

Salem, MA: Witch Category Does It Go In?

[I've actually had this on the back burner for 7 years!! But, hey! The subject matter is 312 years old anyway!]

I have a Salem, MA, cover in my Towns collection, but do I also need one in my Famous Places collection? Does a cover from modern Salem actually represent a "famous place"? Salem certainly capitalizes on its history and thus pushes itself as a famous place, so should I? Questions like this keep me up at night.

"Three centuries ago, Salem's townspeople hanged 19 people and pressed another to death in the mistaken belief that they were witches. Today, Salem thrives on that horrifying example of misdirected witches. Witches are big business here [*Salem*]. There's a Witch House, a Witch Dungeon Museum, a Wax Museum of Witches, a Witch Trials Memorial, a Museum of Myths and Monsters, a Witch Village, even a Witch Stop Deli. The local newspaper prints a red witch in its masthead every day, and witch doodads decorate just about every shop window." *[...Am I being unduly sensitive here, or is all this akin to making an amusement park out of Auchwitz?]*

"It all started with two girls who began to fall into trancelike states and spoke in tongues. The village doctor couldn't figure out what was wrong with them, so his diagnosis was...they had been bewitched!

That started the witch hunt. The girls implicated a slave named Tituba and two other women, who were promptly brought to trial. More girls began acting strangely and the thing escalated. Neighbor testified against neighbor; one man testified against his own wife. The first hanging took place in June 1692; others quickly followed. One man was pressed to death as men piled stone after stone upon him in an attempt to make him confess.

The madness lasted about a year, encouraged by fear and ignorance.

"Eventually, the girls admitted they had faked their bewitchment, but not before 20 falsely accused people were dead and dozens of other lives were ruined. Years later, the Massachusetts legislature authorized payments to the families of the witch-trial victims.

All this history is your for the reading in Salem guidebooks and brochures, but if you want your witch lore dramatized, Salem is happy to cast its spell on you. The Witch Dungeon Museum re-creates a witch trial of one of the accused, Sarah Good, and takes you on a tour of replicated prison cells. The Salem Witch Village examines the myths and facts about witches and witchcraft from medieval times to the present, while the Museum of Myths and Monsters explores the supernatural. The Wax Museum of Witches and Seafarers expands its sorcery into a sound and light show.

The Witch House, the restored home of one of the witch-trial judges, Jonathan Corwin, is a more authentic reflection of the period. It presents an accurate picture of a Salem home of the 1600s without any gimmicks."

*[Ed. Note: I'm as open-minded as the next guy, but I think this is sick!]
[Quotes are from *The Sacramento Bee*, p. 6, October 26, 1997]*

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