



HOW TO SPOT A WITCH

By Stacy Conradt

As we know today, some of the measures taken to “prove” a person’s guilt or innocence during the Salem Witch Trials were absolutely ludicrous. But in case you’d like to employ some of them for yourself, here are 10 ways to identify a witch according to those running the Salem Witch Trials.

1. Make a witch cake. What’s a witch cake, you ask? Well, it’s definitely something you don’t want to eat. You take the urine of the people who are thought to be under the spell of the witch in question, mix it with rye meal and make a little patty. Then you feed the patty to a dog. Because some of the powers the witch used to cast a spell on the afflicted people were in their urine, when the dog eats the cake, it will hurt the witch and she’ll cry out in agony.

2. Weigh them against a stack of Bibles. If the suspected witch is heavier or lighter than the stack of Bibles, then clearly she’s guilty of evil-doing. If the scales balance out, she’s in the clear. You can imagine that a perfect balance doesn’t happen often.

3. Check for moles, birthmarks, scars, or extra nipples – they’re marks of the Devil. That’s a sure sign right there, but if you need even more proof, try pricking the Devil’s Mark with a blade. If it doesn’t bleed or hurt when it’s pricked, you’ve definitely got a witch on your hands. During the Salem Witch Trials, some unscrupulous witch-hunters actually used knives with retractable blades, so of course when they appeared to puncture the Mark, nothing happened.

4. Observe them talking to themselves. During the Witch Trials, one accused woman, Sarah Good, was partially damned based on the fact that she was sometimes seen muttering to herself, and sometimes this even happened when she was leaving people’s houses. Her accusers knew she was casting spells on people, even though Sarah claimed she was just reciting the commandments or a particular psalm. Her claims weren’t enough to save her, because she was hanged on July 19, 1692.

5. See if they can say the Lord’s Prayer. If they don’t, they’re guilty. If they do, they’re guilty too. George Burroughs, the only minister to be executed during the Trials, ran across this problem. He was standing at the gallows to be executed when he recited the Lord’s Prayer to prove his innocence – it was believed that a witch (or warlock, in this case) would be unable to utter the holy words. People were momentarily convinced that the jury had wronged him until a minister named Cotton Mather told the crowd that the Devil allowed George Burroughs to say that prayer to make it seem as if he was innocent. Ahhh, of course. With Satan himself apparently working right through him, Burroughs’ fate was sealed and he was hanged moments later.



6. Ask a hard-of-hearing elderly woman if she's guilty while her good ear is turned the other way. If she doesn't respond, she's definitely a witch. This happened to 71-year-old Rebecca Nurse. She was known to be a very pious woman and most people in the community were hesitant to accuse her or believe the pointing fingers that were. In fact, she was found not guilty during her first trial. But when there were more outbursts from young girls who said they were being tormented by a witch, Nurse was reconsidered. When another prisoner claimed that "she was one of us" during the trial and Nurse failed to

respond, she was immediately assumed guilty and hanged.

7. Observe the number of pets she has. A woman who has pets – or says hello to the neighbor's cat – is surely using that animal as a familiar. In fact, if a fly or a rat entered a woman's cell while she was awaiting trial, it was assumed that the witch had used her powers to summon a familiar to do her bidding.

8. Take their sarcastic comments seriously. John Willard was the constable in Salem responsible for bring the accused to court. After bringing in so many people, including those who were known for their church-going ways and elderly woman who barely understood what they were being accused of, Willard began to doubt how real these accusations really were. In May 1692, he finally put his foot down and declared that he would no longer take part in any arrests, sarcastically saying, "Hang them all, they're all witches." Wouldn't you know, Willard was immediately accused of witchcraft himself, stood trial, was found guilty, and was executed just three months after his sarcastic comment.

9. Ask if they've had dreams about Native Americans. Sarah Osborne, one of the original three to be accused on March 1, denied all witchcraft accusations that were thrown her way. Her downfall was when she admitted she had recurring dreams that an Indian would seize her by the hair and drag her out of her house. Apparently that was enough to convince the village she was likely casting spells on them. However, Osborne ended up dying while being held captive and never stood trial for her "crimes."

10. Check to see how many times they've been married. At least a couple of the women tried for witchcraft were married two or more times and were accused of killing their former husbands ("bewitching" them to death) or evilly seducing them.

Source: Conradt, Stacy. "10 Ways to Identify a Witch." *Mentalfloss.com*. 1 Mar. 2010. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.