

Witchcraft and Hauntings Research at the Bridgeport History Center



by Meg Rinn, Assistant Archivist
Last updated December 2019

Conducting witchcraft and hauntings research at the Bridgeport History Center

Colonial New England's witch trials are a perpetual source of fascination and curiosity, as are more local hauntings over the years. Bridgeport was home to the Lindley Street poltergeist haunting in the 1970s, which saw a mass media frenzy over the strange incidents, and there were a few colonial era witch trials in Fairfield County.

While the Bridgeport History Center has few original documents related to these events, it does have a host of secondary resources that provide great information for gaining context and understanding the events and their cultural context. This guide is divided into two parts: witchcraft trials and hauntings.

Witchcraft Trials

The study and understanding of witch trials in Europe and colonial New England has endured for centuries, as well as gone through various cycles of understanding the *causes* of these events. Some eras focus on gender exclusively, others look to environmental factors (such as ergot being responsible for the events at Salem, Massachusetts), and dozens of other explanations. These cycles have a tendency to make works seem unfortunately dated because of their preoccupation with one particular factor. Whenever possible, the secondary works that display this particular bias have been noted. The material below focuses primarily on Connecticut trials, rather than the whole of New England. Those seeking wider information are advised to look at the resources in the Connecticut State Library's research guide, as it includes Massachusetts trials.

Primary sources

[Records of the colony or jurisdiction of New Haven, from May, 1653, to the union. Together with New Haven code of 1656, p. 77-88](#)

The original copy of the Records of New Haven are held at the [Connecticut State Library](#). A transcript copy is available online. The material related to the Goodwife Knapp trial is located on pages 77-88.

[RG 000, Samuel Wyllys Papers, 1663-1728](#)

Held at the Connecticut State Library and available online, the papers contain original documents regarding witch trials in the state. Refer to the Tomlinson books in this research guide for exacting information about the documents.

Secondary works

Connecticut State Library. [Research Guide to Colonial Witchcraft Trial Materials at the Connecticut State Library](#). Undated

Published by the Connecticut State Library, this research guide includes some sources listed here, as well as listings of where primary documents reside. It also includes extensive information on Massachusetts colony trials, which this research guide does not.

Karlsen, Carol F. [The devil in the shape of a woman : witchcraft in colonial New England.](#) (1987).
New York : Vintage Books 133.40974 K18d

This excellent overview of the whole of New England witchcraft takes a particular focus on the role that gender played in accusations. While focusing wholly on gender in witch trials has since fallen out of fashion among historians, it is still a major factor and this book illuminates it.

Marcus, Ronald. ["Elizabeth Clawson ... thou deservest to dye": An account of the trial in 1692 of a woman from Stamford, Connecticut who was accused of being a witch](#) (1976). Stamford, Connecticut: Stamford Historical Society. 133.4 C6616m

This case study focuses on the trial and execution of Elizabeth Clawson in Stamford, offering a solid perspective on how these trials worked on a case-by-case level.

Taylor, John M. [The witchcraft delusion in colonial Connecticut, 1647-1697.](#) (1908.) New York : Grafton Press. 133.43 Taylor

One of the most important parts of this particular text is that it contains reproductions of primary documents used in several of the witch trials at the start of the book. While Taylor focuses on the trials in Connecticut, the book strives to provide an overview of the history of how the events of the colonial era came to pass, including looks at European trials. Please be aware that some information and perspectives may now be outdated. [It is also available online.](#)

Tomlinson, Richard G. [Witchcraft trials of Connecticut : the first comprehensive, documented history of witchcraft trials in colonial Connecticut.](#) (1978) - 345.746 T659w

An earlier version of the book listed below, this book lists almost all the primary sources and their locations in Connecticut.

Tomlinson, Richard G. [Witchcraft Prosecution: Chasing the Devil in Connecticut.](#) (2012.)
Rockland, ME : Picton Press. 345.74 Tomlinson

This recent publication attempts to give a history of witch trials in the state, as well as an overview of nearly every trial and what happened within. The appendices contain biographies of major players, overviews of primary document sources, and additional helpful information.

Hauntings

Written works about hauntings tend to reveal if an author is a true believer, a skeptic, or somewhere in between. In order to provide accurate information about an author's bias, their

skepticism is included in resource descriptions when possible. Please note that in the case of material written by and relating to Connecticut natives Ed and Lorraine Warren, there is additional controversy related to how skeptical an author or authors may be. The Bridgeport History Center is aware that there are strong opinions about their careers, and strives to offer access to all perspectives.

Primary sources

[ARC 001308 -- Lindley Street Haunting](#)

The BHC ARC files represent small archival collections that do not have enough material to be a standalone collection. This file in particular relates to the poltergeist activity on Lindley Street during the 1970s, which centered on a young girl. Ed and Lorraine Warren were heavily involved in trying to cast out this poltergeist. Composed of newspaper clippings, this material relates how newspapers interpreted the events of Lindley Street in real time. For additional information, refer to the listing for William J. Hall's book under secondary works on this page.

Secondary works

Brittle, Gerald. [The Demonologist: the extraordinary career of Ed and Lorraine Warren](#). 2002.

Lincoln, NE : BackInPrint.Com. 133.42 Brittle

This biography of Ed and Lorraine Warren heavily quotes the Warrens themselves and provides their perspective on their careers as paranormal investigators. It very heavily favors their version of events, and so those seeking more skeptical opinions are not well served by this particular text.

Carter, Donald. [Connecticut's Seaside Ghosts](#). (2008.) Atglen, Pa. : Schiffer Pub. Ltd. 133.1 Carter Covering the whole of Connecticut's coast line, Carter's text offers excellent photographs and history of the locations that he focuses on. It is written in first person.

Hall, William J. [The World's Most Haunted House: the true story of the Bridgeport poltergeist on Lindley Street](#). (2014.) Pompton Plains, New Jersey : New Page Books. 133.12 HALL

This comprehensive overview of the Lindley Street poltergeist haunting lays out a well-researched timeline of events. As many horror films draw inspiration from these events, this particular text offers a skeptical view of events and extends empathy to the young woman who was at the center of events.

Warren, Ed and Loraine. [Various titles available in the catalog](#).

The published writings of Ed and Loraine Warren contain their perspective on various occurrences they have been involved in. They are credulous on the topic of hauntings, demons, and the like and bring a religious perspective.