



EXHIBITION UPDATE OF WITCHES: EVOLVING PERCEPTIONS

JULY 2020

Witches: Evolving Perceptions was created in 1999 in an effort to connect the history of the Salem witch trials with the broader definitions of witchcraft depicted in popular culture. This exhibit examines the European witchcraft trials, the evolution of the definition and iconography associated with the term “witch,” and the broader historical phenomenon of witch-hunting.

Updates to *Witches: Evolving Perceptions* began in the winter of 2018, with the creation of an expanded timeline of witchcraft history. This floor-to-ceiling display is a major focal point in this space. With the addition of color-coded panels and new images, this display illustrates the rise and decline of witch trials in Europe and its North American colonies. The next major alteration came in 2019, when a display case was added featuring a newly acquired first edition of L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Around this same time, several artifacts were also added to a display case highlighting the practice of folk magic, including a seventeenth-century bellarmine jug, children’s shoes found in the wall of a colonial New England home, and an early modern era horseshoe.

In an effort to remove dated scholarship and refresh the visual displays, a major interpretive update of this exhibit was completed in March of 2020. New narrations were created for three life size tableaux. Spaced throughout the room, three scenes portray different definitions of the witch– the historical crime of witchcraft, the stereotypical pop-culture witch, and contemporary Neopagan practitioners. In addition, a previous tableau featuring a pagan midwife was replaced with a new scene depicting two fictional women accused of witchcraft in the sixteenth century, during the peak of the European witch trials. Though closed to the public due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, over the next several months an audio tour was created for the new exhibit, which now assists with social distancing in this space.

On July 6, 2020, the exhibit was finally unveiled to the world when the Salem Witch Museum reopened to the public. This was accomplished through the hard work and creativity of many dedicated individuals. As travelers slowly begin to return to the city of Salem, we are extremely excited to welcome our visitors to the new and improved *Witches: Evolving Perceptions*. Though COVID-19 has altered our timeline, we have confidence we will be able to continue moving forward with our plans to update the entire museum in the years to come.

For additional information, please contact:

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