Putnam, Ann, Jr.

*Witchcraft in America*, 2001

**Born:** October 18, 1679  
**Died:** 1717  
**Nationality:** American  
**Born:** 1680  
**Salem, Massachusetts**

**Died:** 1717  
**Salem, Massachusetts**

A main accuser in the Salem witch trials

Modern historians have portrayed Ann Putnam, Jr. as a victim of the Salem witch trials. Although she was one of the primary accusers who sent twenty innocent people to their deaths as convicted witches, she had been trapped in a vicious cycle of events caused in part by her parents. Her father, Thomas Putnam, was seeking revenge on his enemies in a longstanding land feud. Her mother, Ann Putnam, Sr., had become immersed in the occult (attempts to influence events through supernatural forces) as a way to avenge the death, years earlier, of her own beloved sister. Thirteen years after the end of the Salem trials, Ann, Jr. came forward as the only accuser to issue an apology to the families of the executed witches.

Influenced by parents' obsessions

Ann Putnam, Jr. was born in Salem Village, Massachusetts, and grew up in a tense and troubled household. For over fifty years her father's family had carried on a boundary dispute with their neighbors, creating deep divisions within the community. As owners of large tracts of land, the Putnams wielded considerable political power and they were leading a campaign to keep rural Salem Village separate from the more urban Salem Town. Their main strategy was to establish a church that was independent from the Salem congregation. In 1688, after two other ministers had been forced to leave their posts, Thomas Putnam and his relatives pressured the Salem Village congregation to hire Samuel Parris (see biography entry) as the new preacher. They also took the unusual step of giving Parris a high salary and granting him the title to (legal
ownership of) the parsonage (minister's home) and surrounding land.

By the time Parris arrived the following year the community had broken up into two factions, those who supported the Putnams and his decision to hire Parris, and others who opposed the appointment of Parris. Soon the anti-Parris group gained enough votes on the village committee (local governing body) to withhold taxes that paid the minister's salary. This situation had a direct impact on the Salem trials of 1692–93, and on Ann, Jr., who became one of the main accusers of suspected witches (see Chapters 3 and 4). Most of the accused people belonged to or were associated with the anti-Putnam faction, and Thomas Putnam actively encouraged Ann to make accusations throughout the trials.

Not only was Ann, Jr. caught in the middle of the Putnams' political battles, she was also pulled into her mother's obsession with the occult. Ann Putnam, Sr. moved to Salem Village as a teenager with her older sister Mary, who had married James Bailey, the first minister of the village parish. Mary suffered several failed pregnancies, eventually dying in childbirth. Ann, Sr. and Mary were extremely close, and Ann strongly believed that Bailey and the people of Salem Village were responsible for her sister's death. She felt that, as outsiders, she and Mary had been treated with such hostility that her sister was physically and emotionally exhausted to the point of death. Apparently Bailey was an ineffective leader of the village parish and his political enemies went out of their way to torment the perpetually pregnant Mary. Ann thought many villagers were pleased when Mary died, and she would hold a grudge against these people for many years to come.

Ann, Sr. was married to Thomas at age sixteen and, like Mary, she had several babies who died at birth. Finally, Ann, Jr. was born in 1680, but Ann, Sr. continued to be haunted by the feeling that townspeople had been responsible for her family's misfortunes. She became so obsessed that she tried to communicate with Mary through occult rituals and thus lived a secretive double life. She eventually involved Ann, Jr. in this secret life. A well-read and intelligent child, the younger Ann was pushed by her mother into a level of maturity well beyond her years. Together they often visited the graveyard where Mary was buried, avidly reading the Book of Revelations in the Bible in search of clues for contacting the dead. In 1691 Ann, Sr.'s obsession with the occult reportedly led Ann, Jr. to Tituba (see Chapters 3 and 4 and biography entry), the Carib slave in the Parris household.

**Joins Tituba's circle**

Tituba had been entertaining Parris's nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth (called Betty) and his eleven-year-old niece Abigail Williams, who was also living in the home, with stories about voodoo (magic) customs in her
native West Indies. Soon Ann, Jr. and other Salem Village girls had joined Tituba, Betty, and Abigail in the tale-telling sessions. At that time only twelve years old, Ann, Jr. had been sent by her mother to Tituba for advice in contacting the spirit of Mary Bailey. Ann, Jr.’s adult knowledge of the world had made her high strung and fearful, yet she became one of Tituba's best “pupils.” She had a quick mind and an active imagination, as well as extensive experience with her mother’s own brand of occult practices, which enabled her to understand Tituba’s stories.

By January 1692 other neighborhood girls were gathering around Tituba at the Parris fireside. When Betty and Abigail fell into fits that month, Ann, Jr. and Elizabeth Hubbard, one of the other village girls, joined them in exhibiting extreme emotional distress and incoherent (confused and unclear) babbling. The following month Tituba and her husband, John Indian, baked a “witch cake” containing the girls' urine and fed it to the family dog in an attempt to identify the witches who were casting a spell on them. In February the girls accused three women—Tituba, Sarah Osborne, and Sarah Good—of bewitching (casting a spell upon) them. In early March the women were taken to the meetinghouse (church building) for questioning, and during the investigation Tituba confessed to practicing witchcraft. Tituba, Good, and Osborne were all put in jail. Later that month Ann Putnam, Sr. was also having fits and led the girls in accusing Rebecca Nurse, a respected seventy-one-year-old member of the Salem Village congregation, of being a witch (see primary source entry). Significantly,

**Ann Putnam, Jr. Discovers Her Powers in Andover**

Sometime before the first Salem trial executions took place in July 1693, the village of Andover, Massachusetts, was struck by the witch scare that was spreading like wildfire through the region. When the wife of Andover resident Joseph Ballard suddenly fell ill, Ballard immediately tried to determine the occult causes of her illness by sending for an accuser from Salem. This was how Ann Putnam, Jr. found herself, along with fellow accuser Mary Walcott, riding a horse to Andover to consult the sick woman and her relatives. The girls were welcomed as heroines, and they relished their virtually unquestioned power. They were taken through dozens of homes to visit sick patients and determine whether or not they felt the presence of a witch who could be held responsible for the afflictions. Since Ann and Mary did not know everyone in the village, they could not identify the witches’ specters (spirits) they saw sitting by the patients.

The justice of the peace, Dudley Bradstreet, therefore arranged a sort of line-up to help solve the problem of anonymity. He mixed a group of suspects with respected citizens, blindfolded all of them, and had them
walk individually past Ann and Mary as the girls were in the throes of possession. The people in the line-up were instructed to touch the girls’ hands. If a girl stopped her fit for a moment then the person was considered guilty, as it was believed the person was calling off the demons and was thus in control of the situation. Bradstreet had not anticipated, however, that the girls would name many more people than he had hoped. By the end of the day Ann and Mary had identified more than half a dozen “witches,” and forty warrants had been issued for arrests of other line-up participants. In fact, there were so many suspects that Bradstreet quit writing warrants. The accused were sent to the town jail to await trial without legal representation. Now even more confident of their powers, Ann and Mary returned to Salem to appear as witnesses in the trials. Ann was one of the main accusers who sent twenty innocent people to their deaths by September 22, 1693, when the last hangings took place.
Nurse was a member of the Towne family, longtime enemies of the Putnams in the boundary feud. Formal witchcraft trials began, and by the end of May thirty-seven people had been arrested as suspected witches. Throughout the trials Ann, Jr. remained the most active accuser, often displaying the wildest behavior and hurling the most devastating charges at her victims.
The drama continues

Ann, Jr. was placed in the spotlight in September 1693, when Salem villager Giles Corey was arrested and charged with wizardry (practicing magic). Corey's wife Martha had already been sentenced to death. He refused to stand trial for his alleged crimes because, according to local law, a prisoner's property could not be confiscated (seized by authority) except in cases of treason or conviction. The law also held, however, that refusal to testify could result in being subjected to a slow death by crushing with heavy stones. In an effort to keep his property in his family and to avoid being convicted as a wizard, Corey submitted to being crushed by stones in a field outside Salem, where he finally died after nine days on September 19. Martha Corey was hanged three days later.

While Giles Corey was dying, Ann was at home claiming to experience the exact pain that he was feeling. Behaving as if she were under duress from a suffocating force, Ann was suddenly relieved of her pain when she saw the spirit of a witch who explained to her why Corey was now being crushed to death. According to the spirit, Corey himself had long ago crushed a man to death with his feet while under a contract with the devil. Part of the deal with the devil was that the murderer would profit from the man's death, but then would someday face the same fate himself. According to *The Devil in Massachusetts*, when Ann recounted this
vision to her father, he suddenly recalled that seventeen years earlier, long before Ann was even born, Corey had been charged in court with the death of a man who was "bruised to death." He had somehow escaped justice in the courtroom and had never been found guilty. Putnam revealed this story to nervous villagers, who welcomed the news. Not only could they now have a clear conscience in putting Corey to death, but Ann's vision had given them proof that she was telling the truth. No one considered the fact that Ann's mother had told her about past events in Salem Village and had filled the child with bitterness toward certain residents.

Ann apologizes for role in trials

By October 1693 jails in the Salem area were packed with suspects, and twenty people had been executed as witches, largely at the urging of the young girls. Ann, Jr. and her friends had almost single-handedly devastated entire villages, at times even turning against their own—as in the case of former accuser Mary Walcott (see box on p. 216), who failed to cooperate in the trials (see Chapter 4) and soon found herself suspected of being a witch. Nobody had been safe from the girls' accusations and their frequent fits. In November, however, they discovered that they had lost their power when they were called to nearby Gloucester to determine why a soldier's sister lay ill. Although the girls named three culprits, the accused witches were not imprisoned. On their way home from this disappointing event, the girls were crossing Ipswich Bridge and went into fits while passing an old woman. To their astonishment, nobody paid them any attention and they were for once treated as if they were crazy or invisible. This was to be the last of their accusations and fits, and a solemn silence overtook all of them.

As the trials came to an end and the families of victims sought justice, the accusers slipped into uncomfortable obscurity. Most of the girls left Salem Village with their families or got married and later moved away, but Ann Putnam, Jr. stayed on. Both of her parents died within a week of one another at a relatively young age in 1699, leaving Ann to raise her nine younger siblings by herself. She remained anonymous until 1706, when she was urged to make a public apology for her role in the trials, which would be the only statement from any of the accusers. Parris had been forced to leave his post in 1698 (see Chapter 5) and the new Salem Village pastor, Joseph Green, was determined to make peace within his parish. He took many steps to help reconcile (restore friendship between) enemies and reach an understanding of past transgressions (violations). In 1706 Ann asked Green if she could rejoin the parish, and the pastor required her to make the apology, not only as a way to relieve her own guilt but also to make peace in the community. Green read her lengthy statement to a congregation that included relatives of many executed witches. Among them was the family of Rebecca Nurse. The primary accuser of Nurse, Ann had insisted on the old woman's guilt and was clearly responsible for her execution, which had even
shocked mutual enemies in the village. It was clear that Ann's speech was addressed mainly to the Nurse family, but the words rang true to everyone who had lived through the trials and had lost loved ones or helped accuse innocent people. (See the primary source entry for the full text of Ann's apology.)

Ann claimed she had never willingly meant to harm anybody during the trials and she begged forgiveness from those she had inadvertently hurt. She did not confess to any direct malice or guilt, however, instead blaming her actions on a "great delusion of Satan," whom she held responsible for the witch-hunts. According to the account in *The Salem Witch Trials* by Earle Rice, Jr., she admitted only to the "guilt of innocent blood." Referring indirectly to the role of her own family in the social turmoil at the time of the trials, she said she "desired to lie in the dust and to be humbled for it, in that [she] was the cause, with others, of so sad a calamity to them and their families." Ann lived for eleven more years, dying single and alone at the age of thirty-seven.

**For Further Reading**


