cooper, to watch over Mary during the trial. On April 3, 1651, Mary told Cooper that she, Hugh, and two other women, met "in Goodman Stebbins his lot and we were sometimes like cats and sometimes in our own shape, and we were applauding for some good cheer and they made me to go barefoot and make the

⁵³ The Waldensian people lived in the Alps and Burgundian foothills. Named for being Peter Waldo's followers, the people of this area led a radical Christian lifestyle that involved condemning the Catholic church. In the 1400s, they suffered witchcraft accusations for supposedly worshipping the devil in the mountains and having incestual relationships. The word 'Waldensianism' also means 'heresy.'; Muchembled, *A History of the Devil*, 36-38.

⁵⁴ Muchembled, *A History of the Devil*, 36-40.

fires because I had declared so much at Mr. Pynchon's [man to who she had confessed]."⁵⁵ A few years later, in 1656, Agnes Puddington testified at the witchcraft trial for Portsmouth, New Hampshire resident, Jane Walford. Puddington claimed that a yellow cat prevented a gun from shooting at it, suddenly multiplied itself into multiple cats, and then vanished altogether. Later, on March 27, 1683, the Hadley, Massachusetts court examined a woman, Mary Webster, for witchcraft. On June 1, 1683, the Court of Assistants documented that "she [Mary] not having the fear of God before her eyes and being instigated by the devil had entered into covenant and had familiarity with him in the shape of a warraneage [black cat] and had her imps sucking her and teats or marks found in her secret parts."⁵⁶

Cotton Mather, a minister, warned in his *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) that the devil planned to visit New England. He cautioned, "An Army of Devils is horribly broke in upon the place which is the Center, and after a sort, the First-born of our English Settlements."⁵⁷ Referring to the devils as "the terrible Plague, of Evil Angels," he forewarned, "Yea, That at prodigious Witch-Meetings, the Wretches have proceeded so far, as to Concert and Consult the Methods of Rooting out the Christian Religion from this Country."⁵⁸ Despite his warning, Cotton Mather expressed hope that the demons and witches would not tempt all to sin. In his 1689 *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, he declared, "But should one of those

55 "Mary Parsons on the devil, and her fantasies of witch meetings," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 48-49.

56 "Strange cats and other testimony," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 95, 97; A *warraneage* is a Native American term for both an evil spirit and a black cat.; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 142; "The court acquits Mary Webster," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 260-262.

57 Mather, "The Wonders of the Invisible World," in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*, 218.

58 Mather, "The Wonders of the Invisible World," 219.

hideous wights appear visibly with fiery chains upon him and utter audibly his roarings and his warnings in one of our congregations, it would not produce new hearts in those whom the Scriptures handled in our ministry do not affect.”⁵⁹ Though Mather displayed hope for the people of New England, a large number of witchcraft accusations throughout the American colonies proved that at least some of the Puritan congregation chose instead to dance with the devil.⁶⁰

Mather believed witches congregated to worship the devil and agreed to work for him by signing his book. He recalled that an unnamed Irish woman, “confessed very little about the circumstances of her confederacies with the devils; only, she said that she used to be at meetings which her Prince [the devil] and four more were present at.”⁶¹ Mather, and other Puritan ministers thought that one could sign a covenant with God or with the Devil. Christians believed the devil’s book consisted of signatures of people that he had tempted to sin and enlisted in his service to do evil. The devil would persuade people to serve him with promises of riches or a witch’s power. In many witchcraft examinations, the court-appointed examiners would ask accused witches if they had made a covenant with the devil or written their names in the devil’s book. Other times, accused witches or demon-possessed victims would willingly offer up this information.⁶²

One victim, sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Knapp, often spoke of her encounters with the devil. Knapp, the daughter of a farmer, and servant to Samuel Willard, a pastor, lived with the Willard family in their Groton, Massachusetts home. From October 30, 1671 to January 12, 1672, Knapp began increasingly to display strange behaviors. During this time, Willard documented her experiences. Knapp’s strange behaviors included going from crying to laughing

59 Mather, “Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World*, 44.

60 Mather, “Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions,” 44.

61 Mather, “Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions,” 249.

62 John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 6-7.

very quickly as well as randomly screaming. Knapp also claimed to see people that no one else could see. On Thursday, November 22, 1691, Willard documented Knapp's confession "that the Devil had oftentimes appeared to her, presenting the treaty of a covenant and proffering largely to her—viz. such things as suited her youthful fancy: money, silks, fine clothes, ease from labor, to show her the whole world, etc."⁶³ On another occasion, Knapp relayed that "he [Satan] had presented her [with] a book written with blood of covenants made by others with him and told her such and such (of some whereof we hope better things) had a name there."⁶⁴ Though Knapp revealed to Willard that Satan presented her with the book, she denied writing her name in it. Yet, she believed the devil had possessed her body. Willard remained confused about why she would suffer demonic possession without giving herself over to the devil. He decided that her answer contradicted her behavior, so one could not be certain whether she had signed the devil's book.⁶⁵

Of the more than 200 accused witches involved in the infamous Salem Massachusetts, witchcraft trials, over fifty confessed to signing the devil's book. On August 29, 1692, Salem resident, William Barker Sr. provided the court with a vivid description, "That he did sign the Devil's book with blood brought to him in a thing like an ink horn, that he dipped his fingers therein and made a blot in the book, which was a confirmation of the covenant with the Devil."⁶⁶

63 Samuel Willard, "A Brief Account of a Strange and Unusual Providence of God Befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton (1671-72)," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Source Book*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 235-236.

64 Willard, "A Brief Account of a Strange and Unusual Providence of God Befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton (1671-72)," 236-237.

65 Willard, "A Brief Account of a Strange and Unusual Providence of God Befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton (1671-72)," 237-245.

66 The *Smithsonian Magazine* reported the total estimated number of accused Salem witches.; Jess Blumberg, "A Brief History of the Salem Witch Trials: One town's strange journey from paranoia to pardon," *Smithsonian.com*, accessed January 21, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/a-brief-history-of-the-salem-witch-trials-175162489/>; Richard Godbeer explained that more than fifty accused witches confessed to signing a covenant with Satan.; Richard Godbeer, ed., *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 143; "Confession of William Barker Sr., August 29,

Plenty of plaintiffs also confessed to being tempted to sign the book. In 1692, Salem minister, Deodat Lawson recalled his refusal to take the devil's book from Rebecca Nurse. He recounted to the court, "I am sure it is none of God's book; it is the Devil's book, for ought I know."⁶⁷ When Lawson declined the book, an infuriated Nurse turned away from him, ran to the fireplace, and attempted to jump into the flames. Who or what stopped her from doing so is unclear. Despite such claims, most accused Salem witches denied making a covenant with the devil. When on April 19, 1692, Mr. John Hawthorne, a judge, asked Bridget Bishop if she had made a contract with the devil, Ezekiel Cheever recorded, "The afflicted persons charge her with having hurt them many ways and by tempting them to sign the Devil's book, at which charge she seemed to be very angry and shaking her head at them, saying it was false."⁶⁸ Though many denied their charges, witnesses' accounts usually ensured a guilty sentence.

Because of their sex, women were especially likely to receive accusations of committing common witchcraft-related acts, including injuring livestock and innocent human victims, particularly children. Colonists accused most suspected witches of using maleficium, harmful magic, to sicken or kill animals or people. On June 28, 1692, accused Salem witch, Sarah Good's neighbors, Sarah and Thomas Gadge held her responsible for the death of their cows. Sarah Gadge stated that the "cows died in a sudden, terrible, and strange unusual manner, so that some of the neighbors and said deponent did think it to be done by witchcraft."⁶⁹ Thomas Gadge

1692," in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 145.

67 "Deodat Lawson's Account, 1692," in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 55.

68 "Examination of Bridget Bishop (as Recorded by Ezekiel Cheever), April 19, 1692," in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 103.

69 "Sarah Gadge and Thomas Gadge against Sarah Good, June 28, 1692," in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 76.

explained that, “though he and some neighbors opened the cow, yet they could find no natural cause of said cow’s death.”⁷⁰ A day later, neighbors Samuel and Mary Abbey told the court that they relayed the details of their two cows’ strange deaths to their neighbor, William Good. William discussed the cows’ deaths with his wife, Sarah Good, who then replied that “she did not care, if he, the said Abbey, had lost all the cattle he had.”⁷¹ Furthermore, the Abbeys explained, “we your deponents, had a cow that could not rise alone, but since presently after she [Sarah Good] was taken up, the said cow was well and could rise so well as if she had ailed nothing.”⁷²

Rebecca Nurse’s neighbors also accused her of threatening their livestock’s lives. In Sarah Holten’s testimony, she recalled that Nurse became angry with her husband, Benjamin Holten, because their pigs got in her field. In retaliation, the Holten’s blamed Nurse for the pigs’ trespass and thought she needed to repair her fences. Outraged at their response, Nurse replied that she would make her son kill the Holten’s pigs. While Massachusetts Bay law allowed colonists to kill their neighbors’ animals if they caused damage to property, the law did not protect Nurse from the Holten’s witchcraft accusations. A few days after their argument, Benjamin became blind and then “about a fortnight before he dyed he was taken with strange and violent fitts acting much like to our poor bewitched parsons when we thought they would have dyed and the Doctor that was with him could not find what his distemper was.”⁷³ Since he had no prior health problems, the Holten’s blamed her frustration with the pigs and Benjamin’s ailments on Nurse’s witchcraft. Witnesses doubly condemned Nurse when the Putnam family attributed

⁷⁰ “Sarah Gadge and Thomas Gadge against Sarah Good, June 28, 1692,” 76.

⁷¹ “Samuel Abbey and Mary Abbey against Sarah Good, June 29, 1692,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2011), 78.

⁷² “Samuel Abbey and Marry Abbey against Sarah Good, June 29, 1692,” 78.

⁷³ Emerson Baker speaks about the Massachusetts Bay Law allowing colonists to kill their neighbors’ livestock for destruction of property.; Emerson W. Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Witch Trials and the American Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 151; “Sarah Holton v. Rebecca Nurse,” vol. 2, in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 600.

their eight-week-old child's death to her doing after John Putnam gossiped about her mother. The child experienced several bouts of fits during April 1692 before finally dying.⁷⁴

Many accused witches suffered accusations of pricking their victims with needles or making poppets (little dolls) of their victims to control their real bodies. While accused Wells, Maine minister, George Burroughs, and Salem Town local, John Proctor, supposedly gave poppets to their victims, it is unlikely that either of these men would have made them.

Testimonies by Ann Putman, Jr. on May 5, 1692 and Mary Walcott on August 3, 1692 claimed that Burroughs killed his first wife. It can be inferred that Burroughs had another wife at the time of the trial who most likely made the poppet. Likewise, John Proctor's wife, Elizabeth Proctor, almost certainly made the poppet, for which he received complaint. Elizabeth Proctor also endured witchcraft allegations.⁷⁵

Even so, it would not have been rare for women to have poppets, especially if they had children who would play with them. In 1692, Salem women, Ann Pudeator and Alice Parker, both supposedly gave poppets to witches to use against others. Elizabeth Johnson Jr., a slave named Candy, and Gloucester, Massachusetts resident, Ann Dolliver, all confessed to owning

74 "Sarah Holton v. Rebecca Nurse," 600; "John Putnam, Jr. and Hannah Putnam v. Rebecca Nurse, Mary Easty, and Sarah Cloyce," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 2 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 601.

75 "Ann Putnam, Jr. v. George Burroughs," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 1 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 166; "Mary Walcott v. George Burroughs," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 1 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 174; "John Proctor," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 2 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 677-690; "Elizabeth Proctor," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 2 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 657-676; Baker also describes Burroughs's and Proctor's use of poppets.; Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 131.

poppets. Furthermore, construction workers found a poppet hidden in the walls of Salem resident, Bridget Bishop's house, and John and Elizabeth's son, William Proctor frequently played with a poppet. At her witchcraft trial, Johnson brought three poppets to court. Additionally, Candy temporarily left the court and came back with two poppets she made herself. When the court searched the homes of two more Salem women, Mary Lacey and her daughter of the same name, the examiners found many rags believed to be the supplies for making poppets.⁷⁶

Cotton Mather recalled in his *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions* (1689), that the devil, with the help of a witch, possessed four of Boston resident, John Goodwin's, six children and caused them harm using poppets (little dolls). Using the poppets, the unnamed witch struck the children deaf, dumb, and blind at various times. She also inflicted "unaccountable stabs and pains," choked them with their own tongues, and broke bones.⁷⁷ Mather relayed that, when the court searched the witch's house, they found "several small images or puppets or babies made of rags and stuffed with goat's hair and other such ingredients."⁷⁸ Upon her confession to using the poppets to injure the children, the court issued a death sentence. Yet, the children continued to exhibit symptoms during the few days prior to her death.⁷⁹

Reputation and Repentance

Though ministers and well-respected men attempted to protect women's virtue from the devil, little could be done when one's family members also faced witchcraft accusations. Familial reputation made a significant impact on one's life experiences in early America. Without a positive reputation, one became an outcast to the community. Neighbors gossiped and

⁷⁶ Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 131-132.

⁷⁷ Mather, "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions," 246-247.

⁷⁸ Mather, "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions," 248.

⁷⁹ Mather, "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions," 248.

avoided those with a bad reputation. Though a negative reputation would have made someone more susceptible to witchcraft accusations, witchcraft accusations could also be used by accusers to seek revenge on a person they did not like or one that caused them harm. Historians' consensus that witchcraft accusations largely depended on the occupations of family members, marital status, or if a family member had already been accused of witchcraft reflected the importance of a positive reputation amongst neighbors in colonial society. Sometimes colonial courts charged whole families with witchcraft. Other times family members would petition for the release of their parents, spouses, and children. Even if one never received an accusation, oftentimes, the entire family's good reputation dissipated, making relatives guilty by association. Personal acquaintances made most witchcraft accusations. While children and men could be witches as well, colonists commonly believed they could only be servants of the devil if a female relative practiced witchcraft.⁸⁰

In court, the jury usually considered the defendant's reputation in enacting a sentence. Abigail Barker's intent for practicing witchcraft made a difference in the outcome of her case. In 1692, "Abigaiil Barker Wife of Ebenezer Barker of Andivor" received a charge for practicing "Certaine detestable arts Called Witchcrafts & Sorcerys Wickedly Mallitously & Felloniosuly"⁸¹ Another Andover native, Mary Barker, most likely suffered a witchcraft accusation because of her uncle, William Barker, Sr. who "signe the Devills Booke with Blood, & gave himselfe Soule & body to the Devill."⁸² Mary and William Barker, Sr., shared an arrest warrant that identified

⁸⁰ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 233; Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 46-47, 52, 70-74, 83-84.

⁸¹ "Abigail Barker," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 1 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 57.

⁸² "William Barker, Sr.," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 1 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 63.

Mary as the daughter of William's brother, John. In his August 29, 1692, examination, William Barker confessed to the court, saying that "he had a great family, the world went hard with him and he was willing to pay every man his own, And the devil told him he would pay all his debts and he should live comfortably."⁸³ By linking his family to his reason for entering service with the devil, William condemned his family's reputation. The son of a confessed witch, William Barker, Jr. also admitted his guilt on September 12, 1692.⁸⁴

Tituba, an enslaved cunning woman from Barbados who could identify the work of witches, also possessed a sullied reputation. Yet, she belonged to Samuel Parris, a minister and one of the most reputable men in Salem Town. When one of the Salem village girls began exhibiting signs of pain and possession, her aunt asked Tituba to bake a witch-cake, created with human urine. The townspeople fed these cakes to dogs who they believed would then bark out the name of the witch. However, as time went on, Tituba tarnished her reputation by practicing supernatural rituals. In conjunction with this, Tituba had Native American ancestry and many Puritans believed the native population worshipped the Devil. Tituba eventually confessed to practicing witchcraft. She claimed that Sarah Good tempted her to do it. Because she confessed, the court did not sentence her to death. However, she did have to serve some jail time.⁸⁵

Reputation could also be sullied by a confession. While the confession of an accused witch usually saved one from a death sentence, accused witches could seldom recover from a bad reputation. Some who confessed to witchcraft to avoid a death sentence tried to recant their confession later. However, when six Salem women tried to do so, they declared that "some

83 "William Barker, Sr.," 63.

84 "William Barker, Jr.," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 1 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 75-76.

85 For more on cunning women, see Chapter 3, "Tituba," In *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer (Bedford: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 81-92; Thomas, "Cunning Men and Popular Magic," 212-252.

gentlemen, they knew it, and we knew it, which made us think that it was so; and our understandings, our reason, our faculties almost gone, we were not capable of judging of our condition.”⁸⁶ They could not restore their reputations and when they tried, the court officials once again threatened them with death.⁸⁷

The Devil’s Debt

In colonial society, women’s reputations also closely correlated with their economic status, resulting in many poor women’s condemnation for witchcraft. It was not unusual for poor women to receive economic relief from their townships. Widows were particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations because they often faced financial insecurities after the deaths of their husbands. In seventeenth and eighteenth-century America, marriage represented a merging of two people into one: the man. While there were exceptions to this rule, such as in New Netherland where Dutch law considered men and women equal in marriage, not all colonists followed this logic. Despite this, “The early modern wifely idea—whether Puritan or not—was of a woman unquestioningly obedient to her husband.”⁸⁸ Once married, a woman had no separate legal identity, and unfortunately, unless a widow remarried, any debts incurred by her late husband would become her responsibility. Women could not make contracts, or even be sued without their husbands’ involvement.⁸⁹

After the death of her husband, a widow usually inherited one third of the household property with the rest being divided amongst the children. In some cases, if the children had not

⁸⁶ “Declaration of Mary Osgood, Mary Tyler, Deliverance Dane, Abigail Barker, Sarah Wilson, and Hannah Tyler, Undated,” In *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer (Bedford: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2011), 148-149.

⁸⁷ “Declaration of Mary Osgood, Mary Tyler, Deliverance Dane, Abigail Barker, Sarah Wilson, and Hannah Tyler, Undated,” 148-149.

⁸⁸ Merrill D. Smith, *Women’s Roles in Seventeenth-century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 27-29.

⁸⁹ Smith, *Women’s Roles in Seventeenth-century America*, 27-29.

grown to adulthood, then the mother could remain in control of the estate until the oldest son reached legal age. Despite such customs, New England law stated that a court order declared the final decision for division of the husband's estate if the last will and testament did not expressly give directions. For this reason, widows were often left with nothing at all, not even the bed they once slept on. An accused New England woman, named Eunice Cole, became poor when the town seized her deceased husband's estate from her to pay debts he owed while living. Governing authority refused to recognize her innocence in the matter. Without a home or money, Eunice was left among the poorest women in the New England area. Without a source of income, single or widowed women had difficulty supporting themselves. According to custom, fathers supported women until they married and then husbands cared for their wives' finances. Few women ran self-supporting businesses as most focused on their roles as good wives, homemakers, and mothers. Eunice Cole had no finances to fall back on when the colonial government took the property left to her in her husband's will. Unfortunately, the court deemed Eunice guilty by association. Without a home, everyone in the colony knew her husband as a debtor, and no one was willing to help her for fear it would affect their own reputations.⁹⁰

Rebecca Johnson also suffered witchcraft charges. Though she claimed to be innocent, the initial accusation derived from an instance in which her daughter's "turning of the sieve," occurred because Johnson wanted to know whether "her brother Moses Haggat was alive or dead, and so the sieve did turn."⁹¹ Consequently, Johnson also became guilty of witchcraft by association.⁹²

⁹⁰ Carol F. Karlson, "The Economic Basis of Witchcraft," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 337-338.

⁹¹ "Rebecca Johnson," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 2 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 507.

⁹² "Rebecca Johnson," 507.

Some women became poor through widowhood and thus received financial assistance from the government. Ann Dolliver, an accused witch from Salem, Massachusetts, received funding from the town after the disappearance of her husband. Dolliver reached widow status when her husband, William either passed away or deserted her. She most likely received funding based on her social status. Dolliver's father, John Higginson, worked as a prominent minister. Consequently, neighbors knew Dolliver as a woman from a reputable family. However, because Dolliver did not acquire family money in widowhood, accepting financial support from the county led her to acquire a lowly economic-based social status.⁹³

In another case, Salem Town officials arrested the widow Mary Morey's single daughter for witchcraft. In a court petition, Mary Morey begged that her daughter be released claiming that the law falsely imprisoned her. Mary claimed that her daughter "whas folsly accused & Imprisened for the Sin of Whichcraft The Month of May one Thousand Six Hundred ninty Tew and remained In prison, Teill January following." Morey explained that her daughter's imprisonment negatively affected the whole family. She listed the charges associated with Sarah's imprisonment, including paying for thirty-five weeks' worth of food for her daughter while incarcerated. Not only did the reputation of the family change because of Sarah Morey's witchcraft charges, but the money spent on her while in prison cost her poor widowed mother everything she had.⁹⁴

Conclusion. Nurturing, Yet Hurting

93 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 7; Karlsen, "The Economic Basis of Witchcraft," 338.

94 "Sarah Morey," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 2 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 581.

Reputation, economic factors, and socio-religious ideologies about women's susceptibility to sin all affected women's vulnerability to charges of witchcraft. In a patriarchal society, women held a social status beneath that of men. Yet men played key roles in testifying against many of the women in their community. Women, perhaps unknowingly, threatened their patriarchal society. Women's reputations affected their menfolk. Furthermore, women's financial dependence on men placed a burden on the patriarchy to care for them, especially when they were widowed. The most significant testament to women's influence on the colonial patriarchy was men's inherent fear that, because Eve first tempted Adam to sin, women would do the same to them. Though women depended on men, men also relied on women to set moral examples for their children and care for the families. Puritan ministers preached about women's duty to be virtuous and nurturing. This led to the colonists' normative expectations for women to be healers for their children, husbands, and community members. The roles of healers and midwives presented women with more magical power, seemingly over life and death. This will be discussed further in the next chapter, "Colonial American Women: Healers and Homemakers."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Reflecting Reputation, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Women*, 27-28; John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 228-233; For economic motives, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 77-116; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 376; Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 96, 119; Concerning widows, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 71-76; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 24, 72, 75, 359 Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 127-128; Concerning religious motives for witchcraft accusations against women, see Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 120-125.

Chapter 2

Colonial American Women: Homemakers and Healers

Introduction: Colonial Women, Caring, and Curing

Rebecca Tannenbaum argues, “Even the terms ‘medicine’ and ‘medical practice’ are transformed when women healers enter the picture.”⁹⁶ With this one sentence, the historian of medicine, calls attention to the ways women’s medical practice differed from that of men. Historians have neglected the written history of colonial American women healers. In comparison to colonial male healers, there are less secondary and known primary sources focusing on or written by women. This has led to misconceptions about the importance of women’s roles in colonial life, particularly women’s involvement in healthcare. Women were more than wives and mothers. They impacted their communities by practicing informal management of disease and midwifery. Colonial communities and families normatively expected women to diagnose, treat, and nurse sickness.

Scholars of colonial American family life argue that, as wives and mothers, women played important roles as caretakers of their families and community members. Women managed their children, but the adult male was the head of household. Colonial family, community, church, and government believed women to be the weaker sex, so they examined women’s reputations more often than men. Colonial society expected women to be modest, virtuous, and nurturing. Since women exemplified these characteristics as wives and mothers, men were more likely to oversee all aspects of colonial life outside the home. This included colonial government and non-domestic occupations.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling*, x.

⁹⁷ Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 3-23; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 5.

Other historians believe there is solid evidence that women had authority in their families and communities. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich analyzed Martha Ballard's diary for better understanding of eighteenth century women's roles in her monograph *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*.⁹⁸ In her diary, Martha Ballard, a Maine woman who worked as a midwife during the late eighteenth-century, referenced her and her daughters' role in producing textiles. Through Ballard's daily documentation of chores, one can see that textiles and medicine were feminine-run occupations. Women traded goods and labor by frequently attending other homes to help women with their work. Visiting neighbors also made up a component of social medicine and led to an intimately connected network of people who not only relied on each other for socialization but sustained the community. Because women interacted with each other more than men, patriarchal society concluded that, despite social rank, women had a "collective consciousness."⁹⁹

Scholars have varying ideas concerning women's involvement in colonial healthcare. Women's influence in healing family members, friends, and neighbors allowed them to demonstrate authority within their communities. Ballard exerted authority in her community by her power to successfully deliver babies as well as heal others in the community. Practicing midwifery also provided women with an opportunity to be good neighbors and Christians. Through administering medical care, women networked and voiced their concerns about social and political issues with other women. By visiting neighbors, women also created social childbirth. Many women participated in childbed gatherings to support both the mother and the midwife who aided her. The midwife, a powerful female figure, had authority in the birthing chamber and in the community. Midwives gained positive reputations as community healers

98 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*.

99 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 84, 98-100.

from other female witnesses of childbirth.¹⁰⁰ Midwives followed a ‘self-help’ regimen. Scholars observed the benefits and risks of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ‘self-help’ medicine in women healers’ treatment of families’ health problems. Lay healing methods were often inexpensive and used to treat minor medical conditions such as wounds, respiratory and gastrointestinal conditions, allergies, and headaches.¹⁰¹

Other historians argue that the real power in self-help medical treatment derived from healers’ abilities to persuade people of their skill. While lay healers and physicians used similar medicinal theories and read similar health-related literature, upper-class colonial society eventually came to disrespect traditional healers because of their lack of formal education and qualifications. When physicians obtained a formal education, this also elevated their social status. Poorer colonists, who often could not afford formally trained physicians, continued to get help from folk healers. Lay healers, while less respected, generally had less dangerous treatment methods than doctors, but by the end of the eighteenth century, early Americans increasingly sought doctors’ new, innovative treatments.¹⁰²

Lay healers and trained medical professionals believed in the Galenic humoral theory that evacuation would end bodily imbalances. Some humoral treatments, such as induced vomiting and ‘burning plasters,’ were dangerous for the sufferer and sometimes made symptoms of illness worse or increased pain. Many colonial doctors practiced purging (inducing diarrhea or vomiting) a humoral treatment to bring about physical change to the body. Colonists believed physical change provided evidence that the doctors practiced successful methods, but purging

100 Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling*, 40-49-66, 84, 98-100.

101 Gunter B. Risse, Ronald L. Numbers, and Judith Walzer Leavitt, eds., *Medicine Without Doctors: Home Healthcare in American History* (New York: Science History Publications, 1977), 2-8.

102 Risse, Numbers, and Leavitt, eds., *Medicine Without Doctors*, 2-8; Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 1-7.

could also cause serious health issues, such as severe dehydration. While purging carried more risk than many lay healers' methods, colonists began to seek such treatments from doctors because the physical changes caused in their bodies made them believe these methods were successful in curing sickness.¹⁰³

Mother, Midwife, and Nurse

Though some colonists began to seek the help of formally trained male doctors, especially during the latter eighteenth century, family members, friends, and neighbors, including other women, continued to expect women to diagnose and treat them when ill. When in 1756 Esther Edwards Burr, a New England gentlewoman, unexpectedly delivered her child early, she wrote to an acquaintance of her experience, "It seemed very gloomy when I found I was actually in Labour to think that I was, as it were, destitute of Earthly friends—No Mother—No Husband, and none of my petecular friends that belong to this Town, they happening to be out of Town."¹⁰⁴ Burr felt bothered by no one being present for the birth of her child, particularly because women practiced social childbirth, when a midwife and other women would help the mother through labor pains. During the same period, a Pennsylvania woman, Elizabeth Drinker, wrote in her journal that "Betsy Jervis sat up with us" when her daughter had a sore throat and fever.¹⁰⁵

Many people expected Martha Ballard to aid them in overcoming illness. Martha Ballard practiced midwifery in Hallowell, Maine, from 1785 to 1812. Neighbors often 'called' Ballard to

103 Susan Neiburg Terkel, *Colonial American Medicine* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1993), 14, 24-33; Cecil K. Drinker, *Not So Long Ago: A Chronicle of Medicine and Doctors in Colonial Philadelphia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), 21-23; Kathleen Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3-5; Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 1-7.

104 Esther Edwards Burr to Fidelia, March 26, 1756, in *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, ed. Carol F. Karlson and Laurie Crumpacker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 188-190.

105 Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 126-145; Entry for June 20, 1765, in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Elaine Forman Crane, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 32.

their homes to treat the sick or pregnant. While Ballard's neighbors generally paid her for her help, oftentimes she would not be paid for her service for several years. For example, on September 17, 1788, she wrote "I was Calld between 12 & 1^h morn to Eliab Shaws wife in travil."¹⁰⁶ In the margin of her diary, clearly added later, she noted next to the entry, "Birth of Eliab Shaws Daft. receivd my fee Oc^r 22, by Ephm, 1792. [Martha's husband]."¹⁰⁷ On Tuesday, October 13, 1789, Ballard explained, "I was Calld at y^e 8th hour morn to See mrs Stone, Shee was Safe Delivrd at 5 pm of a Dagt." In the margin, she later mentioned, "at mrs Stones. 33^d. receivd my fee Nov. 6th 1790."¹⁰⁸ Sometimes, Ballard did not receive a fee. On January 28, 1785, she inscribed "Drest John Forbys fingers" and made no mention of payment. Family members expected treatment from women, as well. On February 11, 1785, Ballard stated, "Augustus Ballard Came for Salv for his toe." Augustus was probably a relative of Martha Ballard's husband. Once again, Ballard did not mention receiving a payment from Augustus Ballard. Rather, she carried over the topic of salve into the next entry on February 12, when she simply marked, "I made Burn Salve, 5 lb."¹⁰⁹ Ballard's late receipts of payment or complete absence of payments in her diary, proved early Americans expected her to help them whether they paid her for her services or not.

Called to Cure

106 Entry for September 17, 1788, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online, 1725-1812*.

107 Entry for September 17, 1788, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

108 Entry for October 13, 1789, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

109 Entry for January 28, 1785, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*; Entry for February 11, 1785, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*; Entry for February 12, 1785, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

Normative expectation of colonial women to diagnose, treat, and nurse the sick stemmed from social aspects of colonial culture. Colonial women's roles as good neighbors and Christians also reflected their ideas of being a good wife and mother. Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich explained that "A neighbor sustained the community of women, gossiping, trading, assisting in childbirth, sharing tools and lore, watching and warding in cases of abuse." She clarified that "Relations between neighbors could be vertical or horizontal, embracing the obligations of charity and deference as well as ordinary helpfulness and sociability." In 1790, Martha Ballard visited the exact number of men and women who were listed in the Federal Census for Hallowell at 157 males, and 142 females. Nearly 300 of the 642 people Martha visited with during that year were not members of her own family.¹¹⁰

Other women practiced the concept of being good neighbors by visiting women healers, as well. Ballard wrote in her diary on Monday, August 28, 1786, "Hannah North here, Says her Mame is Coming to See me."¹¹¹ On Wednesday, July 23, 1788, Ballard explained, "I Came home. thee Girls gone to help mrs Thomas quilt."¹¹² On Monday, July 9, 1787, Ballard remarked, "mrs Densmore Came to make our gounds."¹¹³ Ulrich believes that the Ballards had a cordial relationship with the Densmores.¹¹⁴

In the way that colonial women became good neighbors by offering companionship and help with household chores, they also offered medical advice and services. On Friday, July 20, 1787, Ballard wrote, "mr Densmoore here for advice for his Son who is lambd by a fall which brousd his knee."¹¹⁵ On Sunday, June 22, 1788, she inscribed, "mr Isaac Cowin & wife here for

110 Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9-10; Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 92.

111 Entry for August 28, 1786, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

112 Entry for August 28, 1786, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

113 Entry for July 23, 1788, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

114 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 132.

115 Entry for July 20, 1787, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

advice about her Breast which is Soar.”¹¹⁶ She also entered, “Hannah Savage here for advice respecting her Brothers infant. Shee Says it pases bloody Stools.”¹¹⁷ While people sought Ballard out for help, she also went to them, as well. On January 20, 1785, Ballard explained, “Cald in hast to Savages. a very Cold morn. about 11 o clok put mrs Savage to Bed with a Daughter. Returnd home at Evn very much fatagued.”¹¹⁸ On April 24, 1785, she penned, “I was Calld at 2 O Clock in ye Morn to go to thee hook to Mrs Blake in travil.”¹¹⁹

Other women helped by being a good neighbor, as well. In “A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson,” Mrs. Rowlandson of New Hampshire wrote of being captured by Native Americans in 1676 and held against her will for eleven weeks. Six years later, in 1682, she remembered how inhumanely the Native Americans treated her. Rowlandson warned the colonists of the natives’ behavior and strength. Though her memoir did not entirely focus on women’s roles in the English colonies, it provided numerous examples of normative expectations for women to treat and nurse the sick and wounded. The Native Americans would not allow Rowlandson to help wounded captives, but she felt strongly that she should help her neighbors. Rowlandson and others had been captive for twenty days when she had an opportunity to see Goodwife Elizabeth Kettle, who with her three children had been taken captive from the same fort, Rowlandson Garrison. Kettle gave news about Rowlandson’s sister and daughter, who were also captured, and Rowlandson wanted to go to help them, but her captors would not allow her to do so. In a moment of crisis, other women sought to help Rowlandson, too. Mary Thurston of Medfield, also a captive, lent Rowlandson a hat to wear. Rowlandson only wore the hat a brief time before the woman who owned Thurston took it away.

116 Entry for June 2, 1788, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

117 Entry for October 8, 1797, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

118 Entry for January 20, 1785, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

119 Entry for April 24, 1785, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

While Rowlandson and others fought their adversaries to provide aid to one another, they prayed to God for strength.¹²⁰

Colonists found being a good Christian an extremely important characteristic of also being a good neighbor. Mary Rowlandson recorded that “no *Christian Friend* was near him [her captive son] to do any office of love for him, either for Soul or Body.” She reflected of her captivity “And I hope I can say in some measure as *David* did, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted.*”¹²¹ She declared, “the Lord brought me and mine out of that horrible pit, and hath set us in the midst of tender-hearted and compassionate Christians.” She reminded herself that “*There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a Brother,*” that friend being God who she believed everyone should strive to emulate. While Rowlandson wanted to be a good neighbor, she found it difficult to do in captivity. Despite her struggle, she once had the opportunity to medically help her own son. Though they became separated during the Native Americans’ raid of their town, Rowlandson’s son sought her out amongst the captors because he wanted his mother to search his head for lice.¹²²

Men, such as Puritan minister, Cotton Mather, taught that women should be good neighbors. In his 1721 diary, he wrote:

I will move a godly Midwife, to procure a new Edition of my little Essay, entitled, *Elizabeth in her Holy Retirement*: that it may be scattered thro Town and Countrey; and occasion to be taken from the Circumstances of them who are expecting an Hour of travail, to quicken their Praeparation for Death, and the Exercise of all suitable Piety.¹²³

120 Mary Rowlandson, “A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson,” in *Journeys in New Worlds: Early American Women’s Narratives* ed. William L. Andrews and Amy Schrager Lang (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 27-65.

121 Rowlandson, “A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, 65.

122 Rowlandson, “A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, 44, 49, 64-65.

123 Entry for May 12, 1721, in *The Diary of Cotton Mather*, ed. Worthington Chauncy Ford, vol. 2 (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1977), 618.

Mather intentionally chose a midwife, known for her godliness, to distribute the piece to pregnant women. As women were apt to die from childbirth complications, Mather used this as a marketing tool to reach women about being virtuous and righteous, so they would not be afraid for their souls in the afterlife. Women were able to help others, especially medically, by offering pure and virtuous examples.¹²⁴

Education and Influence

Relatives and neighbors taught colonial women and men how to treat and diagnose illness. Peter Bryant, a man, acquired knowledge about medicine because his father was a doctor. He too started practicing as a physician in Bridgewater, Connecticut in 1792. Margaret Hill Morris, the daughter of a physician and eighteenth-century merchant, opened an apothecary shop in Burlington, New Jersey in 1779. Yet, most colonial women healers did not have physician fathers. Both Morris's mother Deborah and her older sister Hannah also worked as healers, only they practiced traditional healing. Their methods of healing related to gardening, food preparation, and maintaining their families' health. They passed these skills along to Morris. Some of their shared medical expertise is evident in family letters. On December 2, 1749, Deborah Hill wrote a letter to her daughter asking her to send snakeroot and elecampane. Deborah Hill also sent dragon's blood tree that could be used in remedies and dyes. She may have also used tansy as a contraceptive.¹²⁵

Women lay healers often learned their skills from other women. For instance, Martha Coit, of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, learned about cures from her mother, Mehetabel Chandler Coit. In a letter from August 13, 1723, she wrote to her mother of visiting "Mad:

124 Entry for May 12, 1721, *The Diary of Cotton Mather*, 618.

125 Terkel, *Colonial American Medicine*, 58.; Susan Brandt, "'Getting into a Little Business': Margaret Hill Morris and Women's Medical Entrepreneurship during the American Revolution," *Early American Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 782.

Elery,”¹²⁶ Martha penned in her letter, “She would be very glad of a bottle of Rosewater if you can Spar it, She intends to Send you Some more of her waters we have ten gallons of it.”¹²⁷ In another letter dated April 8, 1728, she notes, “I Long to know how you do & how you come of w.th the Plague of Plagues,” a physical ailment, though not actually the plague.¹²⁸

Martha Ballard also had the help of other women, at home and in town, to aid in healing practices. Hannah Cool lived with the Ballards and probably learned healing skills from Martha. On Tuesday, November 27, 1787, Martha noted that “Mrs Williams Safe Delivrd of a Dafter at 7 O Clok morn, I tarried with her all day. he Brot Hannah Cool to nurs, mrs Pollard, Porter, Childs & Foster were assistants, all went home after Break^{ts}.”¹²⁹ On Sunday, December 16, 1787, Ballard also noted, “Hannah Cool here for herbs for mrs Williams who has took Cold.”¹³⁰ By this point, only Hannah, rather than she and Martha Ballard, cared for Mrs. Williams. Hannah knew the type of sickness that ailed Mrs. Williams and depended on Ballard to supply her with the appropriate curatives.

While women healers learned about treating disease from relatives and apprenticeships, they also learned from books. Quaker women, such as Margaret Hill Morris, learned about healing and business from formal schooling on natural philosophy, medicine, and science. Quaker girls were taught to read and write and wrote poetry and stories. They passed on their recipes for medicinal herbs and health-care through written word and oral communication.¹³¹

126 Martha Coit to Mehetabel Chandler Coit, August 13, 1723, in *One Colonial Woman's World: The Life and Writings of Mehetabel Chandler Coit*, ed. Michelle Marchetti Coughlin (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 117.

127 Rosewater is an ingredient commonly used in various colonial cures to calm nerves, cure rabies, and etcetera.; Katharine E. Harbury, *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 316.; Martha Coit to Mehetabel Chandler Coit, August 13, 1723, in *One Colonial Woman's World*, 117.

128 Martha Coit to Mehetabel Chandler Coit, August 8, 1728, *One Colonial Woman's World*, 143.

129 Entry for November 27, 1787, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

130 Entry for December 16, 1787, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

131 Brandt, ““Getting into a Little Business,”” 785-786.

Sometimes, women wrote pamphlets and intended for a female audience for sicknesses, injuries, and women's health problems. Elizabeth Smith wrote out a recipe to prevent miscarrying in her *The Complete Housewife, or Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion*.

Originally published in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1742, she explained:

Take of Dragon's blod the Weight of a silver Two-pence, and a Drachm of red Coral, the Weight of two Barley corns of Ambergrease, the Weight of three and mix them well together, and keep them close in a Box; and if you are frighted or need it, take as much at a Time as will lie on a Penny, and keep very still and quiet. Take it in a Caudle made with muscadine or Tent, and the Shucks of Almonds dried and beaten to Powder, and thicken it with Yolks of eggs.¹³²

Several women wrote and published cookbooks that relayed medical advice. In Hannah Glasse's 1765 *The Art of Cookery*, she provided a cure for rabies:

*Let the patient be blooded at the arm, nine or ten ounces. Take of the herb. liver-wort, cleaned, dried and powdered, half an ounce. Of black pepper, powdered, two drams. Mix these well together, and divide the powder into four doses, one of which must be take every morning fasting, for four mornings successively, in half a pint of cow's milk warm. After these four doses are taken, the patient must go into the cold bath, or a cold spring or river every morning fasting for a month. He must be dipt all over, but not to stay in longer than half a minute, of the water be very cold.*¹³³

Men wrote self-help manuals for lay healers as well. "Doctor Keyser's Famous Pills, Imported and Warranted Genuine," a pamphlet, explained that to rid oneself of venereal disease, rheumatic pains, lethargy, asthma, and gout, one should take these pills.¹³⁴ Keyser prescribed no specific length of time to continue taking the pills. He simply stated that one should be taken every night

132 Elizabeth Smith "The Complete Housewife, or Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion," in *Women's Voices, Women's Lives*, ed. Carol Berkin and Leslie Horowitz (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 102-103.

133 Hannah Glasse, *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy: Which Far Exceeds Any Thing of the Kind Yet Published* (London: Printed for A. Millar, J. and R. Tonson, W. Strahan, T. Caslon, T. Durham, and W. Nicoll, 1765), e-book, Chap. 22.

134 Robert Bass, "Doctor Keyser's Famous Pills, Imported and Warranted Genuine," (Philadelphia: Printed by William and Thomas Bradford, 1772) *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans 1639-1800*, 1, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy006.nclive.org/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=L5FV4FNKMTQ5MjcwMjExNC41MDUzOToxOjEyOjE1Mi40Ni4yOC4xNg&p_action=doc&p_queryname=2&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2F8227652C9230@42313-101B608C6B409608@1.

until the desired effect is achieved. On the fifth day of taking the pills, he found it acceptable to purge. He also gave instructions for inducing the purge. William Cadogan's self-help manual, "A Dissertation on the Gout."¹³⁵ addressed all invalids and suggested that they work on improving their diet and being more active. He studied what caused diseases and if multiple diseases could have the same cause. Written in 1772, Cadogan suggested that he wants to find a cure to chronic diseases. He argued that colds and sicknesses could not be accidental. He wanted to discover what people did that made them sick.¹³⁶

Colonial women healers also read manuals written by men and used some of the same cures and treatments as male healers. Ulrich noticed that three quarters of the curative herbs used by Ballard are also mentioned in Nicholas Culpeper's *The Complete Herbal*, published in both Europe and the colonies in 1653. While Ballard never expressly mentioned medical manuals or cookbooks, Ulrich suggested her treatments could also be found in E. Smith's *The Compleat Housewife*, published in the colonies 1742. Ballard most likely read such books or felt influenced by others' knowledgeable of such treatments.¹³⁷

Ideas about disease causation varied depending on location in the American colonies. By 1793, the people of Philadelphia had experienced six major yellow fever outbreaks. Though yellow fever could be found in various other places along America's east coast, it occurred in large, overpopulated and warm cities most often. If healers could not explain how diseases spread from person to person, they could easily explain the spread of disease through works such

135 William Cadogan, "A Dissertation on the Gout, and All Chronic Diseases, Jointly Considered, as Proceeding from the Same Causes; What Those Causes Are; and a Rational and Natural Method of Cure Proposed. Addressed to all Invalids," (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1772), *Early American Imprints. Series I: Evans 1639-1800*, 1-2, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy006.nclive.org/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=S71W58EUMTQ5MDcxMTcyMS4zMzc5MjU6MToxMjoxNTluNDYuMjguMTY&p_action=doc&p_docnum=1&p_queryname=4&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2FD3607520A1B8@18946-@1.

136 Bass, "Doctor Keyser's Famous Pills," 1; William Cadogan, "A Dissertation on the Gout," 1-2.

137 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 49-50.

as William Currie's *Historical Account of Climates and Diseases of the United States* (1792). Because yellow fever (now understood to be a mosquito-borne illness) clearly originated in warmer climates, educated healers, such as eighteenth-century physician Benjamin Rush, believed refugees from Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti) brought the disease with them to Philadelphia.¹³⁸

Place of origin also influenced how healers chose to treat sicknesses. While colonists brought European diseases such as smallpox to America, Native Americans had their own treatments for native disease. Many tribes practiced spiritual healing by a shaman or medicine man, but they also used herbal remedies, including ginseng, ipecac, and sassafras. Colonists learned to use these same ingredients and began exporting them to Europe. Though lay healers, especially women, found native ingredients effective, they did not always prove successful when treating European diseases. In some cases, use of native healing methods and ingredients only made symptoms worse. Though colonists also practiced natives' traditional healing practices, including bloodletting or sprinkling ingredients directly on a person, they often attributed these approaches to witchcraft.¹³⁹

Similarly, African slaves practiced their own methods of herbal and spiritual healing. Much of their knowledge of plant life came from previous farming experience in their home country. Slave owners feared slaves would mangle by using herbs to induce symptoms of sicknesses to avoid working. African slaves also practiced magical healing methods, including using charms to prevent illness. Elaine G. Breslaw recalls that "Archeological digs have uncovered charms and magical symbols among the debris of slave quarters, from polygonal objects shaped from glass and wood to a raccoon penis bone recovered from George

¹³⁸ Brown, *Foul Bodies*, 195, 196.

¹³⁹ Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 13-16; For more on treatment methods' relationships to witchcraft, see Chapter 3.

Washington's plantation, which may have been a fertility symbol, and blue glass beads to ward off the evil eye that caused disease."¹⁴⁰ Though European colonists feared some magical methods of healing, they consulted African-Americans for their knowledge of herbal healing. White European women also had African-American midwives. Overall, women learned healing methods from other women, especially during childbirth.¹⁴¹

Brought to Bed

One major reason women healers learned much of their technique from other women derives from the child birthing process. When speaking of childbirth, Ulrich refers to the process as "travail." The process of carrying a fetus and giving birth played a significant role in the lives of colonial women, as they usually had children in two-year cycles.¹⁴² The colonists' expectations for women to bear children was so great that when a woman married, it was customary for her mother to give her linen specifically for childbirth. Since colonists viewed childbirths as communal events, neighborly women attended to be supportive, help, and gather herbs to relieve labor pains. Colonial women appreciated the support during childbirth because without proper care, labor could be very dangerous, sometimes resulting in the deaths of the mother, the child, or both. Judith Walzer Leavitt refers to the possibility of complications as the "shadow of maternity."¹⁴³ Women also dealt with complications after the birth, including postpartum illnesses and reoccurring pregnancies. Ulrich argues that travail and a cycle of pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation left only a brief time of bodily freedom before the next child came along.¹⁴⁴

140 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 57-58; For more on the 'evil eye,' see Chapter 3.

141 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 58.

142 Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 126, 135.

143 Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 14.

144 Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 14; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 126-145.

Not only did childbirth aid in the creation of gender roles, but the process also influenced the colonists' idea that women had a separate sphere than men. This notion further solidified childbirth as a distinctly female-centered event. Midwives demonstrated control at childbirth while other women acted as helpers and witnesses. Ballard frequently called on other women to assist her at births. On Saturday, September 30, 1786, Ballard wrote, "Mrs Brown Calld her women & was Safe Delivrd at noon of a Son which w^d 11-1/4 lb."¹⁴⁵ On October 8, 1789, Ballard noted, "Clear & pleas^t. I was Calld at y^e 8^h morn to mr Daws at the hook, to his wife in travil. the rigament of Troop Convend there on mr Shubull Hinkleys Land. I tarried with mrs^s Daw till Evn when Shee had her women. Shee remaind ill [in labor] thro y^e night."¹⁴⁶

Women controlled men's knowledge of the progression of birth by not allowing the father to be present for the event. If the father was present for the birth, women would not let him enter the birthing chamber until after the birth of the child. Generally, males did not enter the birthing room unless the child died, though midwives were expected to call surgeons to help with complicated births. Colonial women inevitably associated childbirth with death because many mothers either birthed stillborn babies or died from complications of birthing. In eighteenth century Pennsylvania, Judith Pickman married Edward Augustus Holyoke. Within six months of her marriage, Judith discovered she was pregnant. Eighteen months after their wedding, her life ended while bearing her child. Because colonial women constantly had children, the chance that a colonial woman would die during childbirth or from related complications remained high.¹⁴⁷

Despite the possibility for complications during childbirth, women healers did everything they could to make the birth easier for the mother, including using herbs such as pennyroyal or

145 Entry for September 30, 1786, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

146 Entry for October 8, 1789, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

147 Samantha Cohen Tamulis, "Maternity, Midwifery, and Ministers: The Puritan Origins of American Obstetrics" *Literature and Medicine* 32, no. 2 (2014): 365-369; Leavitt. *Brought to Bed*, 13-16, 95-96.

juniper to speed up labor. If women felt that they had had too many children and did not want any more, women healers would tell them to breastfeed their children longer or practice withdrawal. If a woman became pregnant anyway, women healers would provide them with herbs for abortifacients. Two Malborough, Massachusetts sisters, A.W. and Anna Cromwell, started a family recipe book on December 23, 1650. In their collection, they included a recipe “to cleanse the womb,” which consisted of many mixed ingredients including among others, “maddeer roots, Juniper berries; Bayberries, coriander seeds.”¹⁴⁸

In colonial society, abortions were legal before “quickening,” the time when the pregnant woman could feel the fetus moving. However, colonial women would not have called the removal of the fetus an abortion. Rather, they referred to it as restoring the menses [menstruation]. This idea correlated very closely with the Galenic theory and the belief that the menstrual cycle expelled bad blood from the body, returning the body to a balanced state. Because of this belief, women healers treated abortion as a cure for the pregnancy sickness and sought to make the body healthy again. In this case, women would use herbal abortifacients such as ergot, juniper berries, tansy, and pennyroyal.¹⁴⁹

Battle of the Sexes

Colonial women’s healing methods were both similar to and different than those of men. Most treatments remained the same. Both men and women would “Boil flaxseed and apply warm. Apply sugar and yellow soap. Grate a raw potato, pat on boil, and wrap in cloth; after three days the boil will be gone” to cure boils.¹⁵⁰ Both men and women used the same remedy

148 A. W. and Anna Cromwell, Quoted in Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling*, 35-37.

149 Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 8-9.

150 Margaret M. Coffin, *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning* (New York: Thomas Nelson

for colds. “Place a mixture of onion and butter on the throat and chest. Cook sliced onions in lard until hot and clear; place onions in a muslin bag and wear around neck until congestion is gone.”¹⁵¹ Earache could also be relieved by inserting the juice of an onion into the ear.¹⁵²

Because men wrote many self-help manuals, women lay healers who read them often adopted the same methods, Richard Briggs considered his *The New Art of Cookery*, “a Complete Guide to All Housekeepers.”¹⁵³ Published in 1792, he listed many ingredients for healing the sick. He recommended some only for adults’ use and others only for children. He also included broth recipes to heal people who found eating difficult during illness. In *Mr. Keyser’s Method of Administering his Pills, in Venereal Complaints*, another self-help manual published in 1778, Keyser suggested that he learned how to treat venereal diseases through trial-and-error experimental treatments. He proposed bleeding men of two to three cups of blood. Keyser recommended that like men, women should also bleed two to three cups. Yet his treatment of women differed because he believed females were the weaker sex. Consequently, he warned that women should take less pills, possibly containing mercury, while purging than men should.¹⁵⁴

Inc., Publishers, 1976), 220.

151 Coffin, *Death in Early America*, 220.

152 Coffin, *Death in Early America*, 220.

153 Richard Briggs, “The New Art of Cookery, According to the Present Practice; Being a Complete Guide to All Housekeepers,” (Philadelphia: W. Spotswood, R. Campbell, and B. Johnson, 1792), *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans 1639-1800*, 1, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy006.nclive.org/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=S6FX56ISMTQ5MDcxMTU2NC41OTY5Njc6MToxMjoxNTIuNDYuMjguMTY&p_action=doc&p_docnum=1&p_queryname=3&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2FD44778C16758@33458-@1.

154 Briggs, “The New Art of Cookery,” 413-422; Mr. Keyser, “Mr. Keyser’s Method of Administering his Pills, in Venereal Complaints. Printed by Order of the King, for the Use of the Hospitals and Houses Where Those Complaints are Cured at the Expense of His Majesty. Translated from the French,” (New York: H. Gaine, at the Bible and Crown in Hanover-Square, 1778), *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans 1639-1800*, 1-11, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy006.nclive.org/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=X5DN44YAMTQ5MDcxMTkyOC4xNjkxMDY6MToxMjoxNTIuNDYuMjguMTY&p_action=doc&p_docnum=1&p_queryname=11&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2F822F847D98E0@43478-@1; John Blake provides information on eighteenth century self-help manuals and discusses colonial healers’ use of mercury to cure inflammatory illnesses.; John Blake, “From Buchan to Fishbein: The Literature of Domestic Medicine,” in *Medicine Without Doctors: Home Health Care in American History*, eds. Guenter B. Risse, Ronald L. Numbers, and Judith Walzer Leavitt (New York: Science History Publications, 1977), 11-30.

Another self-help manual, John Theobald's 1767 *Every Man his own Physician. Being a Complete Collection of Efficacious and Approved Remedies for Every Disease Incident to the Human Body* provided directions for bleeding and cures. He organized his work by first describing the signs of a disease and then providing treatment methods. He defined the 'bloody flux,' as beginning "with coldness and shivering, succeeded by a quick pulse, and intense thirst. The stools are greasy, and sometimes frothy mixed with blood, with filaments intermixed, which have the appearance of melted fat, and are attended with intolerable gripings, and a painful defecation as it were of the bowels."¹⁵⁵ Theobald provided the cure for 'bloody flux':

Bleed first, then give the following vomit; half a drachm of powder of ipecacuanha, work it off with chamomile tea, repeat the vomit every other day, for three or four times. On the intermediate days, between each vomit, let the sick person take a large spoonful of the following mucilage, warm, every hour: dissolve half an ounce of gum Arabic and half an ounce of gum tragacanth, in a pint of barley water, over a gentle fire.¹⁵⁶

The success of published self-help journals primarily written by men suggests that women did not have access to formal medical education in an institutional setting and therefore, did not receive accreditation for their own medical methodology. While women read and used self-help journals authored by men, most women would have acquired advice about their medical practice orally or through first-hand experience, such as observing childbirth.

Interestingly, Martha Ballard treated the same sickness, though she did not expressly state the curative ingredients used. On July 29, 1794, Ballard wrote, "I was Called to See Mrs Hamlin who is very Sick with a Disentary." Two days later, she noted, "I was Called to Mr Hamlin's, his

¹⁵⁵ John Theobald, "Every Man his own Physician. Being a Complete Collection of Efficacious and Approved Remedies for Every Disease Incident to the Human Body. With Plain Instructions for their Common Use," (Boston: Cox and Berry, 1767), *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans 1639-1800*, 6, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy006.nclive.org/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=J6AJ51SNMTQ5MDcxMjA4OS4yMjUyMTA6MT0xMjoxNTluNDYuMjguMTY&p_action=doc&p_docnum=1&p_queryname=18&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2F82FA918EA100@10783-@1.

¹⁵⁶ Theobald, "Every Man His Own Physician," 6.

wife is very Sick with a Bloody flux. I tarried all night.” In another case, Ballard penned on Saturday, March 1, 1800, “Calld to rise and go to Son Lambards to See Son Pollards infant, find it very Sick. we gave it Senna and Rhubarb.” Rhubarb and senna were used as laxatives. Yet, the child did not get better, and the family called in a male doctor to help. The doctor treated the baby with ingredients Ballard did not recognize. On Monday, March 3, 1800, she wrote, “the Doc^t left Snake root, Cammomile and an other ingredient and Parrigoric [an opiate] which was used acording to his direction to a punctilio but to no affect, the illness still increases.”¹⁵⁷ While Theobald and Ballard treated the same sickness, their treatments were different because they used different ingredients. Theobald used chamomile to treat the ‘bloody flux,’ but Ballard did not use the same treatment. Thus, while lay healers used self-help manuals, they also had their own versions of treatments that differed from formally educated physicians.¹⁵⁸

Disease Causation and Controversy

While early Americans normatively expected women to diagnose and treat illness, there were controversies over women’s informal management of disease. When Dr. Cony treated Ballard’s grandson with ingredients unknown to her, she had an argument with him over the correct way to treat the baby. On Wednesday, March 5, 1800, she wrote, “the babe is very Sick in dead. Cony Came, he proposed to put blister on the neck, he Cast very hard reflections on me without grounds, as I think. may a mercyfull God forgiv him.”¹⁵⁹ The baby did not recover and died that

¹⁵⁷ Entry for July 20, 1794, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*; Entry for July 22, 1794, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*; Entry for March 1, 1800, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*; Entry for March 3, 1800, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

¹⁵⁸ Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale*, 256-257; Entry for July 23, 1786, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

¹⁵⁹ Entry for March 5, 1800, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

evening. Ballard questioned Cony's methods just as he questioned hers. Two days later, on March 7, 1800, the Ballard family buried the infant boy. When Ballard returned to her home after the funeral, she wrote, "Hepsy went and watcht at mr Parkers with his oldes^t Dag^t who is very Sick. as I am informd, Doct Cony givs it as his opinion, Shee must Soon Die."¹⁶⁰

Though there were trained medical doctors in the colonies from the beginning of settlement, healers increasingly began to look to more formalized education as a qualification for practicing medicine for income. As early as the sixteenth century, formally qualified English physicians complained of imposter physicians. By the 1600s, educated colonial doctors followed their predecessor's actions by questioning the treatment methods of lay healers and self-described doctors who had plenty of experience but no academic training.¹⁶¹ Interestingly, Peter Middleton, a professor of physic at King's College in New York, argued in his "A Medical Discourse, or An Historical Inquiry into the Ancient and Present State of Medicine" that there were some imposter physicians who claimed to be educated but never received any academic discipline. Written in 1769, Middleton addressed those present for the opening of a medical school in New York. Though Middleton felt biased against physicians who had no academic training, he remained very interested in Biblical mention of physicians. In his speech, He referred to Biblical Rachel offering Leah mandrakes for her sons to explain the long-known knowledge about the medicinal properties of plants. He also used the Bible to explain the importance of food and cleanliness for one's health just as God was concerned about the eating habits and cleanliness of the Israelites.¹⁶²

160 Entry for March 7, 1800, in *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

161 For more on formally educated healers' questioning treatment of lay healers, see Chapters 3 and 4.

162 Peter Middleton, "A Medical Discourse, or An Historical Inquiry into the Ancient and Present State of Medicine: The Substance of which was Delivered at Opening the Medical School, in the City of New-York," (New York: Hugh Gaine, 1769), *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans 1639-1800*, 1-2, 23, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy006.nclive.org/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=H6AL51BNMTQ5MDcxMTk4OC45MDY0Mjg6MToxMjoxNTIuNDYu

With the opening of New England medical schools during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, treatments issued by educated male physicians became more routine for colonists. In another example of treatment, William Cullen, one of the leading academic physicians in Europe at this time, directed his “First Lines of the Practice of Physic” to students at the University of Edinburgh. Cullen published this work within the colony of New York in 1793. He stated, “The editor is happy in an opportunity of introducing the out-lines of the first part of his illustrious master’s discoveries of the causes and cures of diseases to the knowledge of Students of Physic in America.”¹⁶³ The first part of Cullen’s work described fevers, what caused them, and how to treat them. The second part detailed inflammation. Similarly, he wrote on what caused inflammation and how to stop it. He also defined various epidemics, including the plague and small pox.¹⁶⁴

Though men began seeking formal education at medical schools, they still trained through both school and apprenticeships until the end of the nineteenth century. Often, men would attend school for a time and then seek an apprenticeship where they would get the opportunity to follow a doctor around and observe healing methods and surgical procedures. American apprentices also attended medical schools in Europe and then returned hoping to make an impression on colonists who sought aid from elite intellectuals. This continuous cycle of

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163 William Cullen, “First Lines of the Practice of Physic,” (New York: Samuel Campbell, 1793), *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans 1639-1800*, 1, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy006.nclive.org/iw-search/we/Evans/>

p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=B6CA53LPMTQ5MDcxMTc2NS4xODE1MTI6MT0xMjoxNTluNDYuMjguMTY&p_action=doc&p_docnum=3&p_queryname=5&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2F8288562A7BF8@17129-@1.

164 Cullen, “First Lines of the Practice of Physic,” 1-39.

attending school and working an apprenticeship allowed male physicians to increase their overall experiences and network with other trained professionals.¹⁶⁵

Women did not have the same opportunities as men to attend medical schools. The first medical school in America, founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1765, only admitted males, American medical schools did not admit women until 1847 when Elizabeth Blackwell became a student at Geneva Medical College. Shortly thereafter, she became the first professionally educated woman physician in the United States. Some early American women healers proclaimed themselves professional physicians based on experience.¹⁶⁶

The introduction of obstetrics in America also contributed to the controversy over women's informal management of childbirth. While many women healers continued to deliver babies without obstetric techniques, such as using forceps to extract the fetus, male physicians gravitated toward these obstetric methods.¹⁶⁷ The gender divide may also explain differing opinions about whether traditional herbal or scholarly-taught healing methods proved more successful. While early Americans valued educated women's medical advice, educated male physicians, in particular, did not trust the opinions of uneducated women healers as much because they used outmoded remedies and also because of their sex. In her fight to maintain her respectability as a working midwife, Ballard dealt with young, trained doctors who questioned her practices just as she questioned their methods.¹⁶⁸

Ballard's interactions and disagreements with young physician, Dr. Page, typified discrimination against women healers On Friday, October 10, 1794, Ballard wrote, "at mr Sewalls, they were intimidated & Calld D^r Page who gave my Patient [50] drops ot Laudenum

165 Paul Starr, *The Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and The Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 30-31, 37-40.

166 Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 138, 151.

167 Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 36-63.

168 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 254-256. 260-261.

which put her into Such a Stupor her pains (which were regular & promising) in a manner [Scant] till near night when Shee puk^t & they returnd & Shee was Delivd at 7h Evn of a Son, her firs^t Born.”¹⁶⁹ Ballard’s parenthetical note clarified that she disagreed with Dr. Page for halting the progression of natural labor. Despite this, Ballard still respected male doctors. On November 11, 1785, she explained how upon arriving to a birth late, the mother had complications for which Ballard thought sensible to call the doctor. She stated:

I was Calld at 5 O Clock y^s morn to Henry Babcocks, his wife being in Travil. arivd there about Day Light; found her put to bed, the operation performd By mrs Smith. mrs Babcock I found in Severe pain; her complaints So great & Shee very Desireous I should inquire into y^e Cause. I Complyd & found her greatly ingered by some misshap. mrs Smith does not alow y^t Shee was Sencible of it. however her, Viz mrs Bab^{ks}, Distres was so very Severe we were apprehencive Shee was Expiring. Sent for Doct Colman But Dr Williams fortunately Came in & prescribed remedies which aford Some relief. I Left him there & returnd home at 10/PM.¹⁷⁰

Ballard still trusted in the doctor to save the life of a dying woman.

Controversy over women’s informal management of disease also derived from women’s decisions to step outside the normative expectations of women healers. When women healers started demanding payment for their services or taking on cases unrelated to midwifery, the colonial community began to question their actions. Mary Hale, a New England woman, charged her patients twenty shillings a week during the 1660s. About the same time, a Massachusetts Bay woman named Ann Edmonds accepted a horse worth fourteen pounds for her work [as a doctress].¹⁷¹

Male physicians took offense when early Americans refused their treatment because they preferred the different treatments of other healers, possibly women lay healers. Dr. Benjamin

169 Entry for October 10, 1794, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

170 Entry for November 11, 1795, in *Martha Ballard’s Diary Online*.

171 Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling*, 125-126.

Vaughn, a doctor in the town where Ballard lived, wrote a letter to Dr. Page in which he expressed how a parent was resistant to let him bleed his child. He stated:

Please to give my compliments to Mr. Morse, and tell him, that if he refuses to allow the lancet to his child's mouth, I shall have no hesitation in saying, that he will have been the probable cause of the child's death, should it die; & that he has less courage or more prejudice than all the females that I have yet met with in Kennebec. I hold it *criminal* to pray publicly for a child on one hand, & refuse the approved & innocent means of care on the other. I wish all means may not now be too late.¹⁷²

Dr. Vaughn scrutinized the traditional healing and prayer and saw them as women's healing methods only. While he referred generally to the females he had met in Kennebec, it is possible he also referred to Martha Ballard.

Despite Benjamin Vaughn's aversion to female lay healers, Charles Vaughn, the doctor's brother, worked with the Kennebec Proprietors to open a female department in Hallowell Academy in 1805. Dr. Cony provided money to start a school for girls in Augusta in 1816. While some male physicians found laywomen's treatment methods controversial, Dr. Cony thought women healers, such as Martha Ballard, worthy of the opportunity to treat the sick.¹⁷³

Conclusion

Colonial women healers had a special role in and relationship with healing by virtue of their sex. Women healers usually only depended on male physicians during dangerous child birthing situations. Male healers depended on female healers for their knowledge of the community and help with nursing and midwifery. Families and community members normatively expected women to heal whereas they did not expect men to do the same. Colonists thought women best to diagnose and treat disease because they also expected women to be caring wives, mothers, and neighbors? Social childbirth allowed colonial women to learn healthcare from other women. Childbirth as a women-only event allowed women healers an opportunity to control the

¹⁷² Benjamin Vaughn, Quoted in Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 260.

¹⁷³ Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 260-261.

practice of obstetrics though men also tried to control it as a way to broaden their skills and marketability as healers. While educated men found women's informal management of disease and childbirth controversial, male physicians were aware of women healers' abilities. Because women held reputable positions as healers, men sought to gain the upper hand by denying women formal medical education. Men healers also worked to diminish the good reputations of women healers to eliminate them as competition. The reputations of women healers in relation to witchcraft accusations will be discussed further in Chapter 3, "Early American Healers: Witnesses to Witchcraft," and Chapter 4, "Women Healers as Witches: Magical Methodology and Patriarchal Threat."

Chapter 3

Early American Healers: Witnesses to Witchcraft

Introduction. Healing Victims and Revealing Witches

Though colonial women healers faced competition from male physicians, they continued to work as occupational healers. The competition did not diminish their good reputation. Rather, colonists greatly desired women healers' skills when people started showing symptoms of witchcraft-induced illness. Though many people feared the power and skills of colonial women healers because they possessed knowledge of curatives and the body that others did not, they also respected their knowledge of magically-induced illnesses and injuries. Healers became involved in witchcraft trials in a variety of ways. Healers fulfilled unique, respected roles in uncovering early American witches by treating magically induced illnesses and injuries, recognizing evidence of magic, and inspecting accused witches for witches' marks.¹⁷⁴

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, early American colonists expected women to be healers because of their abilities to bring life into the world and care for children. They believed the ability to bear children inherently made women more nurturing than men. Women fulfilled society's expectations of a healer by prescribing curatives. For example, on March 1, 1800, eighteenth century Maine healer, Martha Ballard gave a baby senna and rhubarb, both of which were used as laxatives, to cure a stomach ache. Historian Susan Brandt writes about women healers' medical practices, such as the apothecary, Margaret Hill Morris. Morris, a Quaker healer and apothecary during the American Revolution, prescribed rhubarb. Healers gave

¹⁷⁴ See Harley, "Historians as Demonologists," 1, 8; Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 98; Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 12-13; Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 91.

advice for maintaining good health. Morris promoted positive changes to colonists' lives to improve one's health, such as eating healthy diets, getting plenty of fresh air, and exercising.¹⁷⁵ Aside from curing diseases, colonial society expected women healers to help mothers during childbirth. While midwives took charge of the birthing procedure, other women usually arrived to help. The historian Carol Berkin states that childbirth became a very social event for women. Women who helped with and witnessed childbirth consumed "groaning beer" or groaning cake," once the mother's contractions began. Then, the atmosphere would become more serious once the mother's labor pains increased.¹⁷⁶ Women who arrived for the birth of a child would learn birthing techniques from the midwife. Women sometimes gave birth while sitting in another woman's lap or supported by other women over the midwife's open-seated stool.¹⁷⁷ Colonial Americans generally respected female midwives and expected them to be trustworthy. In October 1789, Mrs. Foster, Hallowell, Maine's new minister's wife, confided in Martha Ballard when a prominent judge broke into her home and raped her. Mrs. Foster asked Ballard not to tell anyone what had happen for fear of her reputation being ruined. Ulrich concluded that to tell the courts what had truly happened would not have worked out in Mrs. Foster's favor because a man's account of sexual misconduct would be believed by the courts rather than a woman's testimony.¹⁷⁸ Yet, Ballard did eventually give a testimony about this rape. When Mrs. Foster finally brought the rape to court, Ballard testified that her recollection was true. Ballard even referred to the day in her diary where she wrote about Mrs. Foster previously confiding in her after the rape.¹⁷⁹

175 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 256-257; Brandt, "Getting into a Little Business," 795.

176 Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 33.

177 Berkin, *First Generations*, 33.

178 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 102-121.

179 Entry for December 23, 1780, in *Martha Ballard's Dairy Online*.

Just as colonial American society expected women midwives to be trustworthy, they expected them to be honest. As a result, the courts often called the midwives to testify in paternity cases for illegitimate children. During the eighteenth century, couples often had children out of wedlock, but it remained customary to marry soon after. The town did not want the financial burden of caring for the child. A midwife's role in revealing paternity lay in questioning women during the pains of childbirth. Colonists commonly believed that childbirth put a woman in a vulnerable state that would give the mother no reason to lie about the father's identity. Often, the midwife would remind the mother that if she lied about the identity of the child's father and then died in childbirth, she would go to hell.¹⁸⁰

Historian Abby Chandler details a 1686 Essex County paternity trial where the court called the midwife to testify. Martha Rowleson had conceived a son outside of wedlock. Her midwife, Mary Bradbury, testified during the paternity trial. On the day of the infant's birth, Bradbury made a room ready for the birth and asked two women to attend as witnesses. When Rowleson's labor pains began, Bradbury asked her the true paternity of the child and where conception had occurred. Rowleson named a man named Sam George as the father and said that conception occurred at a social gathering where George promised to marry her if she had sexual intercourse with him. Bradbury shared Rowleson's story with the jury and the court legally named George as the child's father.¹⁸¹

Sometimes women healers failed to uphold society's expectations for healers when stillbirths occurred, or cures failed. Mary Beth Norton analyzes the 1649 to 1650 case of Bostonian Mistress Alice Tilly. Susanna Phillips accused Alice Tilly, a midwife, of intentionally

¹⁸⁰ Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 183, 141, 147-160.

¹⁸¹ Abby Chandler, "From Birthing Chamber to Court Room: The Medical and Legal Communities of the Colonial Essex County Midwife" *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 110-119.

causing miscarriages. Fortunately for Tilly, 217 women signed a petition for Tilly's release from prison. Clearly, at least 217 people trusted and respected Tilly. Chandler also spoke about the courts calling in midwives to inspect accused witches for witches' marks. Yet, some women healers challenged society's assumptions about their roles.¹⁸² The significance of women healers accused of witchcraft in America is a debatable topic. Chandler argues that women healers who broke with social norms were more likely than other women to be accused of practicing witchcraft.¹⁸³ David Harley, a historian of primarily English witchcraft argues that the overall number of midwives accused remains insignificant and that scholars wrongly exaggerate the midwives' martyrdom to promote a feminist theory that men hurt women's roles in the evolution of women's healthcare. He argues that the number of midwives accused of witchcraft was insignificant because not all women accused of witchcraft were midwives and that, because people trusted midwives with their lives, it would be unlikely they would have accused them of witchcraft. Indeed, midwives and women healers also gained a great deal of respect from their communities. Harley suggests that all practicing midwives held good reputations within their communities because this is the only way the community would allow them to advertise their skills. Rebecca Tannenbaum and Carol F. Karlsen explains that, rather than be accused of witchcraft, the courts asked midwives to examine the accused for evidence of witches' marks. Women healers also determined whether magic caused people's illnesses and injuries. Yet, women were not the only occupational healers who were involved in witchcraft trials. Male

182 Mary Beth Norton, "'The Ablest Midwife That Wee Knowe in the Land': Mistress Alice Tilly and the Women of Boston and Dorchester, 1649-1650," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (January 1998): 113-116; Chandler, "From Birthing Chamber to Court Room," 109-112.

183 Norton, "'The Ablest Midwife That Wee Knowe in the Land,'" 109-112.

healers sometimes offered competition, particularly when they claimed to have more formal medical education than women.¹⁸⁴

Women played significant roles as both sufferers and healers in seventeenth and eighteenth-century America. As sufferers, they endured both disease and the pains of childbirth. As healers, they practiced lay healing and midwifery with skills learned through experience, orally, or from self-help manuals. Though several midwives and healers suffered witchcraft accusations, they were also well-respected members of the community. As such, courts often called midwives to examine accused witches for devil's marks or testify in paternity cases. Women healers and midwives also provided the courts evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses, injuries, and deaths. Though the colonial consensus on trust in healing approaches shifted more from women to men by the late eighteenth century, one cannot deny that women continued to have some success in a profession that started as a primarily female role.¹⁸⁵

Testimonies to Witchcraft Induced Deaths and Illnesses

Early Americans believed that witches got their power from the devil. With this power, they could hurt people, especially those who were particularly vulnerable, such as the elderly, pregnant women, and children. Witches could also cause harm to animals. Witches could harm in several ways, including curses, incantations, or using poppets (little dolls) to control the victim's body. In 1584, the English skeptic Reginald Scot disputed the existence of witchcraft and believed witches gained their power through others' fear. He believed that curses were only words and that any illnesses or deaths occurred naturally rather than supernaturally. As to the means by which witches caused deaths and illnesses, he explained, "The matter and instruments wherewith it is accomplished, are words, charms, signs, images, characters, etc...yet not is said

184 Harley, "Historians as Demonologists, 1, 8; Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 98; Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 12-13.

185 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 91.

to have the grace or gift to perform the matter except she be a witch and so taken either by her own consent or by others' imputation."¹⁸⁶ Scot argued that witches really were not witches at all.¹⁸⁷

Many people disagreed with Scot's thoughts on witches and believed witches were real and very powerful. Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister, relayed in his 1689 *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possession*, that an anonymous man lost his cattle to mysterious deaths following "threatening expressions" by two of his female neighbors.¹⁸⁸ Though it is unclear what Mather meant by "threatening expressions," he may have been referring to the idea of an "evil eye." Upon suddenly losing his cattle, the man felt very distraught and prayed that God would reveal the women's true identities as witches. Yet, praying for the women's guilty sentence led to an altered state in his health. The man believed that the women, though absent, still caused him harm. Mather recalled that "he sank down speechless and senseless and was by his friends carried away to a bed where he lay for two to three hours in horrible distress." The man constantly complained that someone was stabbing him, though no one visibly seemed to be doing so.¹⁸⁹ Mather truly believed in the witches' abilities to harm and warned, "I entreat every reader to make such a use of these things as may promote his own welfare and advance the Glory of God; and so answer the intent of the writer."¹⁹⁰

Though communities normatively expected women to heal, men often inspected illnesses and injuries for evidence of witchery as well. In 1662, the Kelly family of Hartford, Connecticut accused Goodwife Ayres of practicing witchcraft. Subsequently Ayres also accused Rebecca

186 Scott, "The Discoverie of Witchcraft," in *Witches of the Atlantic World*, 36.

187 Scott, "The Discoverie of Witchcraft," 29-30.

188 Mather, "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions," 46.

189 Mather, "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions," 46; Several early American witchcraft accusations spoke of the witch giving victims the 'evil eye' or causing the victim pain simply by looking at them.; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 41, 174-175..

190 Mather, "Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions," 46.

Greensmith of being a witch. In court, Greensmith sparked the largest witch hunt of the seventeenth century prior to the infamous Salem witch hunt of 1692-3 when she admitted to attending witch meetings in the woods with several other people in town. Meanwhile, the Kellys' daughter suffered an indeterminable illness and died. On March 31, 1662, Dr. Thomas Rossiter, a Windsor, Connecticut native, performed an autopsy on the child. From the autopsy, Dr. Rossiter, judged that magic had been used to cause the death of the child. He documented strange occurrences such as "the whole body, the musculous parts, nerves, and joints, were all pliable, without any stiffness, or contraction, the gullet only excepted: experience of dead bodies renders such symptoms unusual."¹⁹¹ Because the body did not become stiff upon death, the doctor determined that the death had occurred through magical means.

In another case of magically-induced death, Elizabeth Godman, a widow from New Haven, Connecticut, lived with Stephen Goodyear, the deputy governor of the New Haven Colony. In 1653, Mr. William Hooke, a minister, brought Godman to court for witchcraft. Though Godman told the court Hooke slandered her because she had inherited £200 from her late husband, a considerable amount of money for that time, more suspicions arose when neighbors started accusing her of causing sickness and deaths of their animals and children. Mr. William Hooke accused Elizabeth Godman of causing his son to be sick. He testified in court, "so it was with her [Godman] when his boy was sick, she would not be kept away from him, nor got away when she was there, and one time Mrs. Hooke bid her go away, and thrust her from the

191 "The Hartford Witch-hunt (1662-1665)," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 147; "The Kellys describe their daughter's fatal illness," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 152; "An autopsy report on John Kelly's child," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 154-155.

boy, but she turned again and said she would look on him.”¹⁹² Though Godman cared for the boy, Hooke remained convinced that she had caused their son’s sickness. They asked an unidentified doctor to come examine the boy and give a diagnosis. Mr. Hooke stated that:

It was also said that is suspicious that she hath put the boy’s sickness upon some other cause, as that he had turned his brains with sliding, and said the boy would be well again, though he was handled in such a strange manner as the doctor said he had not met with the like. Mr. Goodyear asked her if she was not the cause of his disease, she denied it, but in such a way as if she could scarce deny it.¹⁹³

Based on the doctor’s examination and Mr. Goodyear’s testimony, Hooke became thoroughly convinced that Godman caused the death of his son through magical means.

Women healers, as well as men healers, examined victims’ injuries and illnesses for evidence of witchcraft. Springfield, Massachusetts resident, Mary Parsons, accused her husband Hugh Parsons, a brickmaker and wood sawyer, of witchcraft after an argument. Later, when working as a brickmaker for the town minister, George Moxon, the men also got into an argument. Neighbors noticed Hugh Parsons frequently quarreled with those with whom he worked. Shortly after this, two of Parsons’s children suddenly died of undetermined causes. Many townspeople believed Parsons’s behavior and the deaths of his two children to be evidence of his witchery. Thirty-five neighbors offered their depositions against him to the court magistrates. One woman, Blanche Bedortha, complained that while in childbed, she felt supernatural pains unrelated to childbirth, as if someone pricked her heart, shoulder, and neck.

192 “Elizabeth Godman,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 61; “Mr. Hooke associates his son’s sickness with Elizabeth Godman,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 64.

193 “Mr. Hooke associates his son’s sickness with Elizabeth Godman,” 65.

She attributed the pains to Parsons's doing. Her midwife, "the Widow Marshfield" also testified to Bedortha's pains.¹⁹⁴ On March 22, 1650, she testified:

when I went home at night I left her well as could be expected of a woman in child bed, but in the morning when I came she was in lamentable torment[;] she grew worse and worse for 2 or 3 days and she cried out as if she had been pricked with knives in such a lamentable manner that I did much fear her life: I never saw a woman in such a condition in child bed for she could not lie down in her bed: neither do I apprehend that she had any other kind of sickness but that pricking pains only in her side and shoulder.¹⁹⁵

In 1652, the jury found Hugh Parsons guilty of practicing witchcraft. However, the General court did not accept the verdict. Parsons left Springfield and never returned.¹⁹⁶

Abigail Graves Dibble, of Stamford, Connecticut accused her father, William Graves, of witchcraft after he refused to pay her inheritance when she married her husband Samuel Dibble. Furthermore, she believed her difficult child birthing experience stemmed from her father's remark that she should be ready to meet the Lord, as if he prematurely knew she would die in childbirth. Even though Graves did not die in childbirth, she took her father to trial for witchcraft in February 1666. The court asked Abigail's midwife to testify to her difficult labor. On February 4, 1666, her midwife, Mary Holmes, explained that "she had a kindly labor as other woman had, until the child came to the breath[.] Then she was taken with a trembling and striving that we was

194 "Blanche Bedortha on afflictions in her body," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 36.

195 "Blanche Bedortha on afflictions in her body," 36.

196 "Mary Parsons (EXECUTED?) and Hugh Parsons," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 29-30.

not able to deal with her.”¹⁹⁷ Since colonial women’s chance of dying in childbirth remained high, the court did not find Graves guilty.¹⁹⁸

While the only information on Elizabeth Kendell’s condemnation comes from John Hales, *A Modest Inquiry*, written in 1702, he noted that she had been wrongfully accused and later executed. She was executed sometime between 1647 and 1651. In Hale’s account, an unnamed “Watertown nurse” testified against Kendell for causing the death of Goodman Genings’s (possibly Jennings) child.¹⁹⁹ The witness stated that “the said Kendall did make much of the child, and then the child was well, and quickly changed its color and died a few hours later.”²⁰⁰ Kendall declared her innocence until the time of her death. After her execution, the nurse admitted that she did not believe Kendell had caused the child’s death, and that her false testimony contributed to Kendall’s guilty conviction and death sentence. Hale explained that “the nurse had the night before carried out the child and kept it abroad in the cold a long time, when the red gum was come out upon it, and the cold had struck in the red gum, and this they judged the cause of the child’s death.”²⁰¹

Later, in an unrelated case, the same nurse was imprisoned for committing adultery. There she delivered her illegitimate child and died in prison, most likely from complications related to childbirth. Hale recalled that Mr. Richard Brown, the “deputy to the General Court from Watertown, Massachusetts” told the nurse that “It was just with God to leave her to this

197 “William Graves,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 164; “The midwife testifies about Abigail’s labor,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 166.

198 “William Graves,” 164.

199 “A woman is wrongfully blamed for a child’s death,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 25.

200 “A woman is wrongfully blamed for a child’s death,” 25.

201 “A woman is wrongfully blamed for a child’s death,” 25.

wickedness, as a punishment for her murdering Goody Kendall by her false witness bearing.”²⁰²

Though the nurse lied to the court about Kendall’s role in the murder of the child, the court respected her lone testimony enough to wrongfully sentence an innocent woman to death. This shows that colonists greatly respected the skills and words of healers.

Determining Magically-Induced Illnesses, Injuries, and Death

Colonial healers detected evidence of magically-induced illnesses and deaths in several ways. Healers may have blamed witchcraft to protect their good reputations when they did not feel they could heal a sick or injured person. An accusation such as this would be widely accepted in colonial America where most people feared the power of the devil and his witches. Dr. William Griggs, the only male physician in Salem Town, Massachusetts during the 1692 to 1693 witch trials, examined many sufferers for witchcraft induced pains and sickness. Eventually, Dr. Griggs refused to help many of the young girls involved in witchcraft accusations because he believed their tremors, difficulty swallowing, and sudden vocal outbursts to be evidence of witchery. He believed that the girls’ behavior displayed signs of demonic possession and that worldly medicine and cures would not help them. Instead, he recommended that the community pray for their souls and fast so that they might heal. Since many prominent townspeople, including a minister, were accused and executed during the Salem witch trials, it is possible that Dr. Griggs tried to protect himself by blaming a magical cause.²⁰³

Other times, physicians felt certain that they knew what a naturally caused illness, injury or death looked like, so they believed anything other to be perfect evidence of witchcraft. John Cotta, a Northamptonshire physician, practiced Galenic medicine. In his 1616, *The Trial of Witch-craft*

202 “A woman is wrongfully blamed for a child’s death,” 25.

203 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 137; For more on colonists’ fears of the Devil’s power, see Chapter 1.

shewing the true and right methode of the Discovery: with a Confutation of erroneous ways, he explained:

All diseases that happen unto the body of man are either outward or inward, and therefore either seene by the eye, and deprehended by the outward sense, or conceived only by Reason and the inward Understanding. Inward diseases, and subject onely to reason and understanding doe sometimes appeare clearely and certainly to reason and understanding; sometimes they do not appeare certaine, or by certaine notes or signes, but by likely markes onely, which are the grounds of artificiall [artful] conjecture.²⁰⁴

Cotta used Galenic theory to strengthen his argument that he had only treated naturally caused illnesses and deaths. He argued that a truly knowledgeable healer could easily reveal whether magic, an unnatural cause, had influenced the patient's suffering.²⁰⁵

As early as the sixteenth century, Europeans warned their communities about witches who practiced magical healing (cunning folk). George Gifford, an Essex Minister, warned that by entertaining magical healing practices, people welcomed the devil into their lives. In his 1593, *A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*, he cautioned:

There be many diseases in the bodies of men and beastes which he [the devil] seeth will breake forth unto lameness or unto death, he beareth the witches in hand he doth them. He worketh by his other sort of Witches, whome the people call cunning men and wise women to confirme all his matters, and by them teacheth many remedies, that so he may be sought unto and honored as God.²⁰⁶

Though Gifford warned people against visiting cunning folk, because through them the devil sought power like God's, many Europeans, particularly American colonists, sought the input of cunning people because they more easily accepted magical work than formally trained physicians whose resumés relied on education more than experience.²⁰⁷

204 Cotta, "The Trial of Witch-craft shewing the true and right methode of the Discovery: with a Confutation of erroneous ways," in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America*, 92.

205 Cotta, "The Trial of Witch-craft shewing the true and right methode of the Discovery: with a Confutation of erroneous ways," 90-1, 95.

206 Gifford, "A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes," in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*, 64.

207 Gifford, "A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes," 61-62.

Historian Keith Thomas explains that English cunning folk healed people but also practiced other methods of white magic including fortune telling or protecting people from evil spirits. Some colonists accepted white magical practice because cunning folk used it for good. However, their knowledge of magical practice and strange methods for achieving successful results also instilled fear in the community. Many methods seemed innocent enough, such as using strange ingredients in curatives. If the cure worked, it often went unquestioned by the community.²⁰⁸

Cunning Folk and Character Witnesses

Cunning folk were known for practicing white, or good, witchcraft. Therefore, they best recognized evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses, injuries, and deaths. Many colonists testified to witchcraft-induced illnesses. Of course, not all who presented such evidence to the court were healers. Many simply testified to their own experience of pain and suffering, as well as to the person they thought may have caused it. Magical healing was not uncommon in the colonies. For example, on October 13, 1786, long after the last American witchcraft trial, Maine midwife, Martha Ballard, documented bleeding a cat to cure shingles. While magical healing methods could be the first step in determining a witch's identity, a witness first recognizing evidence of magical healing and second, recognizing intent, made the difference in witchcraft condemnations.²⁰⁹

Colonists frequently used magical methods to heal sicknesses and pain. One colonial cure for yaws included "brass and steel filings, brimstone (sulfur), gun powder, and black pepper ground up and added to 'fowle dung' and some local flowers put into a broth and used as an ointment." Though magical curatives and concoctions consisted of odd ingredients, people usually did not question whether or not these components could heal. Instead, they had faith in

²⁰⁸ Thomas, "Cunning Men and Popular Magic," 212-252.

²⁰⁹ Martha that she bled a cat and applied blood to Eliab Shaw's shingles.; Entry for October 13, 1786, in Ballard, *Martha Ballard's Diary Online*.

their healing properties and feared their supernatural power. Many magical cures were influenced by Native American healing methods. A cure for a child's hernia "required one and a half-inch of the penis of a deer 'culled in the old of the moon' and boiled in milk." The medicine would be consumed three mornings in a row "(between cock crow and daylight) while abstaining from other foods." Another magical cure for stopping a nose-bleed included letting the blood fall on the knife "to cut the bleeding."²¹⁰ This could be considered sympathetic magic because the healer allowed the knife to take the pain away from the ailing person. Midwives followed a similar tradition by placing a knife underneath the childbed to cut a woman's labor pains. Cotton Mather's wife asked her doctor if it would be appropriate to cut and apply "the warm Wool from a living Sheep" to her breasts to decrease chest pain. Her doctor allowed the healing method.²¹¹ Cunning folk were not disrespected by colonists. Colonists often went to them for advice about keeping evil spirits outside their home, telling their futures, as well as revealing the true identities of witches. Cunning folk had the ability to recognize the products of witchcraft because they so closely related to it themselves. In 1693, Increase Mather, a Puritan minister, explained the rules of presenting evidence to the court during witchcraft trials. If at least two credible people could answer a series of questions related to magical practice and, more importantly, the intent of performing such practices, then the one they accused might be considered a witch. He listed:

How often have they been seen by others using Inchantments? Conjuring to raise Storms? And have been heard calling up their Familiar Spirits? And have been known to use Spells and Charms? And to shew in a Glass or in a Shew-stone persons absent? And to reveal secrets which could not be discovered but by the Devil? And have not men been seen to do things which are above human Strength, that no man living could do without Diabolical Assitances?²¹²

210 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 53.

211 Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 128; Beier, *Sufferers & Healers*, 160-163.

212 Increase Mather, "Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men; Witchcrafts, Infallible Proofs of Guilt in such as are Accused with that Crime," in *Witchcraft and*

Healers who were also cunning folk could recognize these things, as well as the intent of the person who performed such actions.

John Demos, historian of American witchcraft, argues that cunning folk also worked in counter-magic, such as hanging a horse-shoe over the doorway of one's home or laying "sweet bays" at the threshold to prevent witches from entering.²¹³ Tituba, a slave woman who confessed to practicing witchcraft during the Salem Witch Trials, worked as a cunning woman. Though she confessed (possibly out of fear from her master, a minister, or possibly to avoid a death sentence), she implicated other women in the process. The community believed Tituba's confessions as she was native Caribbean. Colonists believed Native Americans could recognize evidence of witchcraft and the work of the devil. This idea stemmed from long before American witch trials began. In 1577, Sir Francis Drake thought South American natives danced around a fire to ask the devil to sink his ship. In a memoir of Sir Walter Raleigh's trip (1584-1487) to Roanoke, he recalled that Native Americans tried to cast spells on the English. As a result, God punished "their witches" with a plague.²¹⁴

In 1692, Mary Sibley, the aunt of one of Salem Town's "afflicted girls" asked John Indian to get his wife, Tituba, to make a witch cake.²¹⁵ Oftentimes, cunning women would make witch cakes of rye meal and the victim's urine. Then, when one fed the cake to a dog, the dog would reveal the witch. Sibley made the decision to feed a witch-cake to a dog when a physician determined that the girls' convulsions and odd symptoms were products of something evil and supernatural.

Society in England and America, 1550-1750, ed. Marion Gibson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 223.

²¹³ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 138-139, 182.

²¹⁴ Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 36-37; Alfred Cave, "Indian Shamans and English Witches," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: A Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 197.

²¹⁵ "Tituba," in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Richard Godbeer, 81.

Though Samuel Parris, the town minister and master of John and Tituba, feared for the life of his niece Abigail Williams, one of the afflicted girls, he condemned the act of baking a witch-cake in a sermon. Parris claimed that Sibley had gone “to the Devil for help against the Devil.”²¹⁶ The minister believed that white magic was just as dangerous for the soul as performing witchcraft to hurt others.

Despite Samuel Parris’s claim that practicing white magic was dangerous, historian Elaine Breslaw argues that the cunning people and ministers had a long history of working together and coexisted in European society. Cotton Mather documented objects used in fortune-telling, including “sieves and keys, and peas, and nails, and horseshoes.”²¹⁷ American colonial practices could be learned orally or through English manuals and pamphlets. At the same time, colonists also learned magical practice from Native Americans.²¹⁸

Time, a Native American cunning person, also recognized evidence of witchery. In 1653, the widow, Elizabeth Godman, who lived with Stephen Goodyear, was brought to court for witchcraft. The town minister, Mr. Hooke feared Godman because she knew things before they actually occurred, particularly what occurred in church meetings. In a deposition, “Time, Mr. Hooke’s Indian,” told the court that she could leave a church meeting and then come back and know everything that had happened while she was gone.²¹⁹ Mr. Hooke explained to the court, “Time asking her who told, she answered plainly she would not tell, then Time said did not the devil tell you.”²²⁰ Time also claimed that Godwin talked to herself. Neighbors told her that “Time

216 Linnda R. Caporael, “Erogotism: The Satan Loosed in Salem?,” 257.

217 Breslaw, *Tituba*, 90.

218 Breslaw, *Tituba*, 91-93.

219 “Preternatural knowledge of events and speeches,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 64.

220 “Preternatural knowledge of events and speeches,” 64.

said you talk to the devil, but she made nothing of it.”²²¹ Despite her denouncement of Time’s testimony, the court brought Godman to trial for practicing witchcraft.²²²

Examination for Witches’ Marks

As well as being able to recognize evidence of witchcraft and reveal witches’ identities, colonial healers also participated in examinations for witches’ marks. Early Americans believed that witches’ marks, or teats would appear on the body when a woman made a pact with the devil. In this way, a woman-turned-witch would be able to nurse animal familiars or demons. This would sustain the familiar spirits’ health while the witch would continue to harm and discontinue the good health of Christians. For example, when Mary Perkins accused Eunice Cole, a New Hampshire resident, in 1656, she testified in court that “one Sabbath day when Mr. Dalton was preaching, this deponent saw a small creature about the bigness of a mouse fall out of the bosom of Eunice Cole.”²²³

Some communities had laws about how examinations for witches’ marks would hold up as evidence of witchery in court. For example, Fairfield, Connecticut court did not label “unusual [bodily] excrescences” as witches’ marks unless “able physicians” verified them as such.²²⁴ Ministers sometimes questioned whether bodily marks were actually witches’ marks because the Bible did not talk about them. However, the concept of a witches’ mark was so grounded in witchcraft lore and colonists’ testimonies that most early Americans certainly believed in them as evidence of guilt. When the judge decided that enough testimonies had been given that a woman nursed animal familiars, he would usually assign a jury of women to inspect the body for

221 “Preternatural knowledge of events and speeches,” 64.

222 “Elizabeth Godman,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 61.

223 Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 179.

224 Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 287.

witches' marks. Women performed most bodily inspections for witches' marks out of courtesy for the defendant.²²⁵

Because early Americans believed colonial women's bodies to be private, bodily examinations happened in much the same way as childbirth. Men rarely inspected a woman's body.

Neighborly women traditionally helped mothers and midwives during childbirth. Similarly, other women would be present to assist woman healers when they inspected bodies for witches' marks. For example, in 1706 Princess Anne County, Virginia (modern day Virginia Beach), when Grace Sherwood's neighbors brought her to trial for witchcraft, "gentlemen of the county, called justices of the peace," made up the county court.²²⁶ However, the gentlemen compiled a separate "Jury of women" to search Sherwood for witches' marks. On March 7, 1706, the women gave the verdict, "wee of the Jury have Serch^d Grace Sherwood and have found Two things like titts wth Severall other Spotts." Though the women found evidence of Sherwood's witchery, the court also asked men to search Sherwood's house for evidence of witchery. Men could not search Sherwood's body, but they could search her home.²²⁷

Because a search of a woman's body likened the feminine rituals of childbirth, the testimony of a midwife or woman healer counted doubly when she had a role in the search committee. When Fairfield, Connecticut woman, Mary Staples, and her neighbor, Roger Ludlow, got in an argument, he accused her of being a liar and a witch. In response, her husband Thomas Staples, filed a countersuit against his neighbor for slandering her. In 1654, the New Haven Colony magistrates called in witnesses to testify for and against Staples's supposed witchery. Though those against her found evidence of witchery in her lying, and associating with Native American

225 Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 287.

226 "The Case of Grace Sherwood," in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1946), 438.

227 "The Case of Grace Sherwood," 440.

rituals, and other accused witches, the condemning moment occurred when she herself inadvertently accused herself of witchcraft.²²⁸

When Goodwife Knapp was hanged for witchcraft in 1653, a jury of women curiously inspected the body for evidence of witches' marks. Many women, including Elizabeth Brewster, testified that Staples confessed to witchcraft when she "handled her [Knapp's body] very much, and called to Goodwife Lockwood, and said, these were no witch's teats, but such as she herself had."²²⁹ This statement was further corroborated by "the wife of John Tompson of Fairfield," who explained that "Goodwife Whitlocke, Goodwife Staples and herself, were at the grave and desired to see the marks of the witch that was hanged, they looked but found them not at first, then the midwife came and showed them, Goodwife Staples said she never saw such, and she believed no honest woman had such."²³⁰ Because the midwife claimed they were witches' teats and Staples claimed they were like hers, she condemned herself to accusations of witchcraft.

Conclusion. Respect and Fear

Early Americans greatly respected the skills and input of healers. While colonists normatively expected women to heal, many respected male healers, as well, particularly if they had much experience and success at curing diseases. When early American witchcraft trials began, colonists looked to their healers to determine whether ailments and deaths could be caused by

228 "Goodwives Bassett (EXECUTED), Knapp (EXECUTED), and Mary Staples," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 74-75; "Hester Ward describes Indian gods," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 78.

229 "Goodwives Bassett (EXECUTED), Knapp (EXECUTED), and Mary Staples," 74; "Elizabeth and Mary Brewster on the search for teats," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 79.

230 "Witnesses for the plaintiff," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 82.

witchcraft. Colonists also looked to their healers to determine whether someone could be a witch. In such cases, many people turned to cunning folk who had reputations for dealing in white magic. These skills gave them the ability to recognize evidence of maleficium.

While colonists shared beliefs that Native Americans practiced witchcraft and had close relationships with the devil, colonists approached cunning folk for advice on determining the identities of witches or magically-induced injuries, illnesses, and deaths. Some colonial healers also gained their knowledge from Native Americans. Though early Americans depended on cunning folk's knowledge, they also feared it. Since cunning people possessed knowledge of magic, they also fell vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. However, colonists also depended on healers' expertise in other ways. Healers held important roles in court as inspectors for witches' marks. Though men may have inspected bodies for witches' marks, women juries tended to inspect women's bodies to protect the defendant's virtue. Just as women gathered to witness childbirths, examinations for witches' marks became women-centered events. If midwives belonged to inspection committees, then their testimonies to evidence of witches' marks had more bearing in court than women who did not work in healing.

Despite the respect garnered by healers, women healers remained particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. Women who healed others, healed themselves, gave health advice, or possessed the skill to heal but refused to do so, were especially vulnerable to accusations. As in the cases of other accused witches, women healers confronted a greater possibility of being convicted when multiple witnesses provided testimonies to the court. However, women healers had the least chance of ensuring their innocence when male occupational healers or physicians spoke out against them. Women healers existed as a threat to not only their male competitors, but also to early American patriarchal society. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4, "Women Healers as Witches: Magical Methodology and Patriarchal Threat."

Chapter 4

Women Healers as Witches: Magical Methodology and Patriarchal Threat

Introduction. Respected But Feared

Early American colonists widely respected their healers. Particularly during times of witchcraft hysteria, colonists looked to their healers to recognize evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses and injuries, reveal the witches' identities, and inspect accused witches for marks of the devil. Both male and female healers were involved in witchcraft trials as witnesses. Yet women were involved in witchcraft trials more than men healers who usually did not inspect accused women's bodies for witches' marks to protect the accused witch's modesty. While many cunning folk, including Native Americans, recognized evidence of witchery and practiced white magic such as fortune-telling, colonists had a longstanding relationship with those who walked the line between the natural and the supernatural. Colonists often blamed cunning people for being witches because they made easy targets for explaining misfortune, such as illnesses and deaths of people, animals, and crops.²³¹ Though women and men worked as colonial healers and suffered witchcraft accusations, women healers were more vulnerable to suspicions of practicing witchcraft because their special expertise allowed them to be agents of change in their own lives, despite their particular vulnerabilities to witchcraft accusations by virtue of their sex.

While the historiography of colonial American women healers is growing, historians have written very little about women healers' involvement in early American witchcraft trials. This is surprising since the first and last women tried and convicted for witchcraft in America practiced healing. The significance of women healers accused of witchcraft is a debatable topic. David Harley, a historian of English witchcraft, argues that women healers, especially midwives, would

²³¹ Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 6-9; John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 80-84.

have garnered too much respect from the community to be involved in witchcraft trials. Yet, scholars of American witchcraft and medicine, such as Carol F. Karlsen, Abby Chandler, and Rebecca Tannenbaum disagree. They argue that community-wide respect for women healers involved them in witchcraft trials through examining the accused for witches' marks. Despite this, healers attracted fear as well as respect from their community members. Women healers, more than women of other professions, faced accusations for witchcraft. Evidence stemmed from their supposed role in disease causation, miscarriages, and still births.²³²

Disease Causation in Colonial America

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, North American colonists were rife with disease, including smallpox, dysentery, and fevers. Colonists often looked toward the women to care for their ailments. Though educated physicians eventually took over the practice of medicine, female lay healers played an intimate role in healing family and community members. Though women healers aided sufferers with the intent to help others, their attempts to heal were not always successful. Consequently, community members criticized their work by accusing them of intentionally causing harm under the guise of helping. Regardless of the result, one cannot deny that women's experiences as sufferers and healers had a significant impact on early modern health care.²³³

Historian, Elaine G. Breslaw explored the experiences of Early American sufferers. When Europeans first started settling along the east coast of North America, they brought disease with

232 Marc Carlson, "North America," *Historical Witches and Witchtrials in North America*, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/witchtrial/na.html>; Virginia Historical Society, "Grace Sherwood: 'The Witch of Pungo,' *Collections and Resources*, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/grace-sherwood-witch-pungo>; Harley, "Historians as Demonologists," 1; Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 12-13; Chandler, "From Birthing Chamber to Court Room," 112-113; Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 125-129.

233 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 46.

them. Native Americans were more vulnerable to disease than European colonists because they did not have former exposure. Because Native Americans had weaker immunity to European diseases than the colonists, many of them died because of their ailments. Though Europeans introduced many new diseases to Native Americans, plenty of sicknesses affected both groups of people. These ailments included chicken pox, smallpox, diphtheria, influenza, and pneumonia.²³⁴ Several outside factors brought on colonists' increased suffering. Because America had a greater variety of food and accessibility to food sources than England, the population of colonists increased. However, access to an increased food supply did not necessarily mean that colonists ate a balanced diet. Especially during the winter months, when it became difficult to grow crops, colonists ate a lot of salted meats, which lacked nutrients and caused dehydration. Colonists also did not eat enough calories to sustain them through demanding labor, such as farming. Because they did not consume a sufficient amount of nutrients, colonists became weak and less able to withstand suffering.²³⁵

Uncleanliness also contributed to the suffering of colonists. Kathleen Brown explains that early American colonists did not bathe often. Reasons for not bathing varied. It is possible that colonists bathed less than Europeans because it was difficult to collect and drain water. Even so, if a colonial family collected water for bathing, all family members bathed in the same bath water, just as Europeans did. People may have avoided bathing because it became almost impossible for them to avoid filth. In more populated colonies, colonists dealt with everyday bad smells from roaming livestock and chamber pots emptied in the streets. Bedbugs contributed to colonists' suffering by residing in straw mattresses and biting people while they slept. Colonists did not always have adequate time or supplies to make new mattresses. Therefore, colonists

²³⁴ Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 2-6, 46.

²³⁵ Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 62-71.

usually flipped the mattresses over in the hopes that a few days or months would pass before the bugs became a nuisance again. Society held women responsible for keeping things clean, including the laundry. Similarly, women washed clothes almost as often as people bathed. Because society expected mothers to care for ailing family members, including young, vulnerable children, women usually became sick more frequently than men.²³⁶

Colonial Healing Methods

Early American women were responsible for family cleanliness and healthcare. Unfortunately, disease became unavoidable for some early Americans. In fact, some diseases progressively caused other ailments if left untreated. In some instances, healers never discovered effective treatments for diseases, such as yellow fever. Yellow fever caused internal bleeding. Sometimes, the treatment of disease caused equal or more suffering than the disease itself. Notable eighteenth century colonial physicians, such as Benjamin Rush, believed copious bleeding to be a cure for yellow fever.²³⁷

Doctors usually only performed surgeries as a last resort. Historian of colonial healthcare, Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, argue that operations were excruciating for sufferers because surgeons did not use anesthetics before the mid-nineteenth century. Because of this, surgeons never tried to cure organ problems for they knew the sufferer would not survive the operation. Also, if bones were fractured too badly to be reset, surgeons generally decided to amputate. Colonial women faced similar fears of pain and infection following childbirth. Becoming pregnant likened to a death sentence. Women would mentally prepare for the prospect of death prior to labor. In childbirth lay the possibility of infection, difficult delivery, and injury. Historian Judith Walzer Leavitt argues that, if women did not die, they still faced prolonged suffering from complications

²³⁶ Brown, *Foul Bodies*, 18-19, 33-37, 140-147, 212-232.

²³⁷ Brown, *Foul Bodies*, 54; Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 98-99.

including prolapsed uterus and painful sexual intercourse. Initially, only women were involved in the birthing chamber. Male practitioners were only called to the birthing room if the midwife anticipated a difficult birth. Because of difficult births, men healers first introduced forceps to America in the 1760s when William Shippen, a physician-accoucheur educated in Europe, began giving lectures to women and men on midwifery.²³⁸ Used to more easily extract a fetus during delivery, forceps sometimes did more harm than good. Male physicians who misused forceps accidentally removed limbs or crushed the fetus's skull. Men who were unfamiliar with the female anatomy sometimes damaged women with forceps by causing internal tears. Many male doctors deemed midwives as meddling because they argued against the dangers of forceps and preferred to let the course of labor and childbirth run naturally rather than use tools.²³⁹

Colonial women also experienced suffering through unsuccessful abortions. American historians, Cornelia Hughes Dayton and Leslie J. Reagan, speak of complications from abortions. During the eighteenth century, many colonies did not have laws against abortions until the moment of quickening, which meant that a woman could feel the fetus moving. Sarah Grosvenor, a pregnant woman from Connecticut, decided to have an abortion in 1742. Her lover, Amasa Sessions, found John Hallowell, a self-proclaimed physician, to perform the procedure. Hallowell prescribed Grosvenor an abortifacient and performed the procedure, causing a miscarriage. While performing the abortion, Hallowell broke and failed to extract a bone. As a result, Grosvenor became very sick with a fever. Afraid the community would blame him for Grosvenor's ailments, Hallowell fled town. When Grosvenor's cousin John found Hallowell, he begged the doctor for help. Hallowell assured John that Grosvenor would live. Despite this

²³⁸ Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 38-39.

²³⁹ Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 13-35, 142-170.

assurance, Grosvenor died from the complications. The court found Hallowell guilty of Grosvenor's murder, but he was not available to receive punishment for his crime.²⁴⁰

Though the number of colonial male physicians increased, society continued to expect women to be the primary caregivers and healers. Because they were not allowed to receive formal education in medical care, many women practiced cures of their own making or those that were passed on to them by other family members. However, like men, women practiced medicine based on the Galenic Humoral theory. This theory stressed the importance of balance in four humors: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile.²⁴¹

Magical Practice

Since isolated people had trouble acquiring imported medicines, women generally worked with readily available curative ingredients. Historian Elaine G. Breslaw listed herbs and kitchen ingredients, barks, and animal dung as cures used by women, some of which had magical elements. They used hair-like herbs to treat baldness. They also used herbs that looked like worms to cure intestinal worms. Some female lay healers used mandrakes (an ancient plant commonly found in Europe) in curatives because they thought the plants possessed magical healing properties since the roots resembled small humans and thrived under gallows. In addition, women healers used self-help manuals such as John Wesley's 1764 (Philadelphia Print) *Primitive Physick*. Though men wrote most published self-help manuals, women lay healers found them helpful in that they gave recipes for cures to people who did not have access to formally educated physicians.²⁴²

240 Cornelia Hughes Dayton, "Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village," in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, ed. Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 90-103; Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 9-10.

241 Tanenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 6.

242 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 43-47, 55; Blake, "From Buchan to Fishbein: The Literature of Domestic Medicine," in *Medicine Without Doctors: Home Health Care in American History*, eds. Guenter B. Risse, Ronald L. Numbers, and Judith Walzer Leavitt, 18-20.

Though society generally expected women to be healers, they condemned them for it as well. While David Harley disputes historians who believe midwives were more likely than others to be accused of witchcraft, he admits that women were more vulnerable to witchcraft accusations because they prepared food and medicines. In contrast to Harley's beliefs about midwives' invulnerability to witchcraft charges, social activists Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English argue that witch hunts directly related to an increase in men in the medical profession. Their evidence lay in English licensing laws imposed on women healers to ensure that women who healed without formal education could be considered a witch by law. Historian Joseph Klaitis contends that midwives were more likely to be accused if poor, elderly, or single because falling under these demographics meant women did not rely on a male family figure to financially support them, as colonial patriarchal society preferred.²⁴³

Women Healers as Witches

Women healers were more likely than other women to be accused of witchcraft, especially if their healing methods failed or medical emergencies occurred under their care. Jane Hawkins, a Bostonian midwife, never received formal witchcraft charges. However, several respectable persons in her community contemplated the possibility that she was in league with the devil. When Mary Dyer gave birth in October 1637, the child was severely physically deformed and looked like a 'monster.' Hawkins worked as Dyer's midwife when the monstrous birth occurred. Leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony eventually banished Hawkins from the colony, though this decision was based on her involvement in the 1636-8 Antinomian controversy rather than associated with her role in the monstrous birth. In 1638, Hawkins left for

²⁴³ Harley, "Historians as Demonologists," 5; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1978), 5, 18-20; Joseph Klaitis, "Classic Witches: The Beggar and the Midwife," in *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 95.

Rhode Island but later returned to Boston. Governor John Winthrop banished her a second time for her religious beliefs in 1641. This time she never returned.²⁴⁴

John Winthrop remained intrigued with Hawkins's part in the monstrous birth. In his journal on March 12, 1638, he recalled that the magistrates restricted her freedom to practice medicine and midwifery. They declared that "she is not to meddle in surgery, or physic, drinks, plasters, or oils, nor to question matters of religion, except with the elders for satisfaction."²⁴⁵ Later, in the summer of 1640, he remembered the monstrous birth, "The midwife, presently after this discovery [of the deformed fetus], went out of the jurisdiction; and indeed it was time for her to be gone, for it was known that she used to give young women oil for mandrakes [plant with human-shaped roots] and other stuff to cause conception."²⁴⁶ Colonists had other reasons to believe Hawkins practiced witchcraft. Winthrop also documented that, "she grew into great suspicion to be a witch, for it was credibly reported, that, when she gave any medicines (for she practiced physic), she would ask the party, if she did believe, she could help her, etc."²⁴⁷

Alice Lake, a Dorchester, Massachusetts woman was convicted and executed for witchcraft circa 1650. As documented in Hale's *Modest Inquiry*, at the time of her death, she was married to her husband, Henry Lake, and had four small children. While it is unclear whether Alice healed other people, she tried to heal herself by inducing an abortion to restore menstrual flow. Though she did not commit adultery while married, she justified her punishment for witchcraft because "she had when a single woman played the harlot, and being with child used

244 "Jane Hawkins," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 19.

245 "The magistrates restrict and then expel Jane Hawkins," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 20.

246 "John Winthrop on Jane Hawkins as healer and midwife," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 20.

247 "John Winthrop on Jane Hawkins as healer and midwife," 20.

means to destroy the fruit of her body to conceal her sin and shame.”²⁴⁸ Though it is unclear what means she used to cause the abortion, it is possible that she was familiar with a method or received herbs or information about abortifacients from another woman. Because colonial women were normatively expected to diagnose and treat the sick, they often viewed pregnancy as an illness and used abortion to restore her menses. Colonists generally accepted abortions if the procedure happened before the time of quickening, or when the woman could feel the fetus moving. Historian Leslie Reagan explains that “Once quickening occurred, women recognized a moral obligation to carry the fetus to term.”²⁴⁹

In June 1658, John Winthrop referenced the healing methods of Margaret Jones, a Charleston, Massachusetts woman accused of witchcraft. He explained, “she practicing physic, and her medicines being such things as (by her own confession) were harmless, as aniseed, liquors, etc., yet had extraordinary violent effects.”²⁵⁰ Margaret Jones worked as a healer and cunning woman. On June 15, 1658, the town executed Jones for practicing witchcraft. John Winthrop recalled that she caused many witchcraft-induced illnesses. The same month of Jones’s execution, he wrote in his journal, “that she was found to have such a malignant touch, as many persons (men, women, and children, whom she stroked or touched with an affection or displeasure, or, etc., were taken with deafness or vomiting, or other violent pains or sickness.”²⁵¹

248 “Alice Lake,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 28; “Alice Lake is called a harlot,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 28.

249 Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 9.

250 “John Winthrop describes Margaret Jones as healer,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 22.

251 “John Winthrop describes Margaret Jones as healer,” 22.

Magic and Medicine

Jane Hawkins and Margaret Jones prescribed herbs and concoctions to sufferers. Yet, many women healers suffered witchcraft accusations not because of their prescriptions, but because of the supernatural or abnormal ways they chose to heal others. Margaret Jones was accused of using magical healing methods. While she awaited her death sentence, she remained in prison. Governor John Winthrop recalled in his journal in June 1648, “In the prison, in the clear daylight, there was seen in her arms, she sitting on the floor, and her clothes up, etc., a little child, which ran from her into another room, and the officer following it, it was vanished.”²⁵² On another occasion, an unnamed maid thought Jones both hurt and cured her through the apparition of the child. Winthrop recalled, “The like child was seen in two other places, to which she had relation; and one maid that saw it, fell sick upon it, and was cured by the said Margaret, who used means to be employed to that end.”²⁵³ The community also knew Margaret Jones as a cunning woman. Winthrop explained that “some things which she foretold came to pass accordingly; other things she could tell of (as secret speeches, etc.) which she had no ordinary means to come to the knowledge of.”²⁵⁴

Hampton, New Hampshire healer, Rachel Fuller faced a charge of committing witchcraft-related murder. In 1680, she tended her neighbor’s sick child, Moses Godfrey. According to Goodwife Godfrey’s testimony, Fuller lathered her face and hands with molasses. Then, she turned herself toward the fire, clapped her hands over it, and spit into the flames. She also sprinkled herbs over the fire. Though she told Goodwife Godfrey that her child would become

252 “John Winthrop describes Margaret Jones as healer,” 22.

253 “John Winthrop describes Margaret Jones as healer,” 22.

254 “John Winthrop describes Margaret Jones as healer,” 22.

well, he died. Shortly thereafter, the constable arrested Fuller for witchcraft and murder of little Moses Godfrey. After some jail time, her husband, John Fuller, paid her bond and secured her release from prison. Because married women could be represented by their husbands in court, single women faced greater difficulty getting cleared of charges against them.²⁵⁵

Neighbors and community members accused women healers of using magic and their positions as knowledgeable healers to cause people pain rather than heal them. For example, in 1662, in Harford, Connecticut, Goodwife Ayres stopped by her neighbors, the Kellys, to have some broth. She fed it to eight-year-old Elizabeth Kelly, even though the Kellys told their daughter the broth would burn her. After eating it, Elizabeth complained of stomach pain. Goodwife Kelly treated her daughter with angelica root for the pain. However, the pain did not subside, and Elizabeth blamed Goodwife Ayres for the continuous hurt. While Elizabeth recovered, her parents, who thought nothing of their daughter's accusation, invited Ayres and two other women to care for her. Having a moment to speak to the child alone, Goodwife Ayres offered Elizabeth lace for her dress if she stopped making accusations against her. The little girl once again insisted to her parents that Goodwife Ayres caused her pain, and that night she died. The Kellys' did not accuse Goodwife Ayres of witchcraft right away. When another woman, Ann Cole, started exhibiting what she believed to be symptoms of demonic possession, she began accusing numerous townswomen of witchcraft. The Kellys then joined Cole in accusing Ayres.

255 "The Deposition of Mary Godfrey," in *Documents and Records Relating to the Province of New-Hampshire, From the Earliest Period of its Settlement, 1623-1686*, ed., Nathaniel Bouton, vol. 1 (Concord, NH: G. E. Jenks, State Printer, 1867). *Sabin Americana, 1500-1926*, 416, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?dd=0&locID=boon41269&d1=SABCA03608501&srchtp=a&c=1&an=SABCA03608501&df=f&s1=Mary+Godfrey&d2=424&docNum=CY3803208770&cid=CTRG10156306-B&tvol=on&h2=1&vrsn=1.0&af=RN&d6=424&d3=424&ste=10&d4=0.33&stp=Author&d5=d6&ae=CY103208347>; John Demos mentions this case.; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 330-332; Tannenbaum also uses this case to demonstrate women coming to the bedside of the sick; Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 42-44.

Fortunately for Goodwife Ayres, she escaped a death sentence. Instead, the town exiled her, and she moved to New York.²⁵⁶

The True Believer

Some colonial women healers were notorious for telling sufferers that if they did not believe in their healing methods, then their healing techniques would fail. John Winthrop documented that if ailing people refused Margaret Jones's help, "she would use to tell such as would not make use of her physic, that they would never be healed, and accordingly their diseases and hurts continued, with relapse against the ordinary course, and beyond the apprehension of all physicians and surgeons."²⁵⁷ In 1669, widow Ann Burt of Lynn, Massachusetts, worked as a healer. Many of her neighbors accused her of witchcraft. Bethia Carter, gave a testimony that Burt told her "if she could believe in her god she would cure her body and soul" but that she "could not cure her own husband because he would not believe in her god."²⁵⁸ The colonists may have thought her god to be the devil. Regardless, they believed that she did not follow the Christian god, so she must have derived her skill from an evil deity, potentially a Native American one. According to Puritans' beliefs, faith and worship of any deity other than the Christian god was akin to atheism.²⁵⁹ During the 1650s, Cambridge, Massachusetts resident and accused witch, Mary Holman asked a mother if she could continue to care for her

256 "The Kellys describe their daughter's fatal illness," *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 153-154; Tannenbaum uses this case as an example of the colonial tradition of calling neighboring women to the bedside of the sick or women in childbirth; Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 53-59.

257 "John Winthrop describes Margaret Jones as healer," 22.

258 "Ann Burt," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 183; "Bethia Carter on Goodwife Burt as healer," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 185.

259 "Bethia Carter on Goodwife Burt as healer," 185; For more on colonists' beliefs about Native Americans' relationship to witchcraft and the devil, see Chapter 3.

child though her previous attempts to heal him had failed. She cautioned against seeking help from other healers. She counseled, “I cured one at Malden that had the rickets and if you will take a fool’s counsel you may if you will not choose.”²⁶⁰ The family believed that she caused the child’s illness to increasingly worsen because they refused her help.²⁶¹

Cunning Folk and Witchcraft

Many healers were also cunning folk who were involved in witchcraft trials as both the accused and the accusers. Cunning folk told the future and possessed the ability to recognize evidence of witchcraft. Many healers also learned their skills, particularly from cunning folk who were also Native American.²⁶² Elizabeth Godman, a widow from New Haven, Connecticut, lived with Stephen Goodyear, the deputy governor of the New Haven Colony. In 1653, she was brought to court for witchcraft. The town minister, Mr. Hooke feared Godman because she knew the outcome of events before they occurred, particularly what happened in church meetings. In a deposition, “Time, Mr. Hooke’s Indian,” told the court that Godman could leave a church meeting and then come back and know everything that had happened while she was gone.²⁶³ Mr. Hooke explained to the court, “Time asking her who told, she answered plainly she would not tell, then Time said did not the devil tell you.” Time also claimed that Godwin talked to herself. Neighbors told her that “Time said you talk to the devil, but she made nothing of it.”²⁶⁴

Time recognized Godman’s ability to tell the future because he also was a cunning person.

Because many colonists associated Native Americans with the devil, they also recognized their

260 “John Gibson and his family against Winifred and Mary Holman,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 135.

261 “John Gibson and his family against Winifred and Mary Holman,” 135.

262 For more on cunning people, see Chapter 3.

263 “Preternatural knowledge of events and speeches,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 64.

264 “Preternatural knowledge of events and speeches,” 64.

abilities to identify witches. Tituba, a native Caribbean woman and slave to Salem Town, Massachusetts minister, Samuel Parris, also worked as a cunning woman. In 1692, Tituba identified witches. She also confessed to practicing witchcraft. Breslaw argues that it was not against seventeenth century colonial laws for Native Americans or African Americans, enslaved or free, to testify against someone for witchcraft. The court provided equal attention to their testimonies as they did white people. In many cases, their testimonies outweighed that of white folk, especially if they were able to recognize evidence of witchery because they had experience practicing beneficial or white magic.²⁶⁵

Generally, practicing white magic did not interfere with colonists' religion or law, but Puritan ministers condemned it. Many colonists practiced white magic and borrowed aspects from other cultures, such as the turning of a sieve to tell the future, a practice also found in seventeenth century Africa and Europe. When the town brought Tituba to court for witchcraft on March 1, 1692, Tituba initially denied the accusations. Yet, Tituba, the first person accused of witchcraft during the infamous Salem, Massachusetts witch hunt, baked a witch cake, and frequently testified against other women for practicing witchcraft.²⁶⁶

Elizabeth Morse, healer and wife of William Morse, a shoemaker, lived in Newbury Massachusetts. In 1679, strange things, including the apparently spontaneous movement of furniture started to occur. Because their grandson lived with them, they thought he was causing it. Caleb Powell, a seaman offered to take the boy away to see if the strange things would stop. The community knew Powell as a cunning person. When he arrived uninvited at the Morses' home to take the boy away, Morse accused him of being a witch but to no avail. At the same time, neighbors thought Elizabeth Morse a witch. According to neighbor Jane Sewall, "some

²⁶⁵ Breslaw, *Tituba*, 71.

²⁶⁶ Breslaw, *Tituba*, 90-92, 96; For more on Tituba and witch cakes, see Chapter 3.

years since William Morse being at my house began of his own accord to say that his wife was accounted a witch, but he did wonder that she should be both a healing and a destroying witch.”²⁶⁷ In 1680, neighbors started providing testimonies against her to the court. While the General Court wanted her executed, her husband protested this decision. The court listened to his petition and jailed Elizabeth in Boston instead. After a year, the court released her.²⁶⁸

Beverly, Massachusetts resident and cunning woman, Dorcas Hoar, also suffered witchcraft accusations. Her neighbors recalled that she often boasted about her ability to predict future events. They feared she would use her skills for bad as well as good. On September 6, 1692, Mary Gage testified in court that Dorcas Hoar said her son would not live long, even though he seemed well in that moment. Hoar warned that “it would not live long and bad her mark the end of it; and about a month after that time her said child was taken sick and suddenly died.”²⁶⁹ When the court asked Hoar how she knew the child would die if she did not cause its death, she replied that “she had acquaintance with a doctor that taught her to know and had a doctor’s book by her.”²⁷⁰ On the same day, John Hale testified that Dorcas Hoar had borrowed a book on “palmistry” and “there were rules to know what should come to pass.” He recalled that she told him of “Ensign Corning’s fortune, viz. that his first wife should die before him (which is since come to pass, she spoke it from observing a certain streak under the eye of said Corning or

267 “Jane Sewall on Elizabeth Morse as a healer,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 249.

268 “Elizabeth Morse and Caleb Powell,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 230-231.

269 “Dorcas Hoar,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. by Richard Godbeer (Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2011), 116; “Mary Gage against Dorcas Hoar and Others, September 6, 1692,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. by Richard Godbeer (Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2011), 123.

270 “Mary Gage against Dorcas Hoar and Others, September 6, 1692,” 123.

his wife, but as I take it, it was his wife had the streak.”²⁷¹ On September 6, 1692, the court tried and convicted Hoar of practicing witchcraft. They sentenced her to death but showed her mercy when she confessed to the crime “and being in great distress of conscience, earnestly craves a little longer time of life to realize and perfect her repentance for the salvation of her soul.”²⁷²

The Doctor Knows Best?

Colonial male doctors determined whether pain and illness could be witchcraft-induced. When Elizabeth Knapp, servant of Samuel Willard of Groton, Massachusetts became possessed in 1671, Willard wrote in his account on November 5th, that a physician determined her symptoms were caused by normal factors. In response, Knapp suggested that the physician found no unnatural causes for her fits and pain because, by the time he examined her, Satan had already left her body.²⁷³ Men and women healers also competed with one another. By accusing women healers of witchcraft, men healers attempted to eliminate competition in a market dominated by women.²⁷⁴

During the infamous 1692 Salem, Massachusetts witchcraft trials, James Allen testified on the behalf of healer and accused witch, Mary Bradbury. He stated that she “was a constant attender upon the ministry of the word; & all the ordinances of the gospel; full of works of charity and mercy to the sick & poor.”²⁷⁵ Other community members felt similarly about

271 “John Hale against Dorcas Hoar,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. by Richard Godbeer (Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2011), 124-125.

272 “Petition of John Hale, Nicholas Noyes, Daniel Epes, and John Emerson, Jr., September 21, 1692,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. by Richard Godbeer (Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2011), 128.

273 “Samuel Willard describes the “possession” of Elizabeth Knapp,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991) 201.

274 Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses*, 18-23, 33.

275 “James Carr v. Mary Bradbury,” in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 1 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 124.

Bradbury and a petition of ninety-three signatures attested to Bradbury's good works. Despite this, Bradbury received many accusations of witchcraft, including one from James Carr, who offered a story from twenty years earlier when he visited Bradbury and her then living husband. After coming down with a "strange maner as if [every] living creature did run about every part of my body redy to tare me to peaces," he visited Doctor Crosbe who treated his ailments and demanded to know what caused the pain to begin. Afraid to tell the doctor the truth, Carr relayed that "I did not care for spaking for one was counted an honest woman."²⁷⁶ However, he gave in to Crosbe's demands, to which the doctor explained he thought Bradbury worse than another accused witch, Goodwife Susannah Martin. Though the court condemned Bradbury to death in September 1692, she escaped prison and what had seemed to be certain death.²⁷⁷

In 1669, widow Ann Burt of Lynn, Massachusetts, worked as a healer. Many of her neighbors accused her of using witchcraft to produce Sara Townsend's fits. On November 1, 1669, Bethiah Carter testified, "the said Sara Townsend being sorely afflicted with sad fits crying out and railing against me saying my father carried me to Boston but carried her to Lynn to an old witch."²⁷⁸ Supplying evidence of Burt's witchery, Bethiah remembered, "And farther the said Sara hath told to me and others that she hath seen the said Burt appear often at her bed's feet and

²⁷⁶ "James Carr v. Mary Bradbury," 124.

²⁷⁷ "Mary Bradbury," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol. 1 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 115-129; "Account of Henry and Jane True" in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, vol 3 (New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 980-981; Norman Gevitz also references Mary Bradbury's case when explaining how competed against women healers. He argues that Doctor Crosby urged James Carr to accuse Bradbury of witchcraft. However, after reading the trial transcript, I do not think this argument is correct.; Norman Gevitz, "'The Devil Hath Laughed at the Physicians': Witchcraft and Medical Practice in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Journal Of The History Of Medicine And Allied Sciences* no. 1 (2000): 28.

²⁷⁸ "Bethiah Carter on Goodwife Burt as healer," in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 186.

at divers other places in the day and also at night, this she hath often related as well in health as in sickness [and] farther saith not.”²⁷⁹

“Phillip Read physician” stated that he had seen Sarah Townsend for her illnesses three times.²⁸⁰

In reference to her sister Bethiah Carter, he stated “being both very ill but especially the said Sara Townsend being in a more sadder condition he had no opportunity to examine her condition but did plainly perceive there was no natural cause for such unnatural fits[.]”²⁸¹ He also testified that Bethiah finally told him that it was Burt her caused her to be sick but that she had to secretly tell him because if Burt found out she said anything, she would cause her worse pain.²⁸² In another testimony, Thomas Farrar blamed Burt for his two daughter’s sicknesses. He also claimed that his son, was also sick was examined by a doctor and that the doctor said, “he is bewitched to his understanding.”²⁸³ Though many people claimed Burt practiced witchcraft, the courts never convicted her of her crime. Four years later, Burt died of natural causes.²⁸⁴

Dr. Philip Reade was a travelling physician who travelled throughout Massachusetts to towns such as Salem, Cambridge, and Lynn. He set up his practice and temporary apothecary shops at inns where he would examine sufferers and treat them. In 1669, Martha Hill gossiped with Goodwife Blood, a midwife, that Reade “had Cured Sara Wyman of a Swelling under her chin and another under her Apron.” Afraid that Hill’s claim would hurt his reputation, and consequently his medical practice, he sued her for one hundred pounds. Though Goodwife

279 “Bethiah Carter on Goodwife Burt as healer,” 186.

280 “Phillip Read on the sickness of Sara Townsend,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 186.

281 “Phillip Read on the sickness of Sara Townsend,” 186.

282 “Phillip Read on the sickness of Sarah Townsend,” 186.

283 “Thomas Farrar blames sickness in his family on Goody Burt,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 188.

284 Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling*, 131.

Blood had not been the first to make the claim, he proclaimed Blood's quackery in his complaint against Hill, possibly to bring the court's attention to problems with her own practice and devalue the reputations of both Blood and Hill in the process.²⁸⁵ Regardless of Reade's fear for his reputation and continuation of his medical practice, his career did not end. Reade continued to work as a doctor. However, women healers did not get the same treatment from their communities. Instead, accusations against them for failing to cure or being involved in witchcraft left them without a job.

Power Struggle Between Women Healers

While men healers competed with women healers, women healers also competed against each other. Widow Winifred Holman worked as a healer in Cambridge Massachusetts during the 1650s. Her daughter, Mary Holman, often aided her in her work. In June 1659, the Holmans' neighbors, the Gibson family, complained to Thomas Danforth, the Cambridge magistrate, that the Holmans were causing their illnesses rather than curing them. In John Gibson's deposition against Winifred and Mary Holman, he explained, "Mary Holman asked her [John Gibson's daughter, Rebecca Gibson Stearns] why she did not get some help for them and she answered she could not tell what to do she had used means by physicians and could have no help."²⁸⁶ Mary thought her mother, Winifred, a better healer than the physicians and so, "the said Mary said that her mother said if she would put herself into her hands that she would undertake to cure her with the blessing of God." Desperate for a cure, Stearns agreed to let the Holman's help her child. Her father recalled of the matter, "Our daughter telling us of it and would say to her and she said her

²⁸⁵ Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 125, 130; Phillip Reade, Quoted in Tannenbaum. *The Healer's Calling*, 130.

²⁸⁶ "John Gibson and his family against Winifred and Mary Holman," 135.

daughter was a prating wench and loved to prate but yet did prescribe some herbs to her that she should use in the spring.”²⁸⁷

Despite this, Stearns’s child became more ill. Mary asked the family if she could continue to care for the child and counseled that “I cured one at Malden that had the rickets and if you will take a fool’s counsel you may if you will not choose.” Since she advised Stearn against asking another healer to watch over the child, she exclaimed “that Mr. Mitchell’s [Jonathan Mitchell, minister] child had the rickets and it was easy to be seen for the face did shine but since Mr. Mitchell sent to Lynn for a skillful woman to look on it and she could not see no such thing[.]” Yet, the Gibsons and Stearns were still skeptical of the Holman’s methods, and refused their treatment. Despite this, Rebecca Stearn thought all was well between them and let Mary Holman borrow a skillet. When Mary came to return the skillet, angry, she pinched the child’s nose until it bled and fled out the window. In response to the Goodman family’s claims that Winifred and Mary Holman were witches, eighteen neighbors signed a petition proclaiming their good character and innocence. The court made the Gibson family apologize to the Holmans. Winifred Holman never remarried and died at the age seventy-four. Her daughter, Mary Holman, never married and died two years after her mother at age forty-five.²⁸⁸

The Holmans found competition with male physicians and “skillful women” bad for their family business.²⁸⁹ Other colonial women healers competed with each other, as well. When Mary Hale, a Boston, Massachusetts widow and healer, boarded Michael Smith in her home, he became suddenly ill. Smith testified in court that he became sick when Hale found out that he intended to marry a woman other than her granddaughter. He visited another healer, Hannah Weacome, with

287 “John Gibson and his family against Winifred and Mary Holman,” 135.

288 “John Gibson and his family against Winifred and Mary Holman,” 135-136; “Winifred and Mary Holman,” in *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History (1638-1692)*, ed. David D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 134.

289 “John Gibson and his family against Winifred and Mary Holman,” 135.

hope that she would heal him. After making him a bed, Weacome put some of his urine into a bottle and corked it, so that the identity of the witch who hurt him would be revealed. Soon, Hale arrived at Weacome's house and paced in front of the door for almost an hour. When Weacome removed the cork from the bottle, Hale finally left. Knowing that Smith remained upset with her, Hale sent him a caudle as a gift. Smith would not accept the gift, and later that night, had a horrible nightmare. He attributed his bad dream to Hale's witchery, and asked the magistrate to arrest her for practicing witchcraft. Though the court entertained the idea of Hale's witchery, the jury decided that there was not enough evidence. Instead, they concluded that Weacome's testimony of Hale visiting her house while Smith slept may have been a lie. Puritan minister, Increase Mather, also recalled Mary Hale successfully curing him in 1666. While she continued her medical practice after being arrested for practicing witchcraft, it may be the positive testimony of Increase Mather that aided her in evading a guilty conviction. Women healers did not have the same opportunities as men healers. Not only did men healers seek to eliminate women as their competitors in the healing profession, but their testimonies were treated differently in court, most likely because they were women.²⁹⁰

Many women who did not practice occupational healing also accused women of witchcraft. In 1706, Elizabeth Barnes accused Grace Sherwood, a healer in Princess Anne County, Virginia (modern day Virginia Beach) of witchcraft because she thought Sherwood caused her to miscarry. Though Hill may have acted out of grief, her accusation was not the only one to affect Grace Sherwood. Other women provided the court with testimonies against her, as well.

Sherwood is just one example of many women healers who faced accusation from other women,

²⁹⁰ Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 119, 126-127; Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45-46.

not because they competed in the same occupation but because they found women healers threatening.²⁹¹

Colonial women accused other women of witchcraft because they feared other women's power in their communities. Because colonial women healers exhibited power to heal and hurt, they received their neighbors' respect, but also their fear. In the cases of many women accused of witchcraft, those who spoke out in the community and challenged their neighbors also suffered witchcraft accusations. Colonial men and women made many witchcraft accusations against women because they felt threatened by their susceptibility to sin. Knowing that women were already more likely to sin than men, they feared women healers in particular because they claimed additional power through practicing magic.²⁹²

Conclusion. A Legacy Of Their Own

Women healers' unique involvement in witchcraft trials and accusations, specifically in America, is rather intriguing and largely ignored by scholars. Yet, there is more than enough evidence that women healers faced witchcraft accusations. Guilty of being more susceptible to sin and the devil's temptation because of their sex, women healers faced even more scrutiny because they stepped outside normatively defined gender roles by practicing their occupation outside their homes. Though colonial society expected women to be nurturing and successful at healing, their power to influence harm and good health among individuals, threatened the patriarchy and their communities. Though witchcraft trials left many women healers with diminished reputations, jail time, or death sentences, their roles in colonial society set an

²⁹¹ Monica C. Witowski, "Grace Sherwood (ca. 1660-1740)," *Encyclopedia Virginia, A Publication of Virginia Foundation for Humanities, In Partnership with Library of Virginia*, accessed March 12, 2017, http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Sherwood_Grace_ca_1660-1740; Belinda Nash and Danielle Sheets, *A Place in Time: The Age of the Witch of Pungo* (Virginia Beach: W.S. Dawson Co., 2012), 106-108.

²⁹² For more information on colonists' beliefs that women were more likely than men to sin and make pacts with the devil, see Chapter 1.

example for all other early American women. By seeking to help others and help themselves by refining their skills and generating income, women healers exhibited agency over their own lives. In a society where men sought to keep women in their place, their legacy as women who challenged normatively defined gender roles lived on in the hearts and minds of a new, revolutionary generation of women. Women healers' roles in colonial society and witchcraft trials will be reviewed in the concluding chapter, "The Woman Witch: Healing for the Devil?"

Conclusion

The Woman Witch: Healing for the Devil?

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women healers' occupations positively and negatively affected their lives. Community members, neighbors, and families normatively expected women to diagnose, treat, and nurse the ailing. Women possessed power in their knowledge of childbirth, healing injuries, and recognizing curatives. Some colonists found women's power over life and death threatening. In relation to early American witchcraft trials, women healers were particularly vulnerable to accusations because colonists believed the female sex more susceptible to sin, too powerful through their knowledge of healing, and threatening to other healers, especially men.

Colonists believed that women were more susceptible to sin than men. American colonists carried the same beliefs about women's fallibility and ideas about witchcraft as many other Europeans, particularly English ideas about witchcraft. Like the English, colonists believed that the devil tempted women to make a pact with him. The witch would use familiar spirits to do the devil's bidding. In exchange for the witch's service, Satan would offer her power as a reward. Colonists also believed that women were more promiscuous and lustful than men. Therefore, they worried that women witches would seduce men to serve the devil. Because colonists believed women more vulnerable to sin and temptation by the devil, having a bad reputation contributed to women's exposure to witchcraft accusations. Women who feuded with their neighbors, caused disruptions in the community by speaking out of turn, or defied social mores, often faced witchcraft accusations. Neighbors and community members accused women of using witchcraft to hurt their crops and farm animals. They accused women of causing harm to people

by touching them, looking at them, or using sympathetic magic, such as poppets.²⁹³ Women's reputations followed those of their family members. For example, Rebecca Nurse, a Salem, Massachusetts woman accused of witchcraft, also had two sisters who suffered witchcraft accusations. Found guilty by association, the court condemned Nurse and her sister, Mary Easty, to death. On July 19, 1692, Nurse hanged as a witch.²⁹⁴

Furthermore, economic factors negatively affected women's reputations. Poor women suffered more witchcraft accusations than women of well-to-do families. Because colonial society expected men to protect women financially, widows who refused to remarry or those who had no grown sons or male family members to care for them, often relied on neighbors or the county government to supply their needs. Neighbors sometimes found these women nuisances and accused them of witchcraft to rid the town of their financial dependency.

Women healers such as Grace Sherwood were particularly vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft because they had power over life and death. Despite this, American colonists expected women to diagnose, treat, and nurse the sick. Colonial ministers often stressed the importance of women being virtuous and good neighbors. Early American women practiced being good neighbors by treating the sick. Young women learned about healing from other women in the community. Women particularly practiced being a good neighbor by participating in social childbirth. Women ritualized childbirth by inviting women of the community to aid the midwife and support the mother through her labor pains. Colonial women viewed childbirth as a women-only event. They did not allow men, even the fathers, to enter the birthing chamber. In some cases of difficult childbirth, midwives made exceptions for male doctors.²⁹⁵

293 For more on poppets, see Chapter 1.

294 Charles Sutherland Tapley, *Rebecca Nurse: Saint But Witch Victim* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1930), 66-67.

295 Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 14, 126-145.

While men healers had the opportunity to attend medical schools, colonial society did not allow women these opportunities for formal education. Male practitioners were protected by their sex, social status, and (sometimes) professional affiliations. Colonial women primarily practiced informal lay-healing methods in neighbors' homes. Many created their own curatives from natural ingredients. Men and women healers often disagreed about the appropriate way to heal people or proceed with the child birthing process. Though they disagreed, women and men healers used popular self-help manuals to treat their family and community members.

Because American colonists normatively expected women to heal and nurse the sick, they became involved in witchcraft trials in both positive and negative ways. Colonists generally respected women healers and trusted them to act as witness in paternity and rape cases. Because women healers often testified to people's character in court, they also acted as witnesses to witchcraft. In particular, women healers testified to evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses, injuries, and deaths. Many women healers possessed the ability to recognize evidence of witchcraft because they were cunning people. Cunning people had knowledge of and used charms, amulets, symbols, and chants to heal. Yet, these objects could also be used to cause harm. Women healers who were also cunning folk held a special role in witchcraft trials in that they could determine evidence of magic, but also the intent behind a witch using these objects. Cunning folk practiced rituals to protect people from possession by witches or the devil.²⁹⁶

Women healers participated in witch trials by inspecting bodies for witches' marks. Both men and women healers diagnosed magically induced illnesses. However, only women healers inspected women's bodies for devil's marks or witch's teats to protect the accused woman's modesty. Colonists believed witches' marks provided evidence that a woman nursed a familiar spirit. Some ministers questioned the reliability of searching for witches' marks as evidence of

296 Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic*, 91.

witchcraft because the Bible did not mention them. Regardless, depositions by colonists prove the vast majority of colonists believed in the reality of witches' marks.²⁹⁷

Though colonial women healers played valuable roles as witnesses in witchcraft cases, they also suffered more accusations of witchcraft than any other category of women. Because women healers as cunning folk could recognize evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses and injuries, colonists felt women healers tread a fine line between the natural and supernatural.

Consequently, women healers often faced accusations of harming people rather than curing them. Sometimes women healers received accusations such as this when sufferers did not heal as quickly as they preferred. In other cases, women healers suffered witchcraft accusations because the patient's health diminished despite their honest attempts to heal. Men healers also recognized evidence of witchcraft-induced illnesses. Men healers sought to increase their marketability. By accusing women healers of practicing witchcraft, they faced an opportunity to eliminate competitors. Just as men healers accused women healers of practicing witchcraft, women healers accused each other as well.

Colonists respected and feared their women healers. From the evidence, their unique role in early American witchcraft trials is abundantly clear. However, there is room for scholars to further research women healers and witchcraft. More could be said about women healers' involvement in legal cases following the last documented witchcraft trial for healer, Grace Sherwood, in 1705. Scholars should ask questions such as the following: Why was Sherwood's witchcraft trial the last to occur in the American colonies? Did women healers continue to participate as witnesses to character, paternity, and rape following the eighteenth century? Since men and women healers continued to compete against each other in their marketability, it is also important that scholars further research how colonists' understandings of magically-induced

²⁹⁷ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 59.

illnesses factored into curative techniques and innovative medical treatment following the last witchcraft trial.

Though scholars may argue that women healers accused of witchcraft lost out to formal male professionals in the nineteenth century, they should further explore women healers involved in American witchcraft trials as trailblazers for independence.²⁹⁸ Most women accused of witchcraft received accusations because they did not fit colonial society's normative expectations for women. These were women who spoke against their neighbors and purposely ignored social expectations for women to play a submissive role in their community and in church. Plenty of women also relied on their own sources of income (such is the case for several colonial women healers) rather than rely on a husband or other male family member to supply their financial needs. As a result, colonial women healers claimed their independence despite living in a patriarchal society that expected women to rely on men for support in all aspects of their lives. Their contemporaries and next generation of women leading up to the American Revolution, were pioneers for independence.

Witchcraft accusations in North America ended with Grace Sherwood's trial in 1705. Historians have different opinions about why American witchcraft trials happened and ended when they did. Medical historian Mary K. Matossian argues that the fits experienced by the accusing young girls of the 1692 Salem, Massachusetts witchcraft trials greatly resemble food or mold poisoning. Historian John Demos took a psychological approach in analyzing the Salem girls' behaviors. He argues that the girls' exhibited fits for attention. Demos explained that the fits garnered the attention of others and presented the girls as victims of evil possession. Having fits, along with recalling threats by accused witches and visits by the devil, allowed them to take

²⁹⁸ Historian Judith Walzer Leavitt argues that men overtook professional medicine during the nineteenth century; Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 142-170.

revenge on those they disliked by accusing them of threatening their Christianity through the practice of witchcraft.²⁹⁹

Regardless of the reasons why witchcraft accusations occurred in mass in colonial America, the trials clearly left a legacy for how to deal with magical practice should it happen again in the future. On December 14, 1692, the Massachusetts legislature approved a new law prohibiting the inheritance rights of accused witches even if found not guilty. Not only would the accused witches be unable to reclaim land and material possessions, but they also suffered threat of death if they completed an act determined as magical by even one witness. Evidence of magic included entertaining familiar spirits for good or bad purpose, raising the dead, or using enchantments. Perhaps the most significant of crimes punishable by death affected women healers. The law against witchcraft also prohibited, “practice or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall be killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined or lamed in his or her body.”³⁰⁰ Alluding to magically-induced illnesses, injuries, and deaths, this law put healers in awkward positions if colonists construed their curative methods as magical or if their healing methods failed despite their attempts to save the ailing.

When colonial laws declared magical practice punishable by death, several colonists voiced their doubts that condemned witches were actually guilty of such crimes. On October 8, 1692, Thomas Brattle, a Bostonian merchant wrote a letter to an undetermined minister in which

299 Mary K. Matossian, “Ergot and the Salem Witchcraft Affair,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 467; John Demos, “Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 483-484.

300 “An Act against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 495.

he described his beliefs that accused witches did not receive fair trials. Referencing the Salem witch trials where jurors firmly believed the afflicted girls could be hurt and healed by the accused witches' touching or looking at them. He wrote:

I would fain know of these Salem Justices what need there is of further proof of evidence to convict and condemn these apprehended persons than this look and touch, if so be they are so certain that this falling down and arising up when there is a look and a touch, are natural effects of the said look and touch and so a perfect demonstration and proof of witchcraft in those persons.³⁰¹

Brattle called out the accusers for misconstruing their symptoms of evidence of witchery to achieve their own means. Concluding his narrative of the Salem witchcraft trials, he exclaimed, "I am very apt to think, that as for five or six of the said confessors, if they are not very good Christian women, it will be no easy matter to find so many good Christian women in New England."³⁰²

Incidentally, the jury for the Salem witch trials held some of the same thoughts about the accused as Brattle. On January 14, 1697, the jury made a public apology to the accused witches who still lived, and all families involved. Signed by the twelve jury men and delivered by judge, Samuel Sewall, they apologized:

We confess that we ourselves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand the mysterious delusions of the powers of darkness and prince of the air, but were for want of knowledge in ourselves and better information from others, prevailed with to take up with such evidence against the accused as on further consideration and better information, we justly fear was insufficient for the touching the lives of any.³⁰³

The jurors asked forgiveness for their delusion and followed their public apology with a day of fasting and prayer.³⁰⁴

301 Thomas Brattle to Reverend Sir, October 8, 1692, in *Witches of the Atlantic World: Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 413.

302 Thomas Brattle to Reverend Sir, 419.

303 "The Apology of the Jury," in *Witches of the Atlantic World: Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 420.

304 "The Apology of the Jury," 420-421.

Minister, John Hale, also expressed guilt at being involved in the Salem witch trials. Though he had testified against accused witch Bridget Bishop in 1692, he completed his apologetic “A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft and How Persons Guilty of the Crime May be Convicted: And the Means used for their Discoveries Discussed both Negatively and Affirmatively, according to Scripture and Experience,” a year later. Hale argued that accused witches deserved sentencing for “vain curiosity to pry into things God hath forbidden and concealed from discovery by lawful means.”³⁰⁵ He justified punishment of sins by recalling the Biblical story of God’s punishment of the Israelites’ sin with a three-year famine. Despite this, Hale felt that colonists’ sins of fortune-telling, stealing, keeping secrets, and practicing magic should not be punishable by death, especially when the sinner had no malintent.³⁰⁶

Hale recognized that some crimes were greater than others. Not everyone that practiced magic did so to hurt others. Yet, Hale ensured his readers that witchcraft trials would not occur again if colonists avoided magic altogether. He warned, “Seeing we have been too fierce against supposed malefic witchcraft, let us heed we do not on the contrary become too favorable to divining witchcraft.”³⁰⁷ Hale believed many innocent people had suffered but still considered witchcraft a threat. While Hale finished his work in 1697, his work was finally published posthumously in 1702, just three short years before Grace Sherwood’s trial.³⁰⁸

Scholars have not determined whether apologetic literature played into Sherwood’s trial. Other than accusations by women detailing Sherwood’s malpractice as a midwife, no evidence existed

305 John Hale, “A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft and How Persons Guilty of the Crime May be Convicted: And the Means used for their Discoveries Discussed both Negatively and Affirmatively, according to Scripture and Experience,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: Historical Reader & Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 424.

306 Hale, “A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft,” 424-425.

307 Hale, “A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft,” 425.

308 Hale, “A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft,” 422.

of her witchery. Searches of her home yielded no evidence of magical, curative ingredients or charms. The judge also dismissed the witches' marks found by Elizabeth Barnes, Sherwood's accuser, for another traditional test of determining innocence, a witch-ducking. However, Grace's home of Princess Anne County remained untouched by previous witchcraft trials. Most likely, Luke and Elizabeth Hill's persistence that Grace be held accountable for causing a miscarriage, paired with the second testimony of Elizabeth Barnes, supplied enough cause for her to be tried. Fortunately for all colonial women, including women healers, witchcraft trials would no longer plague the American colonies.³⁰⁹

Grace Sherwood is the last woman healer known by scholars to have endured accusations of witchcraft in colonial America. Yet, she remains just one of many women healers whose skills and professions were compromised by the testimonies of others. The adage, knowledge is power, was truly the case for colonial women healers. Women healers held knowledge of healing techniques and magic that others did not possess. Based on the evidence, some American colonists believed women were agents of the devil. Regardless of where colonial women healers claimed to derive their powers, their agency dramatically set them apart from other colonists.

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Vita

Jewel Carrie Parker was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to Jeff and Rebecca Parker. She grew up in Elkin, North Carolina and fostered interest in the past at an early age. She decided to begin her career as a historian when completing a genealogy book for her father's Christmas present in 2012. Jewel attended Surry Community College in Dobson, North Carolina and graduated with an Associate in Arts in May 2014. She then transferred to Appalachian State

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