



The Untold Story of *Dorothy Good*, Salem's Youngest Accused Witch

Studying the lives of those ensnared in witchcraft trials is often sorrowful work.

The personal stories found in these records are filled with misfortune and suffering. Due to their intensity and ferocity, the Salem witch trials of 1692 are remembered today as the most infamous witch-hunt in North American history. In just over a year, nineteen people were hanged, one man was tortured to death, at least five died in prison, and between 150 and 200 were arrested. The stories of each of these victims is heartbreaking, but Dorothy Good's tale is particularly tragic.

At just four years old, Dorothy was the youngest person arrested during the Salem trials. Her mother, Sarah Good, was one of the first to be accused. Sarah, whose life had been shadowed by hardship, was an easy

target in 1692. Born in July of 1653 in Wenham, Massachusetts, Sarah was the daughter of John and Elizabeth Solart (or Soulart). Although she came from a prosperous family, Sarah experienced one calamity after another—the suicide of her father, a prolonged inheritance struggle, and the death of her first husband, Daniel Poole—which left her in a drastically reduced state. Her second marriage, to William Good, did not improve her circumstances, since she faced debt from her previous marriage and her new husband failed to support their family. Eventually forced to resort to begging, Sarah was known to mutter or curse at those who turned her away.

Records from 1692 paint Sarah Good as vitriolic. When Sarah was tried for witchcraft, there was no shortage of neighbors willing to testify against her and recount stories of past confrontations and allegations of malevolence. Unfortunately, Sarah's story was not unique; women who made others feel uncomfortable,



Rachel Christ-Doane is the Director of Education at the Salem Witch Museum. She holds a BA in History from Clark University and an MA in History and Museum Studies from Tufts University. She began working at the Salem Witch Museum in 2015 and has been the Director of Education since 2018. Within this role she engages in an array of research, curates the museum's exhibits, works with students and teachers, and creates educational programming.

broke with social conventions, or lived on the margins of society often attracted suspicions of witchcraft. These women were the unlucky scapegoats for any manner of misfortune.

Sarah and William's eldest daughter, Dorothy, was born in 1688. As the Good family did not have a permanent home, it is difficult to determine where her birth occurred. She may have been born in Salem Village (today Danvers), as the family had begged for alms in this area before 1692. Dorothy's earliest years were spent following her mother from house to house seeking charity.

On March 23, 1692, only a few weeks after her mother's arrest, a warrant was issued for Dorothy. She was questioned by local officials and admitted to having a little snake (thought to be a familiar, a witch's animal companion) given to her by her mother. This was taken as tantamount to a confession. By April 12, Dorothy was in prison in Boston.

Although initially jailed there with her mother and infant sister, Dorothy was eventually deprived of their company. In June, Dorothy's mother Sarah Good was taken back to Salem for trial. She was found guilty and executed on July 19. And, although the exact date and location are unknown, Dorothy's baby sister perished in the harsh prison conditions before her mother's hanging—the youngest known fatality of the Salem witch trials.¹ Dorothy was left to languish in jail in Boston as other witchcraft suspects came and went.² Prison records indicate Dorothy was in jail for a total of thirty-four weeks and four days, and finally released in December when the Salem witch trials were nearly over.³

Opposite page: Image created by Carolyn Oakley. Photograph of Sarah Good memorial marker in Salem, Massachusetts, by Cindy Lindow/Shutterstock. Below: Order to warn out Dorothy Good, September 5, 1720. Salem Town Records 1680–1729, vol. 3.

A 1710 petition for restitution submitted by William Good, Dorothy's father, hinted at the lasting impact of these events, describing his then 22-year-old daughter as "chargeable having little or no reason to govern herself."⁴ The phrase "chargeable" seems to indicate the financial burden of caring for such a severely traumatized person.

Information on colonial women's lives is often brief or nonexistent. In Dorothy's case, even her name was misidentified, the result of a magistrate erroneously referring to her as "Dorcas Good" early in 1692.⁵ Though later corrected in the court records, this mistake lingered for centuries. Beyond the limited yet disturbing description offered by her father's 1710 petition, nothing more has been known about the life of Dorothy Good—until now. In the spring of 2022, I found records which revealed previously unknown details about Dorothy Good, including the fact that she became a mother.

While conducting research for Salem's Women's History Day in 2022, I was directed by the city clerk to the eighteenth-century records of the Salem Town selectmen. At the time, I was researching Ann Dolliver, another woman accused of witchcraft in 1692. Much like Dorothy, Ann seems to have been a troubled person. In 1698, Ann's father, Reverend John Higginson, described her as "overbearing[ly] melancholy and crazed in her understanding." After her father's death, Ann was placed with a local family that was compensated by the town for her care.⁶

This was not an unusual arrangement. Colonial New England's relief system tasked individual municipalities with providing for the "deserving poor," assessed as such by local selectmen or board of overseers.⁷ Although the circumstances differed slightly from town to town, indigent individuals were commonly placed in private homes. These arrangements typically lasted a year, with the custodial families paid by the town to provide food, lodging, and clothing.⁸ While combing through the selectman's records in search of Ann Dolliver, I

A handwritten document in cursive script, enclosed in a rectangular border. The text reads: "At a Meeting of the Selectmen Septemb^r 5th 1720. Sundry Orders On the Treasurer &c To Supply the Wid^{ow}: Taply with ap^{pr}: of Sheets & lvo Shifts --- To give Const^{able} Benj: Ives & By Abatements --- 1:16:8 Sam^{uel}: Gold thrite hath approbation for being an Inholder Ordered That Doro^{thy}: Good be warn^{ed} out of this Town According^{ly} a Warrant is given to Const^{able} & Lord: Wilson

At a Meeting of the Selectmen, June 28. 16
 Ordered, The Treasurer pay unto Mr. John Flint one of the Selectmen
 of the Town of Concord, that Towns Charge, on Dorothy Good of this Town
 in June 1725, when she strayed hence & laid in there of a Bast Child 78-6
 Ordered, The Selectmen & Constables have made Choice of Miles
 Warden to be the Dealer of Weights & Measures in this Town
 Ordered, The Clerke of the peace having transmitted to the Selectmen
 a List of Innholders & Retailers, and said List having been considered the
 Selectmen do Except, Samuel Putnam, & Samuel Giddishwaite Innholders

Order for payment to Concord for Dorothy Good's expenses, June 28, 1726. Salem Town Records 1680–1729, vol. 3.

encountered references to many such unfortunate people, including Dorothy Good.

Evidently, William Good was either no longer willing or able to support his daughter as she grew older. The few details known about William do not paint a favorable picture of his character. Sarah and William Good were married by 1683, and during their marriage William provided little support for his family.⁹ When Sarah was charged with witchcraft in March 1692, William told the magistrates “he was afraid that she either was a witch or would be one very quickly” and described his wife as “an enemy to all good.”¹⁰

In June 1693, just under a year after Sarah's death, William remarried. Perhaps this marriage was out of necessity, as he was now the sole caretaker of his severely traumatized child. How long Dorothy stayed with her father and stepmother is unclear. A reparation payment awarded to William Good in 1712 directed the sum to Benjamin Putnam, for his “share of the necessary charge.”¹¹ Salem selectmen records reveal Dorothy had been living with Benjamin Putnam prior to 1712, as he was paid for her care as early as 1708.

Unlike his cousin Thomas Putnam, whose family was at the center of the witchcraft accusations, Benjamin Putnam remained largely outside the maelstrom. The scant evidence of his involvement is limited to his signature on a petition in support of accused victim Rebecca Nurse. Notably, Charles Upham's 1867 book, *Salem Witchcraft*, hints at an early familiarity between Benjamin Putnam and Dorothy Good.¹² In describing Dorothy's arrest, Upham noted the task was passed from the marshal to someone else, as he “did not, perhaps, fancy the idea of bringing up such a little prisoner.” Upham continued, “Whoever performed the service probably brought her in his arms, or on a pillion. The

little thing could not have walked the distance from Benjamin Putnam's farm.”¹³ This brief aside is puzzling. As the Goods had no permanent home, had Dorothy been temporarily taken in by Benjamin Putnam after her mother's arrest? Had Benjamin Putnam opened his home to Dorothy long before 1708? Unfortunately, the source of Upham's intriguing statement is unknown.

Regular payments issued by the Salem selectmen indicate Dorothy lived with Benjamin Putnam for at least seven years, from approximately 1708 to 1715. Following Benjamin's death, his son Nathaniel appeared before the selectmen in January of 1716 to receive his father's last payment. Dorothy Good then disappeared from the records for four years.

The next mention of Dorothy provides an unhappy glimpse into what transpired during this period. On September 5, 1720, the Salem selectmen ordered “That Doro Good be warned out of this town.”¹⁴ To “warn out” meant the town refused responsibility for a transient person (nonlegal inhabitant), forcing them to leave and seek support elsewhere. Two months later, on November 7, 1720, the town treasurer was ordered to “pay unto Nathaniel Putnam for 11 weeks keeping and nursing Doro Good and agree to allow him 20 shillings for keeping Good and child one month longer.”¹⁵

Apparently, Dorothy was warned out of Salem because she was pregnant. Colonial New England towns commonly warned out unwed mothers to avoid bearing the cost of caring for an impoverished mother and raising an illegitimate child.¹⁶ The town's payment to Nathaniel Putnam implies that Dorothy may have been able to avoid being sent away because he volunteered to take her and her child into his home.

Dorothy remained in the Putnam household for two years.¹⁷ In July 1722, her child was indentured to

Nathaniel. Such arrangements were common for the offspring of impoverished women. An indentured person worked as an apprentice or servant for a specified period of time and, in return, was housed, fed, clothed, taught to read, and trained in an occupation.

Although no records identifying the father of Dorothy's child have been located, the indenture agreement reveals other important details. Dorothy's child was a daughter, also named Dorothy.¹⁸ As was standard, her term of service was eighteen years, or until the time of her marriage, and she was to be trained as a domestic servant. In her indenture contract, Dorothy Jr. is described as "about a year and nine months," meaning Dorothy Sr. was about eight months pregnant when she was warned out, and likely gave birth while in the care of Nathaniel Putnam—or more accurately, his wife Hannah.

A month before Dorothy Jr.'s indenture was finalized, an agreement was made that had Dorothy Sr. moving into the care of Robert Hutchinson, Nathaniel's brother-in-law. It is difficult to say what happened next, as selectmen records from later in 1722 note that Dorothy Sr. was housed for a time in the House of Correction. Although the structure adjoined the Salem jail, this was not a prison but more akin to a workhouse. The House of Correction was where the selectmen would send able bodied people who "loiter [and] [or] misspend his

or her time, wander from place to place, or otherwise misorder themselves."¹⁹ An order for the creation of a house of correction was issued on June 4, 1722, meaning Dorothy was sent there almost immediately after its construction.²⁰

Dorothy remained in the House of Correction for eighteen weeks. After her release, she seems to have gone to the home of Robert Hutchinson; selectmen records show a payment to him "for three months keeping Doro Good."²¹ Following this record, she again disappeared from the records, this time for three years.

Dorothy reappeared in the records in 1725 when she was sent back to the House of Correction. Dorothy had become pregnant again, either just before she arrived at the House of Correction or during her stay. Robert Hutchinson seems to have played a part in Dorothy's release, although the extent of his involvement is hard to ascertain. Robert Hutchinson was paid in October 1725, "relating to the case of Doro Good, her being with child before he took her out of the House of Correction last spring and her having a child."²²

Subsequent records show Dorothy did not give birth in Robert Hutchinson's home in Salem, but instead about thirty miles west in Concord, Massachusetts. How and why she traveled to Concord is unknown, although both the Salem and Concord selectmen records agree that she gave birth in Concord in June 1725. Six months



Concord (left) and Salem are indicated on this early eighteenth-century map detail. Map of eastern Massachusetts and vicinity, circa 1711. Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center.

At a Meeting of the Selectmen, June 5th . . . 30

Sundry Orders on the Treasurer —

To pay unto Jon^a Batchelder for taking to apprentice Doro Good's Child 8:0:0
 To pay unto Geo Daland for the burying of y^e Wid^e Simson 1725 . . . 0:12:0
 To pay unto In^a Holliman for the Tison Stocks Laiting . . . 0:8:0
 To pay unto M^r Manning his Aced, for some repair to the Stock Houses &c. 3:3:4
 To give the Constables Unno 1726, & the 3^d pound for Collecting the Taxes
 Lt^e. Constable Thoro^{dike} Procter for Collecting, £ 133:14:9²³, \$ 1:13:5
 Theodore Atkinson — — — — — \$ 178:0:5 — \$ 2:4:6
 Benj^a Gray \$ 115:12:0 — \$ 1:8:10
 David Best \$ 105:19:0 — \$ 1:6:6
 Daniel Mackentive \$ 116:1:4 — \$ 1:9:0
 Skelton Felton \$ 70:17:9 — \$ 17:9
 Joseph Hulchinson \$ 126:15:7 — \$ 1:11:8²
 Sam^l Trask \$ 121:2:4 — \$ 1:1:3

Record of Jonathan Batchelder apprenticing Dorothy Good's child, June 5, 1727. Salem Town Records 1680–1729, vol. 3.

later, Concord selectmen issued a payment to Nathaniel Billing for the “entertaining and nursing of Dorothy Good in her lying in at his house.”²³ The Salem selectmen eventually issued payments to Concord to cover these costs.

Over the next several years, Dorothy and her second child were shifted from one house to another. After initially returning to Salem and living with Robert Hutchinson, they soon moved in with his son John Hutchinson Jr. This arrangement did not last long, as John died a year later, necessitating yet another move.²⁴ This time, Dorothy and her son were taken in by Jonathan Batchelder.²⁵ This particular arrangement is striking, as Jonathan Batchelder gave testimony against Sarah Good during the witchcraft trials. Both Jonathan and his uncle gave depositions describing a confrontation with Goodwife Good at the home of Zachariah Herrick in 1690. Fearing she would light his barn on fire with her pipe, Zachariah (Jonathan’s uncle and a relative of Sarah Good) refused her lodging. As Sarah left, she purportedly grumbled that this would cost him. Fourteen-year-old Jonathan testified that a week after this altercation his grandfather’s cattle appeared to be different, younger animals who “let loose in a strange manner.”²⁶

What motivated Jonathan Batchelder to take in Sarah Good’s daughter and grandchild can only be left to speculation. Perhaps he felt guilt and sought repentance. Perhaps he was motivated by Christian charity or empathy for a poor soul. In April 1727, one month after their arrival, Dorothy’s nearly two-year-old son was indentured to Jonathan Batchelder. His term of service was

21 years, as was standard for males, and he was to be trained as a housewright. The record of this indenture reveals this child’s name was William, almost certainly named for Dorothy’s father.²⁷

Dorothy lived with her son in Batchelder’s home for a little more than a decade. Although this was her longest consecutive period in one household since childhood, the selectmen records hint at Dorothy’s unsettled nature and the difficulty of supporting her. When Jonathan initially arranged to take her into his home, he not only agreed to provide lodging, food, and clothing, but also “to keep the said Doro Good from straying and rambling about as formerly.”²⁸ Six years later, Jonathan was paid for “the extraordinary expense” of keeping Dorothy Good.²⁹ Unfortunately, it is impossible to gauge the true situation through these brief statements. As with Ann Dolliver, these brief notations provide little information about Dorothy’s actual condition. At the very least, the records indicate she required considerable care and seemed to have had a habit of wandering away.

The last reference to Dorothy Good in the Salem selectmen records was made in September 1738. If Dorothy’s absence from subsequent records is due to her leaving the Batchelder household, her departure may have occurred because of a decline in Jonathan’s health, as he died two years later. No further accounts or references to Dorothy or either of her children have yet been found. Neither Dorothy Jr. nor William are listed in Massachusetts vital records. As William was thirteen at the time of Batchelder’s death and had eight years left in his indenture contract, he probably remained with the Batchelder family, perhaps taken in by Jonathan’s eldest



New London (bottom) and Salem (top) are shown on this map detail. Herman Moll, *A New and Exact Map of the Dominions of the King of Great Britain on ye Continent of North America* (London: Tho. Bowles, 1755). Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center.

son. Dorothy Jr. likely completed her indenture term, and either married or remained a spinster and worked as a domestic servant.

Although the deaths of other people supported by the town were recorded in the Salem selectmen records, Dorothy Sr.'s death was not listed—so perhaps she died elsewhere. Like many other transient people, Dorothy might have spent the rest of her life wandering from town to town after she left Batchelder's home. While perhaps entirely circumstantial, Dorothy Sr. disappeared from the records the same year her daughter's indenture was up. It is tempting to speculate the two women left Salem together.

On August 14, 1761, a notice published in the *New-London Summary* reported that a woman identified as Dorothy Good was found dead in a bog meadow in New London, Connecticut. In the days that followed, a newspaper in New York and two in Boston republished the notice. The report, printed identically in each newspaper, read "Friday last was found lying in a desolate bog meadow in the North Parish of this town, the dead body of a person almost consumed. Upon inquisition made, the jurors gave in their verdict, that it was the body of one Dorothy Good, a transient vagrant person, who had wondered [sic] into said desolate place and perished. After their judgment was taken, as decent a burial was given her as the circumstances would admit."³⁰

In the twenty-three years since Dorothy Sr. presumably left Salem, she could have wandered as far as New

London. Given that no further records of her daughter have yet been found, the deceased could also have been Dorothy Good Jr. Colonial New England vital records indicate the Good surname was not particularly common.

This research has shone further light on the lasting impact of the witchcraft trials on the youngest accused witch—and revealed a glimmer in this dark story. Sarah Good, previously believed to have no descendants beyond her two daughters (one of whom died as an infant), has now been revealed to have two grandchildren. Although further research is required to determine if the line continued to another generation, Dorothy Jr. and William may have lived to adulthood and perhaps had children of their own. It is remarkable to consider that Sarah and Dorothy Good might yet have descendants alive today. ♦

NOTES

- ¹ The exact date of Dorothy Good's sister's death is unknown. An April record lists two blankets provided for Sarah Good's daughter, meaning she was alive and in prison with her mother in Boston in early April. When William Good later submitted a petition for restitution, he noted, "A suckling child died in prison before the mother's execution." "Account for Payment Submitted by John Arnold, Jailkeeper [?]" and "Petition of William Good for Restitution of Sarah Good, Dorothy Good, & Infant" in Bernard Rosenthal, ed., *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 814, 871.

- ² Suspects were transferred between the four Essex County jails (in Salem, Boston, Cambridge, and Ipswich) throughout the witchcraft trials. The account kept by the Boston jail keeper indicates that at least a dozen witchcraft suspects were brought to Boston's jail the month before Sarah Good's execution and remained there until December. "Account for Payment Submitted by John Arnold, Jailkeeper," [note 1], 817.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ "Petition of William Good for Restitution for Sarah Good, Dorothy Good, & Infant," in Bernard Rosenthal, ed., *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* [note 1], 871.
- ⁵ According to historian Bernard Rosenthal, "The 'Dorcas' came from a common problem of people not knowing the name of the accused, especially the first names of females. When the error was caught in 1692 it was corrected to 'Dorothy.' And even though almost every surviving document refers to her as Dorothy, the error of Dorcas came through the ages as her name." Bernard Rosenthal, "Introduction," in *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* [note 1], 38.
- ⁶ John Higginson, "Letter from Rev. Higginson to his Son Nathaniel Higginson, August 31, 1698," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, vol. 43 (1907): 183; catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000681568.
- ⁷ Anne Decker Cecere and Eric Nellis, eds., *The Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2006), 19; colonialsociety.org/node/3083#ch02.
- ⁸ Douglas Lamar Jones, "The Transformation of the Law of Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts" (paper presented at *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630–1800*, The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, November 1981); colonialsociety.org/node/893#ch03.
- ⁹ Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-By-Day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege* (Lanham: Cooper Square Press, 2002), 13.
- ¹⁰ "Examinations of Sarah Good, Sarah Osborn, & Tituba, as Recorded by Ezekiel Cheever," in *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* [note 1], 127.
- ¹¹ "Petition of William Good for Restitution for Sarah Good, Dorothy Good, & Infant," in *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* [note 1], 871.
- ¹² Charles W. Upham (1802–1875) was a minister of the First Church of Salem, U.S. Representative from Massachusetts, and noted Salem historian. Unfortunately, like many of his contemporaries, Upham did not use citations, making it impossible to identify some of his sources—in this case the assertion that Dorothy Good was arrested at the home of Benjamin Putnam.
- ¹³ Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2000), 364.
- ¹⁴ Salem, Massachusetts, Town Records 1680–1729, vol. 3, 373; records.salem.com/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=235110&dbid=0&repo=CityofSalem.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 374.
- ¹⁶ Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 17.
- ¹⁷ Born in 1686, Nathaniel Putnam was two years older than Dorothy. At the time Dorothy and her child joined his household, Nathaniel and his wife had five children under the age of ten. Eben Putnam, *A History of the Putnam Family in England and America* (Salem, Mass.: The Salem Press Publishing and Printing Co., 1891), 129; catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100331622.
- ¹⁸ DeWayne Whitehead, *Compiled List of Indentured Servants in Essex County, Massachusetts*, (1999), at Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Rowley, Massachusetts.
- ¹⁹ *The Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, Volume 1, 1692-1714* (Boston, Wright & Potter: 1869), 67; archive.org/details/actsresolvespass9214mass/page/n5/mode/2up
- ²⁰ Essex County (Massachusetts) Prison Records, 1688–1858, MSS 341, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Rowley, Massachusetts.
- ²¹ Salem Town Records 1680–1729, vol. 3 [note 10], 387.
- ²² Ibid., 402.
- ²³ "Lying in" was a common term that referred to giving birth and the subsequent period of recovery. *Ancient Records Volume II*, Concord, Massachusetts, 313; concordmass.archives.starter1ua.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_d855cf27-f04a-4abf-9136-e57ee1d467b3.
- ²⁴ Salem Town Records 1725–1773, vols. 4–5, 17, records.salem.com/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=235111&dbid=0&repo=CityofSalem.
- ²⁵ His name is also spelled Batchelor.
- ²⁶ "Deposition of Henry Herrick & Jonathan Batchelor v. Sarah Good," in *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* [note 1], 424.
- ²⁷ DeWayne Whitehead, *Compiled List of Indentured Servants* [note 18].
- ²⁸ Salem Town Records 1725–1773, vols. 4–5, 25, 33; records.salem.com/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=235111&dbid=0&repo=CityofSalem.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 180.
- ³⁰ *The New-London Summary*. August 14, 1761. Connecticut State Library, Connecticut State Archives Archival Record Group #003, box 44, Hartford, Connecticut; ctstatelibrary.org/connecticut-state-archives-archival-record-group-rg-003.