

### GOODY PEASE OF SALEM TOWN

by Elaine K. Pease

Sarah Pease of Salem Town, Massachusetts, was accused of witchcraft in 1692. Although little is known of Sarah personally, study of public documents of the time and family histories help to shed some light on what her life must have been like before, during, and after the witchcraft hysteria. This article will try to reconstruct her life and interpret the witchcraft delusion through her eye.

Sarah's family name, her place of birth, and her residence before her marriage is unknown. We first hear of her upon her marriage to Robert Pease, a weaver, about whom more information is available. He emigrated from Great Braddow, County Essex, England on the ship Francis in 1634 accompanying his father, Robert and his uncle, John. His age was listed as three on the ship's list but he probably was five or six. His father and uncle were granted land in the Northfields area of Salem prior to 1637 and settled there.<sup>1</sup> His father died in 1644 leaving his estate including a "howse and a barne and a frame and a ll acres of ground"<sup>2</sup> to his wife and two sons. His uncle, John, left Salem about 1638 and was one of the first white men to settle Martha's Vineyard, founding Edgartown there.<sup>3</sup> The presence of his uncle on the island may have been one reason why Robert took up residence there for a period in the late 1650s and/or 1660s. Robert had learned his trade as a weaver while apprenticed to Thomas Root between 1645 and 1651. He practiced this trade on Martha's Vineyard and was a welcome addition to the settlement there as is shown by the citizens who promised to supply him with one hundred pounds of fish each year as an incentive to remain.<sup>4</sup>

Robert and Sarah were married about 1658. It is not known where she came from or where they were married but it is possible that he met and married her on Martha's Vineyard. According to one source Robert inherited three quarters of an acre from his father's estate at the time of his marriage<sup>5</sup> and sometime before 1664 he and Sarah moved back to Salem Town. Whether Robert and his bride built a new house or moved into the one built by his father in the late 1630s is unknown. It seems reasonable that as the eldest son he would have inherited his father's house and likely that he would have improved the existing structure rather than tear it down and start anew. It is probable that Robert continued his trade as a weaver during the early years of the marriage. It would not have been possible to earn a living by farming three quarters of an acre of land but there would have been sufficient area for Sarah to have a kitchen garden and it is probable that she did. In April 1664, Robert was granted twenty acres from the undisposed town lands.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that he farmed or raised sheep on these acres and combined that with his weaving to support his growing family. However, in 1692 he was still referred to as a weaver.

Robert and Sarah had nine children, at least two daughters, Bethia and Deliverance, died before their tenth birthdays and two later daughters were given the same names.<sup>7</sup> If all of the remaining seven lived to adulthood, it is possible that five children between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine might have been living at home when Sarah was arrested for witchcraft. Elizabeth, aged 29, married in 1703. It is not known if this wedding that took place when she was forty-one was her first marriage. The second daughters named Deliverance and Bethia would have been 18 and 16, respectively, and it is likely that

they were unmarried at the time of their mother's arrest. The two younger sons, Isaac, aged 20, and Nathaniel, 13, almost certainly were at home. Isaac was not married until 1697 but had started paying the real estate taxes on the Pease property in 1693.<sup>8</sup> Several sources claim that Robert Pease was also accused of witchcraft and was jailed with Sarah.<sup>9</sup> If this were true Robert may have been in jail at the time the taxes were required, and Isaac as the oldest son at home paid them. It may also have been that his parents turned over the ownership of the land to their son as a precaution against losing it if they were found guilty of witchcraft.

The site of the house occupied by Robert and Sarah is now 62 Central Street, Peabody. It was called Garp or Gape Lane in 1680 and then changed to the King's Highway in 1694.<sup>10</sup> Although this area was a part of Salem Town in 1692 it is located about midway between the Salem Town center and the Salem Village center. It was an important spur road that connected the main street of Salem Town and the Ipswich Road, the commercial highway of the Village. The house was torn down in 1739 and the only description of it exists in the record of its sale in 1712. It was purchased "to improve as a schoolhouse for the education of our children."<sup>11</sup> The eleven men who made the purchase agreed to adapt one of the rooms immediately to keep the house in good repair. This indicates that there was more than one room. It is possible that it was similar to the two neighboring houses that were sold by Robert's brother John in 1682. Both of these sturdily-built houses lasted well into the nineteenth century. One of them was described in 1838 as an old salt-box and the other was large enough in the 1850s to be occupied by two families.<sup>12</sup>

The design of a house and the size and arrangement of the rooms followed a standard during that time. Some of the houses on this block of present day Central Street could date from that year. Their new clapboards and modern windows disguise but do not obliterate their steep-roofed profiles or the convention of having the narrow end facing the street. The original house of John Ward built in Salem in 1684 consists of two large rooms on the ground floor with their chambers above. The rooms measure about twelve feet by fifteen feet and fifteen feet by fifteen feet. The double-sided fireplace forms part of the wall separating the rooms with the larger cooking hearth extending into the smaller of the two rooms. It is likely that the original Pease house was such a hall and parlor structure and that later an addition was added giving it the characteristic lines of a salt-box.

Robert's father died in 1644 just ten years after his arrival in the new world and it is unlikely that he had the opportunity to add on to his home. Their mother, Marie, Robert, and his brother John were the beneficiaries of the will left by their father. Robert as the oldest son was to inherit six pounds and John, the second son, three pounds. Marie inherited the remainder of the estate worth 34 pounds 12 shillings sixpence.<sup>13</sup> There is no record of when Marie died but it is likely that Robert as the first son would have inherited the old homestead at her death. Perhaps it was this that brought him and his wife Sarah back to Salem from Martha's Vineyard.

No will is extant for Robert Pease when he died sometime after 1713 but if he did inherit his father's home it is likely that some of the items listed in the father's inventory would have been used by Robert and Sarah. Perhaps the kitchen items, "on(e) iron and iron kettle and a posenett and two pewter dishes with other small things of pewter," remained in the house and were used. There appeared to be very little furniture in the house in 1644: a flock bed and some

coverings, a small rug, a chest and a "little table board."<sup>14</sup> It is probable that most items remained and were used twenty years later along with the items Robert and Sarah brought with them. Robert also inherited a "lesser chest" from his grandmother, Margaret Pease, when she died in 1644.<sup>15</sup> He may have used it during his apprenticeship, his time on Martha's Vineyard, and it is possible that it also was used by his family when they lived in Salem. Certainly by the 1690s their house had been enlarged to meet the needs of their family and more furniture would have been acquired. Robert's nephew John, who lived nearby until his departure for Enfield, Connecticut in 1680, was a joiner. It is possible they may have purchased furniture made by him and perhaps they were given or bought pieces that John and his family could not move to Enfield. By 1692 Sarah would have had a permanent table, possibly a trestle table, in addition to the "small table board." She would have had forms and probably a couple of chairs. In 1700 seventy-eight percent of inventories in Essex County listed chairs and the average number was nine chairs.<sup>16</sup> Sixty percent of these same inventories list table linens and as a weaver's wife perhaps she had some. Additionally it is likely that by 1692 Sarah had a bedstead and its dressings, a joined chest, a cupboard, a trammel and several iron pots and pans, trenchers, a few earthenware or wooden dishes or bowls, several spoons, a butter churn, some candlesticks, a spinning wheel, and perhaps a Bible.<sup>17</sup> Robert, of course, would have had a loom, and probably his father's "musket with bandileer," his sword, and tools.<sup>18</sup>

The tax records from the 1680s and 1690s list Robert's rates as among the lowest in his district. The fact that he did pay some taxes shows that he and Sarah were not paupers but it also indicates that they were not among the settlers along the Ipswich Road who were profiting from the Salem seaport's business boom.

Each season had its own chores that were added to the normal cooking, firebuilding, washing, midwifing, and so forth that were done throughout the year. Spring was a particularly busy time for a weaver and his family. Sarah surely had a kitchen garden. Normally it would have been planted in early May with vegetables such as carrots, cabbage, pumpkins, squash, onions, turnips, potatoes, and lettuce. An herb garden planted with thyme, tarragon, dill, marjoram, rosemary, mint, and others would be used in cooking and in medicine.<sup>19</sup> Robert or his sons Isaac or Nathaniel would have plowed the ground but it was up to Sarah and her daughters to plant and cultivate the raised beds. Spring was also the time for shearing the sheep and washing the wool. If Robert kept sheep on the twenty acres granted to him in 1664 he would have been busy with shearing or, if he cultivated that land, it would have had to be plowed and planted.

Wool, whether shorn from their own sheep or acquired from neighbors, had to be washed, carded, spun into yarn, and then wound on quills before it could be woven on the loom.<sup>20</sup> Surely Sarah and her children helped in all these operations. Sarah certainly held a central position in the family, combining the roles of housekeeper, wife, and mother. The rapidity with which wives were replaced after death indicates not the dearth of feelings between spouses but the vital part that each partner played in the economic and social well-being of the family. To have a wife removed from the family by death, imprisonment, or other means was a financial hardship as well as an emotional loss.

How much the tension of the Spring of 1692 affected Robert and Sarah and the routine of their life is difficult to say. They were located on the busy highway that connected Salem Town with the Ipswich Road. With travelers passing

their house daily carrying news of the town and colony they could not help but be aware and concerned about the witchcraft that was possessing their town and afflicting their neighbors. Sarah's own four daughters, Elizabeth, 29, Mary, 25, Deliverance, 18, and Bethia, 16, were the same age as the afflicted girls and must have known them personally. It would be interesting to know her reaction to the hysteria. Perhaps, knowing how impressionable young girls could be, she might have believed as John Proctor did that the afflicted only needed to be disciplined and kept busy at home. On the other hand, she might have been fearful that the afflictions which seemed to be spreading would in time affect her own children.

It was not her daughters who were affected but herself when Sarah Pease was accused of witchcraft and arrested on May 23rd, 1692. A variety of reasons have been put forth as to why certain people were accused. Boyer and Nissenbaum have indicated that some of the accused witches have some common characteristics. A few were considered outsiders, either because they actually lived outside the Village area or because they were newcomers to the Village and were not accepted for some reason. Others of the accused were mobile. It was a common belief in the early part of the century that God had ordained the social and financial status of each person and one should be satisfied with it. Although the society was much more fluid by the end of the century, particularly in Salem Town, there was some resentment towards those moving up on the social scale. Of course, those being adversely affected by this movement would be most likely to complain of it. The afflicted girls came mainly from the families that were most threatened by this new mobility. Others of the accused lacked proper deference to their social superiors.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to these reasons family ties seem to have played a part. When one person in a family was accused it was likely that others in the family would be also. This can be seen in the accusations of Sarah and Dorcas Good, John and Elizabeth Proctor and their children, Giles and Martha Corey, William, Deliverance, and Abigail Hobbs, the Towne sisters, the Bishops, the Jacobs, and others. Some had been accused before and perhaps were actually practicing witchcraft. Others may have had a physical affliction or a strange appearance and thus readily came to mind when the afflicted girls were looking for witches. Many of the accused were middle-aged or elderly women. In this close society all older women were given the authority and responsibility of mothers.<sup>22</sup> The generation gap that often finds some friction between mothers and daughters may have been imposed on these surrogate mothers.

The reason or reasons Sarah was accused is not clear although she may have fit into several of these categories. Her place of birth and residence until her marriage is unknown. She may have met and married Robert Pease on Martha's Vineyard and come to Salem as a stranger and never been fully accepted. Although their location along the Gape Road that connected the Ipswich Road and Salem Town was potentially an ideal one, they did not seem to have benefited financially from it. Perhaps being in close proximity with those along the Ipswich Road who were looking to the town rather than the village for their economic, social, and religious leadership put the Peases into this threatening group. This busy location provided much opportunity for conversation with travelers, and remarks heard at the Pease home could easily have been carried to the village center. If Sarah was sceptical of this outbreak and uttered a derogatory remark or a defense of an accused neighbor it might have been passed on to one of the girls and she become suspect.

The family connection with other witches is a possible one. Several sources, including a Pease family history, state that in addition to Sarah, Robert and his sister-in-law Mary Hobbs Pease were also accused of witchcraft.<sup>23</sup> There are no legal documents extant that support this but if it is true, Mary Hobbs Pease may be a link to Sarah's involvement. It is not known if Mary was a member of the Topsfield Hobbs family that included three accused witches, William, Deliverance, and Abigail, but there certainly is that possibility. If Mary was indeed the sister of Abigail, William and Deliverance had the unenviable lot of having two strange daughters. Abigail was known for her eccentricities such as sleeping in the woods before her arrest and she admitted to being a witch during her examination.<sup>24</sup>

Mary Hobbs Pease also pleaded guilty to the charges of witchcraft,<sup>25</sup> but this was not her first time in the public eye. She married Robert's brother Nathaniel in 1668. Although her husband was living, her name is repeatedly entered into the town records as being kept by Sarah Thorne at the expense of the town during 1685 and 1686. On July 12, 1686, Goody Thorne was given five shillings of a promised ten shillings "for Indeauring To gett Goody peas out of the towne."<sup>26</sup> The records are not specific about what made Mary undesirable but anyone troublesome enough to be encouraged to leave town in 1686 would certainly be a prime candidate in the accusations of 1692.

It is certain that Mary and Sarah were sisters-in-law. There is a possibility that the relationship may have been even closer. Sarah named two of her daughters Deliverance, a name that had not been used in the Pease family up to this time or used again for a century afterward. Deliverance Hobbs, the wife of William and mother of Abigail, was also accused of witchcraft and it is possible that she might have been a relative of Sarah who was remembered in the naming of the Pease daughters.

Perhaps none of these reasons had anything to do with the accusations against Sarah. It might just have been that a woman in her mid-fifties who had worked hard all her life as the wife of a weaver and a mother of nine fit the mental image some of the girls had of a witch and she was cried out against.

She was accused on Monday, May 23, 1692 of "sundry acts of Witchcraft, committed on the bodys of Mary Warren, Abigaile Williams and Eliz Hubbard."<sup>27</sup> She was accused along with Benjamin Procter and Mary Derich. A warrant for her arrest was issued and she was arrested that day. The following day was set aside for examinations and the proceedings were recorded by Nathaniel Cary of Charlestown. He and Mrs. Cary had come to observe and to face Mrs. Cary's accuser, Abigail Williams. He writes of the prisoners, one of whom surely was Sarah Pease:

*The Prisoners were called in one by one, and as they came in were cried out of, etc. The prisoner was placed about 7 or 8 foot from the Justices, and the Accusers between the Justices and them; the Prisoner was ordered to stand right before the Justices, with an Officer appointed to hold each hand, least they should therewith afflict them, and the Prisoners Eyes must be constantly on the Justices; for if they look'd on the afflicted, they would either fall into their Fits, or cry out of being hurt by them; after Examination of the Prisoners, who it was afflicted these Girls, etc., they were put upon saying the Lords Prayer, as a tryal of their guilt; after the afflicted seem'd to be out of their Fits, they would look steadfastly on some one person, and frequently not speak; and then the Justices said they were struck dumb, and after a little time would*

*speak again; then the Justices said to the Accusers, "which of you will go and touch the Prisoner at the Bar?" then the most courageous would adventure, but before they made three steps would ordinarily fall down as in a Fit; the Justices ordered that they should be taken up and carried to the Prisoner, that she might touch them; and as soon as they were touched by the accused, the Justices would say, they are well, before I could discern any alteration. . . .<sup>28</sup>*

Sufficient evidence must have been found against Sarah because she was sent to Salem jail on May 25th, 1692.

Even though more than fifty people had been accused between February and the end of May, no trials had taken place because Massachusetts was between governments and the legal jurisdiction of the courts was in question. On May 14th the newly appointed Governor, William Phips, arrived in Boston and one of his first acts was to order that irons be put on the accused witches to prevent them from further afflicting the girls. Sarah, then, was confined to an overcrowded "loathsome dungeon" as Margaret Jacobs described it in a prison letter to her father<sup>29</sup> and was chained with leg irons weighing about eight pounds.<sup>30</sup> The irons and her board charges of two shillings five pence per week were charged to her family as was the practice of the time. She had but eight days to ponder her fate before the trials started. On June 2nd Bridget Bishop was tried by the newly formed Special Court of Oyer and Terminer. She was found guilty and sentenced to death. When Goody Bishop was returned to the dungeon after that verdict it must have sent tremors of fear through the prisoners and their families. She remained with the other prisoners in the close quarters of the jail until her execution one week later. It would be interesting to know how the other prisoners reacted towards her: with sympathy and kindness or fear and recrimination. Bridget Bishop was a special case, however. There was more evidence of her being a practicing witch than of any of the other accused. Perhaps most of her fellow prisoners expected this verdict and would have agreed with it if they had been on the jury. Spectral evidence, so controversial and damning in other cases, was not needed in this one.

The court did not sit again until June 30th when five people were tried. It is not known why these five were chosen. The trials were not progressing in the same order as the accusations and this must have caused further tension among the prisoners. They could be called at any time. The outcome of these trials must have been even more devastating than that of Bridget Bishop. All five were condemned and all were found guilty on spectral evidence. If this were true for these five than there was no hope for the others. The most celebrated of this group was Rebecca Nurse, a respected church member and the matriarch of a hard-working, prospering family. Although they lived within the village, the Nurses kept their membership in the Salem Town church. The Peases, belonging to the same church and living less than two miles from the Nurses, surely must have known them. If they were no more than acquaintances before the Spring of 1692, two months in the Salem dungeon must have intensified the relationship between Rebecca Nurse and Sarah Pease.

The despair that was felt in the Salem jail during the summer is hinted at in the letter written by John Procter to the Boston clergy a few days after the execution of Rebecca Nurse and her four companions. He was asking for a change of venue because he believed that all the prisoners had been condemned in Salem before they even went to trial. Certainly Sarah felt this same fear and agreed with her neighbor. John, his wife Elizabeth, and four others were found guilty on August 5th and all except Elizabeth were hanged two weeks later. Elizabeth

was pregnant and was given a reprieve so that her innocent child would not die also. Under other circumstances Sarah might have aided her neighbor during childbirth at her home. Perhaps she did act as a midwife when Elizabeth's baby was delivered during their confinement in prison. One wonders what kind of aid or support the prisoners were giving each other at this time. There is some evidence of concern among the prisoners. Mary Esty, for instance, wrote a letter shortly before her execution petitioning the magistrates to re-examine their procedures and save other innocent people.<sup>31</sup>

On August 5th at the trial of George Jacobs, Sr., John DeRich testified against numerous people, Goodwife Pease among them. He said that she and others had threatened to tear him in pieces if he did not sign in the Devil's book. Again in September when John DeRich was giving testimony against Giles Corey he said that Sarah Pease pinched him and afflicted him several times.<sup>32</sup>

Since every person who was tried either confessed or was found guilty, Sarah must have known that to be called for trial was tantamount to a conviction and a sentence of death. To know that her name was coming before the judges reminding them of her existence and accusing her of continued activities on behalf of the devil must have added to her anxiety. In September the court increased its activity by holding two sittings and condemning fifteen people to die. It must have been with considerable relief that Sarah learned that the court had adjourned for the month of October. By this time also the sympathy of many town people had been transferred from the afflicted girls to the accused. This had started with the executions on August 19th of George Burroughs, John Procter, and John Willard who impressed many as being sincere, Christian, and innocent and continued with the hangings of Mary Esty and seven others on September 22nd.<sup>33</sup>

The court had been set up to clear the jails of witchcraft and the town of witchcraft. Neither had been accomplished by the time the court recessed in October. As winter approached families worried that their loved ones in prison would die not at the gallows but from the terrible conditions in the dungeon, which was located on a cold windy hill on the edge of an ocean inlet. Petitions from the prisoner's families told of the hardships endured by the accused in the lack of food and coldness of the weather. They also explained that the "exceeding great Charges and expenses. . . expected of us . . . which if put all together our familys and estates will be brought to Ruin."<sup>34</sup> They asked that the prisoners be released on bond to their families. By December the petitions had become more urgent informing the Governor of "the extream danger the Prisoners are in of perishing."<sup>35</sup>

The petitions to free the prisoners for the winter were not granted but Governor Phips did set up a new court of judicature with strict instructions that no one was to be convicted by spectral evidence. The new trials began in early January and only those who confessed were found guilty and they were promptly granted a reprieve by the Governor. Fifty-two prisoners were tried and discharged from prison.

In May, 1693 the Governor issued a general pardon and freed all the remaining prisoners provided that their fees were paid.<sup>36</sup> It must have been at this time that Sarah was freed after almost exactly a year in prison. Let us hope that her homecoming was a joyful occasion. The year was certainly a horrendous experience for Sarah but it must have been very difficult for her family also. Worry about Sarah, fear that they too might be cried out against,

and perhaps even some doubts about their mother's character may have been emotions felt during that time. Financially the year must have been devastating. Not only did they lack the physical presence of one very important family member, but they had to pay for her expenses in prison as well. In 1711 the General Court of Massachusetts reimbursed the prisoners or their survivors for expenses incurred in connection with their imprisonment. Robert Pease petitioned for and received thirteen pounds and three shillings.<sup>37</sup> This substantial amount of money must have been a tremendous burden for a weaver on the lower rungs of the economic ladder. In comparison, his taxes for the year 1692 were ten shillings.

Sarah lived at least another twelve years. It would be interesting to know if she ever returned to the First Church of Salem to hear the Rev. Nicholas Noyes, the pastor who had been so instrumental in prosecuting the accused witches and so adamant about excommunicating the condemned. Perhaps she found more comfort in the church of Salem Village led by the new pastor, Joseph Green. One wonders if she might have been in church when he asked the congregation to revoke the excommunication of Martha Corey or if she were in attendance when any of the afflicted girls made her confession and asked forgiveness.

In 1709 Robert Pease "owned the covenant" and joined the First Church of Salem.<sup>38</sup> He, at least, had forgiven and made his peace with the Rev. Noyes. It is not known if Sarah was still alive at this time.

With the Rev. Green's guidance and the forgiveness of many of the accused and their families, Salem slowly returned to the more normal concerns of everyday life. After twenty years the terrors of the witchcraft episode had been reconciled as much as possible. Most of the victims had received some financial compensation, the excommunications had been rescinded, and the General Court had reversed the attainders on many of the victims. Two new parishes, Middle Precinct and Rial Side, were established in the areas originally most opposed to the Village Church and a school was established that would occupy the children more profitably than the sessions conducted by Tituba twenty years before. The first school in what is present day Peabody was established in 1712 and was located in the old Robert Pease house. That a school would be located in a building that was home for almost half a century to a woman accused of witchcraft was proof itself that the delusion had dissipated and that Sarah Pease had finally received full exoneration.

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The above article was written in celebration of the 350th Anniversary of the Pease Family in America, descendants of John and Robert Pease who sailed from Ipswich, England on the ship "Francis" on 30 April 1634 and settled in Salem, Mass.)