From Witch Cakes to Blood Wine: The Flavor of the Salem Witch Trials

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**Josh Hutchinson:** As Sarah Good stood to be executed on July 19th, 1692, Salem's junior minister, Nicholas Noyes, prodded her to confess.

**Sarah Jack:** Instead, she said, "you are a liar. I am no more witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life, God will give you blood to drink."

**Josh Hutchinson:** Welcome to *The Thing About Salem.* I'm Josh Hutchinson.

**Sarah Jack:** And I am Sarah Jack. Food and drink became evidence of evil throughout the Salem Witch Trials.

**Josh Hutchinson:** And today we're gonna talk about some of the interesting foods that were consumed or otherwise utilized during the Salem Witch Trials.

In our recent episode on oomancy, we heard about how an egg was used to divine the future. It could be [00:01:00] a myth that it was Abigail and Betty.

 Oomancy was supposedly the cause of Betty Parris and Abigail Williams' afflictions, but there's no evidence for this in the *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* or any of the contemporary writings that were produced about the trials. It's said, though, in this legend, that Betty and Abigail freaked out about the coffin that they saw in the glass, and that caused them to suffer the afflictions that came upon them that were the impetus for the witch trials.

When you read Reverend Hale's account of the Venus Glass, it doesn't really match the lives of Betty and Abigail at all, so we don't know who did it.[00:02:00]

That's very true.

I think a lot of, as well, our episode really talked about how, how much divination was going on in the community.Yeah, there were probably other eggs and other glasses that we don't know about.Reverend Hale, *in A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft,* only referred to an afflicted girl. He didn't say who it was. He just said it was one girl, so he didn't really leave a lot of clues except that they were dead, this person who did this egg and glass divination, was no longer living by 1697 when John Hale died.

**Sarah Jack:** And he said, let that be a lesson.

**Josh Hutchinson:** Yes. Let that death be a lesson to all of you folks.

Yeah, so we'll, we'll move on to the next strange food. I don't [00:03:00] know how strange is this one? It's pretty strange. Mary Sibley, a neighbor of the Parris household, and Tituba and John, wanted to help the girls when the pastor and his wife were out for the evening, and they made a very special cake out of rye and pee from Abigail and Betty, and they fed it to the dog. That's what we call a witch cake. It's not in the records as a witch cake, it's just in the records as a cake, and it was supposed to reveal the witch, and the girls did start accusing after this cake. That is when the accusations began, the day after the cake was baked, and then Samuel Parris, the minister of Salem Village, blamed this incident for raising the devil in the community.

**Sarah Jack:** In in her afflictions, Abigail was one who painted a very colorful story of what was [00:04:00] happening at a witch's sabbath, who was there and what they were doing, and the food there was blood wine and red, brown, or white bread. Yeah, and sometimes they substituted sack or cider instead of the usual red wine, but Abigail Williams said that they witches told her that they were using the afflicted girls' blood in the bread and the wine. In her confession, Ann Foster said that she was carrying cheese and bread in her pockets and having a picnic by a brook with her fellow witches.

**Josh Hutchinson:** On the way to the Sabbath, they had to stop and have a snack.

**Sarah Jack:** So

**Josh Hutchinson:** It just like any road trip.

**Sarah Jack:** yep, just pull the cheese outta your pocket.

**Josh Hutchinson:** Mm-hmm.

 Samuel Endicott testified about an incident that had happened 11 years [00:05:00] before the Salem Witch Trials. He was on a sea voyage commanded by Captain Samuel Smith of Boston, and Mary Bradbury came to Boston and sold the captain 2 firkins of butter. One of these firkins went so bad after three weeks at sea that the sailors could not eat of it. They said it stank and it was full of maggots. This led them to believe that Mary Bradbury was a witch, and apparently it seems like rumors of her witchcraft were already well known in Massachusetts by the time of this incident in about 1681. Samuel Endicott testified that basically, in hindsight, it seemed like a whole host of troubles experienced by the crew were the result of Bradbury's witchcraft. First, there was a violent storm. It took out the main [00:06:00] mast, the rigging, and 15 horses, poor horses.

Then a ship came alongside, this sounds like piracy to me, and basically took some of the parts from the ship, some rigging and some other parts, and they just took off with it.

Then the ship managed to get to its destination, Barbados. They unloaded it, took those goods to market, reloaded with new goods to take back to Boston, and they immediately sprung a leak while they were in harbor, and they lost several tons of salt, among other things.

Then as they're coming back to Boston, the captain orders Samuel Endicott to go up and look for land and instead, [00:07:00] he sees 2 separate halves of a woman. He looks to one side and sees the legs of a woman, and then he gets shaken and he looks behind him and he sees the top half of the woman. Very strange. Maybe he had too much butter.

**Sarah Jack:**

**Josh Hutchinson:** And one of the other interesting uses of food that I found in the records of the Salem Witch-Hunt has to do with a poppet. So on July 4th, 1692, the magistrates were examining an enslaved African woman named Candy, who was owned by Margaret Hawks, and the magistrates asked Candy to bring in the instruments that she used to afflict people, her poppets. So she brought in a handkerchief wherein several knots were tied, some rags of [00:08:00] cloth, a piece of cheese, and a piece of grass. She was compelled to eat the grass, and later that night she felt a burning sensation, but we don't know what they did with the cheese.

**Sarah Jack:** The magistrates compelled her to eat it.

**Josh Hutchinson:** The magistrates compelled her to eat a piece of grass, and they tested her rags by burning one and dunking one in water. It was a very weird episode.

**Sarah Jack:** There was a story from April 4th in 1692 in the testimony of Mary Edwards that back in December of 1691, Rachel Clinton came to the Edwards house. Mary was making blood puddings, and Rachel said she really, really, really, really [00:09:00] wanted some pudding.

Rachel said blood pudding is very good food. Mary gave Rachel a blood pudding, but when Rachel received this, she received it scornfully and rushed out of the house muttering. In January and February, then the Edwards livestock died, including five eight-week-old piglets.

**Josh Hutchinson:** Another curious item on the menu was damnation. At Rebecca Nurse's examination on March 24th, 1692, her principal accuser, Ann Putnam Sr., asked her, how often have you eaten and drunk your own damnation, which is a reference to taking communion while also being a devil, as Samuel Parris had labeled all of the witches devils and said, you cannot [00:10:00] be a devil and come to communion. You damn yourself.

**Sarah Jack:**

**Josh Hutchinson:** So recently we did an episode about moldy bread in Salem Witch Trials, and that has to do with the theory that convulsive ergotism caused the symptoms experienced by the afflicted people. And so this theory just says that they ate bad rye that had this ergot in it and got really sick and started behaving strangely, but the symptoms don't match up to what is recorded in the records.

Why we keep repeating that the ergot theory is not a good explanation is because it really oversimplifies the very complicated factors that really contributed to the witchcraft accusations and the whole [00:11:00] witch-hunt itself. It's just trying to reduce it to one simple explanation when it's very complicated. There were hundreds and hundreds of people involved, and they all had different motivations. You can't just say, oh, it's the bread, and think that you're done with explaining the Salem Witch Trials.

**Sarah Jack:** Well, so many of the triggers to these confrontations that were happening between the community members are really clear to us and in the records, it's not obscure.

**Josh Hutchinson:** This was a lot of really interesting food that year that made it into this story.

Definitely. And we already mentioned Sarah Good's words at the beginning, and we wanna just circle back to that, because blood is another of the interesting drinks that [00:12:00] gets thrown around quite a bit in the Salem Witch Trials records, it's blood wine that they're drinking at the Witches' Sabbaths. It's sometimes bloody bread that they're eating at the Witch's Sabbaths and Sore Goode.

Says to minister Nicholas Noyes, "you are a liar. I am no more a witch than you are a wizard. And if you take away my life, God will give you blood to drink."

**Sarah Jack:** And that account comes from Robert Calef, a contemporary.

**Josh Hutchinson:** So what was Sarah talking about? Was she talking about blood from the Witches' Sabbath?

 She was actually referring to a biblical verse, Revelation 16:6, in the King James Version of the Bible says, "for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets and thou has given them blood to drink for they are worthy." [00:13:00] This is referring to an apocalyptic plague that god sends out to punish sinners by turning rivers and springs, the water, into blood so that these people have literal blood to drink as punishment, and so this is basically saying that those who kill God's people will be killed as divine justice.

**Sarah Jack:** So her quote, it comes from scripture, but it was also made popular from Joseph Nicholson's 1660 tract, written in protest to the Massachusetts Bay Colony's execution of Quaker Missionaries.

 That tract was called *The Standard of the Lord Lifted up in New England,* and there's a quote that says, "you shall have blood to drink, who have shed innocent blood. And this is to you who have put the servants of the [00:14:00] living God to death." And that was speaking of these Quakers.

**Josh Hutchinson:** Well, the end of the story isn't just that Sarah said her quote and then was hanged. There is a legend that follows the story.

The records say that Reverend Noy suffered a brain hemorrhage in December 1718, and legend has it that he died coughing up his own blood, which would've given him blood to drink, like Sarah Good predicted 26 years earlier.

**Sarah Jack:** In Salem, food revealed the deepest fears and desires of a community tearing itself apart, where even a simple pudding could damn you and the difference between communion and witchcraft was simply who was serving.