

Salem Witch Trials - 1692 Salem - Economic and Social Divisions - DiscoverySchool.com

In 1692, Salem was divided into two distinct parts: Salem Town and Salem Village. Salem Village (also referred to as Salem Farms) was actually part of Salem Town but was set apart by its economy, class, and character. Residents of Salem Village were mostly poor farmers who made their living cultivating crops in the rocky terrain. Salem Town, on the other hand, was a prosperous port town at the center of trade with London. Most of those living in Salem Town were wealthy merchants.

For many years, Salem Village tried to gain independence from Salem Town. The town, which depended on the farmers for food, determined crop prices and collected taxes from the village. Despite the three-hour walk between the two communities, Salem Village did not have its own church and minister until 1674.

But there was also a division within Salem Village. Those who lived near Ipswich Road, close to the commerce of Salem Town, became merchants, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and innkeepers. They prospered and supported the economic changes taking place. But many of the farmers who lived far from this prosperity believed the worldliness and affluence of Salem Town threatened their Puritan values. One of the main families to denounce the economic changes was the Putnams—a strong and influential force behind the witchcraft accusations.

Tensions became worse when Salem Village selected Reverend Samuel Parris as their new minister. Parris was a stern Puritan who denounced the worldly ways and economic prosperity of Salem Town as the influence of the Devil. His rhetoric further separated the two factions within Salem Village.

It is likely that the jealousies and hostilities between these two factions played a major role in the witch trials. Most of the villagers accused of witchcraft lived near Ipswich Road, whereas the accusers lived in the distant farms of Salem Village. It is not surprising that Reverend Parris was a vigorous supporter of the witch trials, and his impassioned sermons helped fan the flames of the hysteria.