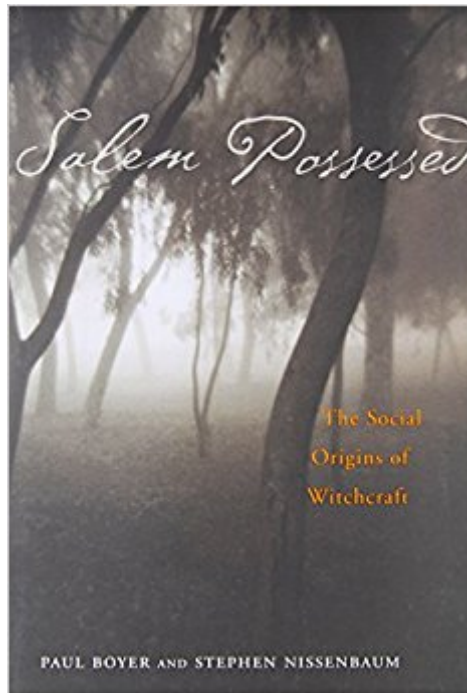




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# **Salem Possessed: The Social Origins Of Witchcraft**



## Synopsis

The stark immediacy of what happened in 1692 has obscured the complex web of human passion which had been growing for more than a generation before building toward the climactic witch trials. *Salem Possessed* explores the lives of the men and women who helped spin that web and who in the end found themselves entangled in it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Provides an admirable illustration of the general rule that, in Old and New England alike, much of the best sociological history of the twentieth century has only been made possible by the antiquarian and genealogical interests of the nineteenth century. —*NYRB* | This sensitive, intelligent, and well-written book will certainly revive interest in the terrible happenings at Salem. (Keith Thomas *New York Review of Books*) The authors' whole approach to the Salem disaster is canny, rewarding, and sure to fascinate readers interested in that aberrant affair. (The Atlantic) This is an 'inner history' of Salem Village that aims to raise the events of 1692 from melodrama to tragedy. —*NYRB* | It is a large achievement. This book is progressive history at its best, with brilliant insights, well-organized evidence, maps, and footnotes at the bottom of the page. (Cedric B. Cowing *American Historical Review*) This short book is a solid contribution to the understanding of the 1692 witch trials. The authors use impressively rich demographic detail to support the thesis that the witch trials are best explained as symptoms of typical social tensions in provincial towns at the time. According to Boyer

and Nissenbaum, Salem villagers played roles determined by economic, geographic, and status interests. (Richard Ekman *Canadian Historical Review*) An important, imaginative book that brings new insights to the study of the 1692 witchcraft outbreak in Massachusetts. Building on Charles Upham's *Salem Witchcraft* (1867), Boyer and Nissenbaum explore decades of community tension and conflict in order to explain why Salem was the focus of this episode. The authors reveal a complex set of relationships between persons allied with the growing mercantile interests of Salem Town and those linked to the subsistence-based economy of outlying Salem Village. (Carol Karlsen *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*) A provocative book. Drawing upon an impressive range of unpublished local sources, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum provide a challenging new interpretation of the outbreak of witchcraft in Salem Village. They argue that previous historians erroneously divorced the tragic events of 1692 from the long-term development of the village and therefore failed to realize that the witch trials were simply one particularly violent chapter in a series of local controversies dating back to the 1660s. In their reconstruction of the socio-economic conditions that contributed to the intense factionalism in Salem Village, Boyer and Nissenbaum have made a major contribution to the social history of colonial New England. [They] have provided us with a first-rate discussion of factionalism in a seventeenth-century New England community. Their handling of economic, familial, and spatial relationships within Salem Village is both sophisticated and imaginative. (T. H. Breen *William and Mary Quarterly*) An illuminating and imaginative interpretation of the social and moral state of Salem village in 1692. A sensitive, intelligent, and well-written book. (New York Review of Books) A large achievement. This book is progressive history at its very best, with brilliant insights. (American Historical Review) *Salem Possessed* is a provocative book. Drawing upon an impressive range of unpublished local sources, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum provide a challenging new interpretation of the outbreak of witchcraft in Salem Village. A major contribution to the social history of colonial New England. Sophisticated and imaginative. (William and Mary Quarterly)

Paul Boyer was Merle Curti Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Stephen Nissenbaum is a cultural historian.

As someone whose family history traces back to Salem Village and Bray Wilkins, I genuinely appreciate the effort it took to dig into the excruciating details of this disturbing period in history. Your book included such a detailed account that it brought the people involved "to life" in a way and made me feel as though I just might be able to understand what would go down in history as one of

the most appalling social condemnations of our fellow men of all time.

Great book. This book takes a look at the economics and social pressures that plagued Salem during the late 17th century. The book does not go into depth with the trials themselves, merely the tensions that brought them on.

I needed this book for my capstone paper. My topic was figuring out if Parris sparked the trials to secure his place in the community. This book was perfect since it explores the social problems and situations of Salem to help explain the trials. The book reads very easily and is just all together interesting, even as just a fun read.

I had this in hard copy but it was stolen. I was thrilled to find it on Prime. Fascinating slant on what happened in Salem and why it happened.

Interesting to read. Think we found some ancestors too!

exactly as described, interesting read

A very interesting read. And quite thorough.

Love the book. I have family in it. Very interesting to read about her

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