

Society Formed at Hampton Beach, NH, to Apprehend Those Falsely Accusing Eunice (Goody) Cole of Being Witch

Purpose is to Refute Charges Which Caused Her Terrible Suffering, and Clear Name in Time for Town's Tercentenary Celebration



"That some of those who passed her home gave unpleasant utterings to her which she answered in kind, has come down by tradition with the more terrible charge that on a certain day when some young people in passing gave unwelcome mouthings, she cursed them and caused them to be lost at sea.

By William D. Cram

It may seem a long time afterward to take up the matter, but a large and growing group of earnest people have joined themselves together under the rather extended title of "The Society in Hampton Beach for the Apprehension of Those Falsely Accusing Eunice (Goody) Cole of Having Familiarity With the Devil" to refute the charges which made almost half of that woman's long life a lingering misery, and clear her name in time for Hampton's Tercentenary Celebration next year.

Those who thoughtlessly perhaps have spoken of the lady as a witch need not be apprehensive of any trouble with the apprehenders. These crusaders are

neither night-riders nor vigilantes, there will be no victims of their apprehending hanging from telegraph poles or suffering from any form of physical violence.

But the excoriations, not vituperative, but denunciatory, which the members of this long-named society will deal out to those apprehended with this delusion, is intended to stop all further slurs upon that lady of long ago as to her having done the many fantastic and impossible things of which she was charged in those far-back days from 1656 to 1685. In other words the society with the long name is saying, "Fie upon you foolish people who still believe in witches."

But the apprehensiveness of

many that there may be some show of interest in Hampton when the members really get busy in their apprehending has caused a sense of suspense and a feeling that something of interest is liable to happen there at anytime. Members of the order carry rather strange-looking cards to identify themselves in case of need, but otherwise there is no outward way in which they can be recognized. Since this explanation of the society and its aims may only make the matter seem more involved, it might be fair to let the great general public make up its own opinion in the matter by reviewing the story of "Goody" Cole.

Delusion Based on Fear

The legends of Hampton, N. H., are numerous, but among them none equal that of Eunice ("Goody") Cole, convicted of witchcraft, in the tragic elements of mob psychology. Though differing in detail, in general trend, the charges made against her in court were much like all other charges of witchcraft both in Europe and America -that the person charged made league with the devil and by him was given supernatural powers to be exercised to the injury and even of causing death to those against whom these strange powers were used.

Those who have hastily condemned the ignorance of the masses who for more than a century clamored for the death of those they believed guilty of witchcraft have failed to understand human nature and to see that the underlying cause which brought about the terrible sacrifices of human lives still exists throughout the world not one whit diminished. What serves to mislead the many is that in each new era of the epidemic it assumes a different form. But its base was, is and will continue to be fear.

Long before migration started to this country death was being meted out to those charged with witchcraft in what was believed by the great mass of people to be in orderly form. That is they were tried according to a written law, and all evidence had to conform to certain requirements. Even though we of today have, at least in theory, abolished the admission of the statement of what we think as absolute evidence of what is, those who follow us at the same distance as we the witchcraft days, will find as much to condemn as well as to wonder at.

Body Dragged From Home

Two and a half centuries have passed since a lawless, terrified, almost frantic handful of people

hurried to a small house set away from all others, and, with many varied expressions and much haste, half dragged, half bore out from within the body of an aged woman hardly yet cold in death.

For days the northeasterly winds had driven low but fast-moving clouds - at one time with heavy downpouring rain and at another with dense enveloping mists that blotted out objects even near at hand. But with the turning of the tide the wind had shifted, the clouds rolled away to some unknown place and suddenly the sun shone down to revive all kinds of life.

And ebbing out with the tide and storm went the final fighting spark of that life which for three decades or more had been a disturbance, bother, and expense to the little village that had endured it almost from the beginning of its settlement.

It was in 1638 that a little company came up the Hampton River and founded Winnacunnet. They brought with them many sturdy virtues and, even as with us, some disturbing faults. From time to time came new recruits from Europe and with them came amazing stories of what was happening back in the old land-of the ever growing excitement of witch hunting-of the marvelous testimonies sworn to in court trials and the even more marvelous tales that went from mouth to mouth.

Hampton was a small community. Seemingly the fight of its people for existence was always against odds. Cares, troubles, privations, dangers from contact with nature, lurking dangers from contact with those they found already in possession of the land, annoying relations with those in power and title back in the land from which they had come hither, all these were theirs. Few things came to lighten their lives, to give happy cheer and wholesome humor. One great medicine they had-hard labor. And among the workers were also some laaqaards.

If one will turn down between the Ashworth Hotel and the Cozy Corner Cafe when he is at Hampton Beach and take the midmost way, one called Island Path, he will reach after many turns and bends and well toward the point where the road and river meet, a place on his right hand side where yet remains a part of an old willow tree which has little success in upward growth but still clings to a show of life. Here deep and full is the old well, which tradition says brought reputation and users, for it began to be reported that the water from Goody Cole's well, no matter how long the voyage might be, never grew brackish in the water butt. Whatever of railing or wall might have encompassed that well in the 1650's has gone and left nothing to give any surmise. Gone too are any vestiges of cellar or foundation of her home which was said to have stood near by.

Whittier's Poem About Her

Along the river past her point came and went all the traffic between the landing and the sea, and that some of those who passed gave unpleasant utterances to her which she answered in kind has come down by tradition with the more terrible charge that on a certain day when some young people in passing gave unwelcome mouthings, she cursed them and caused them to be lost at sea, as Whittier tells in his "Wreck at Rivermouth."

*Once in the old Colonial days,
Two hundred years ago and more,
A boat sailed down through the
winding ways
Of Hampton River to that low
shore,
Full of a goodly company
Sailing out on the summer sea,
Veering to catch the land-breeze
light,
With the Boar to the left and the
Rocks to the right.*

"Fie on the witch!" cried a merry

girl,
As they rounded the point where
Goody Cole
Sat by her door with her wheel
atwirl,
A bent and blear-eyed poor old
soul.
"Oho!" she muttered, "ye're brave
today!
But I hear the little waves laugh
and say:
'The broth will be cold that waits at
home;
For it's one to go, but another to
come.'"

"She's cursed," said the skipper;
"speak her fair;
I'm scary always to see her shake
Her wicked head with its wild gray
hair,
And nose like a hawk, and eyes
like a snake."
But merrily still, with laugh and
shout,
From Hampton River the boat
sailed out.

Suddenly seaward swept the
squall;
The low sun smote through cloudy
rack;
The Shoals stood clear in the light,
and all
The trend of the coast lay hard
and black.
But far and wide as eye could
reach,
No life was seen upon wave or
beach;
The boat that went out at morning
never
Sailed back again into Hampton
River.

But the actual calamity at sea in
the town records was at a later
date when Goody Cole was
languishing in Boston jail.

Testimony Against Her

Whatever of fact there might have
been to her residence on the island
or to her well, the records of the
County Court of Norfolk where she
was arraigned in 1656 and found
guilty of witchcraft seem

indisputable. How full of fear and
terror of her these poor folks must
have been by day and night, if one
reads between the lines as they
testify! Both Goody Marston and
Susanna Palmer deposed "that
goodwife Cole said that she was
sure there was a witche in the
towne, and she knew where hee
dwelt & who they are"; also that 13
years before, she had known one
"bewitched as goodwife Marston's
child was" and that this person
"was changed from a man to an
ape, as goody Marston's child was."

Thomas Philbrick testified that
she (Goody Cole) had said if his
calves should eat any of her grass
"she wished it might poysen them
or choke them"; and he further
testified that he never saw one of
his calves afterward," and the other
calf came home and died about a
weeke after."

Sobriety, the wife of Henry
Moulton, and goodwife Sleeper, the
wife of Thomas, deposed that while
"Talking about goodwife Cole &
goodwife Marston's child," they on
a sudden "heard something scrape
against the boards of the windows,"
which "scrapeing" after they had
been out "and looked aboute and
could see nothing," and had gone
into the house again, and begun "to
talke the same talke again," was
repeated, and "was so loude that if
a dogg or a catt had done it" they
"should have scene the markes,"
but none were to be seen.

Abraham Drake deposed in
court, on the 4th of September,
1656, that "aboute this time
twelvemonth by neighbor Coles lost
a Cowe, and wen we had found it, I
and others brought the Cowe home
to his house & he & shee desired
mee to flea this cowe, and
presently after she charged mee
with killing her cowe, and said they
should know hee had killed hir
cowe, for the just hand of God was
uppon my cattell, and forthwith I
lost two cattell, and the latter end
of somer I lost one cowe more."

Such is the account which
Joseph Dow gives in his history of
Hampton, telling, further, that

Goody Cole was adjudged to be³
guilty and was sentenced to
receive, as she afterwards
expressed it, "a double
punishment," viz., to be whipped
and then imprisoned during her
natural life, or until released by the
court.

Flogged and Imprisoned

So she was duly flogged and
imprisoned in Boston, and time ran
on and she was seemingly
forgotten. During these years her
husband died at the age of about
89 years, his estate having been
taken over by the town to take care
of him.

The town fathers also apparently
forgot their obligation to pay Goody
Cole's board bill in prison, and, to
jolt the town father's memory,
William Salter, the keeper of the jail
at Boston, on July 14, 1664,
arrested Thomas Marston, one of
the Selectmen of Hampton, to
secure payment of the
indebtedness. Although the board
at the jail was only eight pounds
per year, this sum was not easily
raised, and, securing a part, Salter
left with the town's promise to send
the balance.

Some or all of this was raised
from what was left of the Cole
estate, but in 1665 the
townspeople, probably growing
weary of paying the board bill, and
Goody Cole, herself, having
petitioned for her own release, this
was agreed to on the provision that
she pay up what was still due the
jail and depart within one month
from the jurisdiction of the court
and not return.

As Goody Cole at that time must
have been well on in years and
entirely without resources, this was
asking almost an impossibility.
However, in some way she was
released and returned to Hampton
some time before 1671, where,
save that she had her freedom, life
could not have been any too happy.
To provide for her living, a shelter
was either built or secured
presumably somewhere about the

Meeting House Green and here she lived with the heads of the various households in turn (according to their taxes) supplying her with needed food and fuel.

But there were no open arms extended to her, rather the clenched fist. Her own experiences had not given her any love for her townspeople and their fears and dread of witchcraft was increasing not only in Hampton but all through the country, and in Salem, in about 20 years, were to occur the famous witch trials that made almost all other New England witch cases inconspicuous.

In Europe, too, thousands were being found guilty of witchcraft and put to death, many in horrible ways - boiled in oil, burned at the stake and in the mildest form, hung. That in such a state of the world, the total number put to death in this country for witchcraft was so small, is a matter to be glad of, even though it is to be regretted that any should have been put to death. But in this country, in all that delusion, not a single case occurred where the accused person was sentenced to death by burning.

Again Arrested

But her continued presence in Hampton was a continued threat, worry and a cause of apprehension to those who were under the delusion of belief in witches and so it is hardly to be wondered at, that in October, 1672, Goody Cole was again taken into custody for witchcraft, this time charged with appearing in different forms, that is, as a woman, a dog, an eagle and a cat that she might entice a young girl named Ann Smith to live with her.

Naturally the grand jury found a true bill against her and in April, 1673, she was tried in the Salisbury lower court where, of course, she was found guilty, but the court, being without jurisdiction in sentence, she was sent to Boston jail to await appearance before the high court.

In a few months the court sat and found: "In ye case of Unis Cole now prisoner at ye Bar not Legally guilty according to inditement, butt just ground of vehement suspiscyon of her haueing, had familyarryty with the deuill!. Jonas Clark in the name of the rest."

And so back to Hampton once more. But age, strain, the conditions of living were breaking up her constitution. It was difficult for those who were not under witchcraft delusion, and many were not, to do anything to make her life easier, for those who had the obsession were clamorous, watchful and in continuous terror. To deny witchcraft was almost to establish one's own guilt. Many were suspected and in fact eight women were named as witches and two men who were not openly named were regarded as wizards.

In 1680, two of these women were in court, where the shallowness of the case but the attitude of the public mind caused their cases to be virtually indefinitely continued and the women released on bail. Perhaps some of these eight women were guilty of little more than sympathizing with Goody

Cole or being incredulous of the charges, but tradition has it that the men charged as wizards were in fact rather openly derisive of the whole of witchcraft beliefs and flouted public opinion to the extent of doing small kindnesses for Goody Cole, and laughed off the accusations of those who were under the spell.

They were too influential to be formally charged with witchcraft, but the whispers went round and their success and prosperity made the doubtful shake their heads and wag their tongues. Yet there was a limit that even these men would not pass and so many little acts of helpfulness to Goody Cole were done by them when few were aware of it.

As her natural powers gave way, unable to sustain the continual grind of her hard life, the open

jeers and insults of some, the hard looks and easily recognized distrust of others, and the utter lack of kindly intercourse as well as the hardness of the physical life itself, slowly she yielded to the increasing infirmities of age.

"Leave My Spirit to Trouble Ye"

So it happened that on a dreary afternoon, he whose turn it was to see that her scanty needs were supplied, though he longed for the time when she should require no more, was startled to find her almost gone in body but still militant in spirit. "Aye," she said, "ye think ye will have peace when ye bury my bones but I leave my spirit to trouble ye. It shall be good to those who have had kindly thoughts for me, but it shall trouble and ever curse those who have used me ill." Her strength failed her. More she could not say, but as recurring spasms permitted, her eyes flashed out the messages of ill will which her tongue could not utter. And so the end came.

Quickly her visitor left to spread the word of her death to others like himself in terror of her supposed powers. The handful he gathered approached the hut uneasily and in dread lest they should find some fearful manifestation of Satanic creature invoked in her last breathings. Almost unable to believe it, they only saw the wasted form of the woman they knew too well as an accursed witch. Death in its strange way had eased the features of the poor woman, as those who dared look noticed. But the idea which seemed in the minds of all was to carry out the approved method of disposing of a witch.

Gathering all their powers to combat their fears, shrinking, yet eagerly, they bore her out and to some distance from the schoolhouse, where, after a shallow grave had been dug, her body was dropped to the relief of the bearers.

Then the most fearful drove a stake through the body that it

should not leave its resting place to trouble them more, and when a coating of earth had been thrown upon the form, a horseshoe was securely placed on the top of the stake that the devil might be cheated out of the fulfillment of his compact when he came to take her body away. Quickly, and few daring to look back, they left the spot.

The scene had not been without beholders. A son of one of those believed to be a wizard had been, at his father's behest, on his way to see if he might do aught for her comfort. But before he stepped out of the woody growth to cross the clearing toward her habitation he saw the strange procession coming out and followed, keeping out of sight, while from another point, one of the tribe which had roamed the land unrestrictedly until the whites had come, watched the actions of the group. When all was done, the boy returned to his home and told his father, while the warrior told his tribesmen.

Body Exhumed and Buried in Woods

In the quiet of the evening while the rays of the great moon rising illumined the woods and land, the two so-called wizards and their sons came to the place of burial. Carefully they removed the earthy covering, drew from the body the piercing stake, placed Goody Cole's frail remains on a bier which they made from fallen limbs, and then, before departing with the body, made the place to appear as it had when they came, one remarking that "The stake is of willow and will grow into a memorial for her."

With their burden they left the lower land till they came to a fair piece of land well, yet not too thickly, wooded, and here between two noble trees they dug a grave, and there being many pine trees at hand, laid her on a couch of these limbs. Then they reverently consigned her to the care of the great Creator.

Down through the years in the history of several families and in the unwritten history of an Indian tribe has come the story of the burial and the reburial of Goody Cole, and ever and anon some mystic has described a strange influence while the affrighted witch-believer has seen weird omens and heard uncanny things about this unmarked resting place.

Nature has much strange phenomena, and ever round about us forces are being exerted that we do not understand and which sometimes awe us and almost take away our breath. But all is based on order and reason. In the passage of time the grandson of one of the wizards grew to manhood, prospered and built a house not far from the spot where his grandfather and a few others had buried Goody Cole.

Many strange things occurred in his life and frequent mutterings were to be heard, mostly from those who envied his success, that he had made an unholy alliance with the devil. His house burned down but he rebuilt it, and long after his death strange stories were told of his burial. His descendants scattered and strangers occupied the ancestral home, about which stories grew with ever increasing detail.

If one wishes to take the trouble to look over the old files of the Newburyport Daily News he will find in the Issue of July 22, 1908, the following: "Haunted House built on site of the hut occupied by Goody Cole the Witch." "The house is now occupied by Frank Fogg and family who declare ill luck has pursued them ever since they came to live there.

" 'We have lived here now 17 years,' said Mrs. Fogg, 'and we have not had a bit of luck since we purchased the place. Pigs and cows act queerly and at times we can do nothing with them. My husband says he is sure the spirit of Goody Cole still curses the place. The man of whom we bought the house did

not tell us it was the house of a witch or we would never have bought it. We find it difficult to sell because of its history. It is said that the body of the witch is buried between the two large trees in front of the house, and some declare if one walks over the grave it will bring him good luck. But it makes us very nervous to think the body of a witch is on the place.' "