

Gateway Family Historian

A PUBLICATION OF THE ST. LOUIS PUBLIC LIBRARY



Vol. 11, No. 2, 2011



Welcome to the thirtieth issue of *Gateway Family Historian*. This special issue's focus is a topic of wide interest: witchcraft trials and witch hysteria in colonial New England.

PLEASE NOTE: *Gateway Family Historian* is now a bi-annual publication.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Page 3 **Help!!**

Page 4 **Chronology of Witch Hysteria**

Page 5 **Books on Witch Hysteria and Witch Trials**

Page 6 **Site Seeing**

Page 7 **Our Town Events**

Page 8 **Contact**

Where Did European Witch Hysteria and Witch Trials Occur?

The bible for witch hunters, the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*, was first published in 1486. One expert, Anne Barstow, believes that prior to the year 1500 there were fewer than 500 witchcraft executions. Between 1500 and 1650, however, she estimates that approximately 100,000 witchcraft suspects were executed in Europe.

Where exactly were the European persecutions occurring?

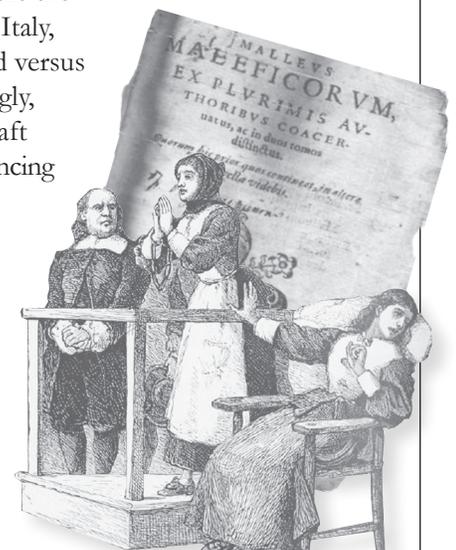
- Holy Roman Empire: Accused (100,000+); Executed (50,000+)
- Poland: Accused (30,000+); Executed (15,000+)
- France: Accused (10,000+); Executed (5,000+)
- Scandinavia & Russia: Accused (5,000); Executed (1,500-1,800)
- Spain: Accused (3,687); Executed (100+)
- Scotland: Accused (3,069); Executed (1,337)
- Italy: Accused (2,200+); Executed (0)
- England & Wales: Accused (2,000); Executed (1,000)
- Hungary: Accused (1,600); Executed (472)
- Colonial New England: Accused (334); Executed (35)
- Ireland: Accused (0); Executed (0)

It should be noted that roughly half of those accused of practicing witchcraft were later executed. Significant exceptions were the British North American colonies, Spain, and Italy, where much lower ratios of persons executed versus persons accused are in evidence. Unsurprisingly, it appears that places with the fewest witchcraft executions were also places that were experiencing minimal amounts of religious upheaval.

Charges Commonly Leveled Against Accused Witches

- Causing drought/hail or other bad weather.
- Causing breast milk to dry up.

continued on page 2



- Causing infertility/stillbirths/ deformities/other birth issues.
- Causing others to engage in adultery or other licentious behavior.
- Causing others to have “fits”/ be possessed.
- Causing plagues and illnesses (or curing them with “witches’ brews”).
- Setting fires or killing livestock/pets through magical means.
- Harming/eating Christian children.
- Commanding their familiars (companion animals) to harm/spy on others.
- Taking on the form of an animal (usually a cat, dog, hawk, or snake).
- Creating charms/potions using herbs or other plants.
- Cursing/denouncing God/Jesus/Christianity.
- Having “witch marks” on his or her body (warts, moles, third nipple, etc).
- Signing the *Devil’s Book*/ performing sexual acts with the devil/suckling the devil through means of a “witch mark.”

- Flying to and/or attending witches’ sabbaths.

- Openly performing spells or rituals.
- Unwillingness to confess to being a witch or performing witchcraft.

Sequence of Events in a Typical New England Witch Trial

NOTE: This sequence could end at any point during this process because the accused could flee the area, escape from jail, or be found not guilty.

- Accusation: One person accused another of being a witch.
- Formal Complaint: Sworn before magistrate.
- Indictment/Presentment: Grand jury returned “true bill.”
- Trial Before Judge/Jury: Types of evidence allowed varied by time period.
- Verdict: Guilty or not guilty.
- Sentencing: Usually death for convicted witches.
- Execution of Sentence: Persons convicted as witches in New England were hanged, not burned, because witchcraft was considered a civil, not an ecclesiastical, offense.

Evidence Commonly Allowed at New England Witch Trials

During New England witch trials, five main types of evidence were allowed by trial judges:

1. Physical evidence, such as effigies, images, or charms made by the accused in an effort to cause harm to a potential victim.
2. Witch marks (for example, unusual physical features which could be used to suckle or nourish the devil).
3. Self-incrimination, whether obtained voluntarily or through torture.
4. Accusations against others, whether obtained voluntarily or through torture.
5. Spectral evidence (for example, testimony of a witch’s intended



victim that a spectral body projected by the witch was the cause of his or her torment).

Were New England Witch Trials Fair?

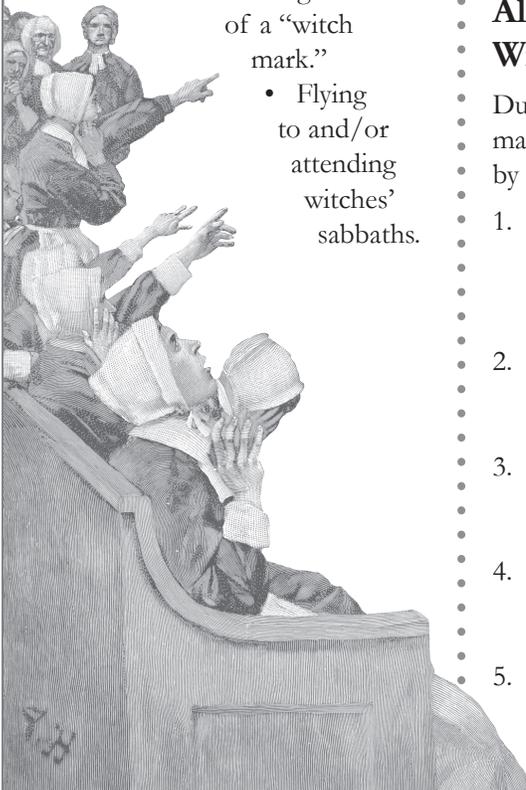
Although being tried for an imaginary crime is inherently unfair, the New England witch trials generally (except those at Salem Village) were conducted in a relatively fair and impartial manner. We know this because few New England witch trials ended with a conviction and even fewer with an execution.

We have some record of the legal proceedings for 134 New England witchcraft accusations (excluding the 1692 Salem trials). These proceedings involved 108 women and 26 men. In 96 of these cases a complaint was filed against the accused, while no further action was taken in 31. Interestingly, 26 of those 31 accused persons sued their accusers for slander. Four confessed to the charges against them, and three managed to flee to parts unknown.

Of the 96 cases in which a complaint was filed, 61 proceeded to trial. In those cases, 39 persons were acquitted, 21 were convicted, and one escaped during trial proceedings.

Of the 21 cases that ended with a conviction, 16 individuals were

continued on page 3



executed (12 percent of the 134 accused persons for whom extensive records exist).

How Were the Salem Witch Trials Different From Other New England Witch Trials?

The Salem judges showed little skepticism regarding the admissibility of spectral evidence. Belief in the reality of supernatural evidence hinged on three wobbly assumptions:

1. A witch could send a spectral double that could torment persons of the witch's choosing.
2. This spectral double could be sent directly by the witch or the devil with the witch's assent.
3. Victims of supernatural violence could see their spectral tormentors, act as reliable witnesses to that torment, and

correctly identify the source of that torment.

The Salem judges also showed a remarkable willingness to accept testimony by obviously disturbed children and young adults.

Why Did the Salem Witch Trials Happen?

Possible explanations offered by commentators include:

- Punishment by God for the sins of backsliding Puritans.
- Power-hungry clergymen and law enforcement officials.
- Play-acting by bored/sexually repressed children and teenagers.
- Socio-economic conflicts between rival families/settlement of old family feuds.
- Ergot poisoning (contaminated rye bread).
- Mental illness of some accusers and accused.

- Mass hysteria induced by frequent Indian attacks and great economic uncertainty.
- A conservative village taking care of its "outsiders" in dramatic fashion.
- A powerful expression of the ongoing conflict between science and the revealed truth of religion.
- Some accused persons actually did practice witchcraft (what we would call folk magic or folk medicine).

The most likely explanation is that a perfect storm of circumstances occurred and a majority of the above explanations played some part in the trials and executions at Salem. ❖



Help!!

Help!! provides an opportunity for our readers to ask for assistance with genealogical queries. See the Contact section below for e-mail and postal addresses. Please put GFH-HELP!! in the subject line

Q: Who was Giles Corey

A: Giles Corey was the Salem witch who was not hanged; he was pressed to death. Pressing was reserved under English common law for an accused person who refused to enter a plea to a criminal charge. The accused was stripped, forced to lie down in a shallow pit, and his body covered with a large board. The sheriff and his deputies then placed heavy stones on the board until the accused person either entered a plea or died from asphyxiation or crushing.

Giles Corey suffered in silence under this treatment for two days before succumbing to his torture. The only times he uttered a sound were

when he said, "More weight," apparently in hopes the sheriff and his assistants would add enough weight to kill him.

It has been speculated that Corey refused to enter a plea to the witchcraft charge to ensure that his family would inherit his property. The property of a person convicted of witchcraft was usually confiscated by the government, and Corey wished for his two sons-in-law to inherit his farm. Numerous persons had already been convicted and hanged at Salem, and Corey knew that conviction was a virtual certainty if he pled not guilty and was tried for witchcraft.

For more information about Giles Corey visit http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/sal_bcor.htm



A Chronology of Witchcraft Hysteria and Witch Trials in Europe

906 – *Canon Eposcopi*, a collection of church laws, declares that belief in witchcraft is heretical—i.e., contrary to the “revealed truth” offered by God to humanity (and helpfully interpreted for laypersons by the Church).

1022 – A group of mystics who deny key tenets of Christianity are burned as witches in Orleans. Contemporary Christian writers branded them as devil worshippers who indulged in orgies and ritual murders of Christian children (a standard accusation against dissident groups then and now).

1204 – Crusade against Cathars begins in earnest by Simon de Montfort. Cathars were a threat to Catholic Church because they believed that spirit is good, flesh is evil, and in renunciation of wealth and sensuality. Cathar clergy (perfecti) wandered village to village spreading their doctrine. Fate of Cathars is important to the study of witch trials because it is an indicator of social and religious unrest when witch hysteria first began to take hold (see also 1244).

1231 – Conrad of Marburg appointed first Inquisitor of Germany. During his reign of terror, he claims to have uncovered many nests of “devil worshippers,” and adopts the motto: “We will gladly burn one hundred if just one of them is guilty.”

1244 – Montsegur, stronghold of the Cathars, breached by Inquisitors. Two hundred five Cathars burned alive as punishment for heresies.

1280 – First appearance of an image of a witch riding a broom.

1320 – Pope John XXII authorizes Inquisition to begin prosecuting persons accused of sorcery and witchcraft.

1398 – University of Paris theology faculty declare that all forms of magic or divination involve some sort of pact with the devil and are thus heresy.

1428 – Witch trials of Briançon, in the Dauphin. Some 167 local people burned as witches between 1428 and 1450 (France).

1484 – Bull of Pope Innocent VIII (*Summis Desiderantes*) authorizes Jakob Sprenger, Dean of Cologne University, and Heinrich Kramer, both Dominican monks, to systematize and categorize persecution of witches.

1486 – Publication of *Malleus Maleficarum* (Witch Hammer) by Sprenger and Kramer: a manual for witch hunters (Germany) that runs to 40 editions. Sprenger and Kramer hold that all witchcraft springs from carnal lust.

1488 – A Papal Bull calls upon European nations to rescue the Church because it is “imperiled by the arts of Satan.”

1490 – King Charles VIII issues edict against fortunetellers, enchanter, and necromancers (France).

1515 – Five hundred persons reported burned for witchcraft in Geneva, Switzerland, during 12-week period.

1532 – Issue of the Carolina Code. Formally authorizes use of torture and death as punishments for witchcraft. Code adopted by the 300-odd small independent states that comprise the Holy Roman Empire.

1542 – Statute of Henry VIII against witchcraft—the first official English statute against witchcraft (England).

1557 – Toulouse witch trials: 40 witches burned (France).

1563 – Statute of Queen Elizabeth against witchcraft (England). Johan Weyer writes *De Praestigiis Daemonum*. This book describes his belief that witches are merely mentally disturbed old women and that it is the belief in witches that is caused by Satan. Weyer forced to leave the Netherlands, and book denounced by Church authorities.

1566 – The first Chelmsford witch trials (England). First witch trial to occur in a secular court in England and results in first woman being hanged for witchcraft (Agnes Waterhouse).

1580 – Jean Bodin, French judge, publishes *Daemonomanie des Sorciers* that condemns witches. According to Bodin, those who denied the existence of witches did so because they were themselves witches.

1590 – The North Berwick witch trials begin when alleged coven of witches is exposed in 1590-91, resulting in Scotland’s most celebrated witch trials and executions. King James VI (who later became James I of England), a devout believer in witches, took part in the proceedings.

1597 – Publication of *Demonology* by James VI of Scotland. Twenty-four persons burned as witches in Aberdeen, Scotland.

1604 – James the First’s statute against witchcraft provides death penalty for anyone convicted of witchcraft (England). The statute notes that accused witches are sometimes “loathe to confess without torture.”

1617 – Twenty-seven persons burned as witches in Aberdeen, Scotland.

1618 – Start of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) during which witch hunting throughout Germany reaches its height.

1631 – Publication of *Cautio Criminalis* by Friedrich von Spee opposing witch hunts (Germany).

1632 – Death of the Prince-Bishop of Bamberg marks end of terrible persecutions in that large principality (1609-1632—Germany).

1645 – Matthew Hopkins, the Witchfinder General, and Chelmsford witch trials result in 29 accused witches being hanged (England).

1652 – Accused witch burned in Geneva, Switzerland.

1655 – Last execution for witchcraft in Cologne, where persecution is less widespread.

1662 – The Bury St. Edmunds witch trials (England).

1679 – Ninety-seven accused witches burned on orders of the Archbishop of Salzburg (Austria).

1679-1682 – The notorious Chanibre d’Ardent Affair: Louis XIV’s star chamber investigates poison plots and hears evidence of widespread corruption and witchcraft. More than 300 people arrested; 36 executed. Affair ends with royal edict denying the reality of witchcraft and sorcery. (France)

1684 – Alice Molland is the last person executed for witchcraft in England (at Exeter).

1712 – Jane Wenham of Walkern in Herefordshire is last person convicted of witchcraft in England.

1722 – Last execution for witchcraft in Scotland.

1736 – Repeal of Statute of James I of England (1604).

1745 – Father Louis Debaraz is the last person executed for witchcraft in France (at Lyons).

1775 – Anna Maria Schweigel is the last person officially executed for witchcraft in Bavaria, Germany.

1782 – Last witches burned in Switzerland.

1787 – All witchcraft laws in Austria repealed.

1836 – Accused witches involved in dunking ordeal are drowned near Danzig, Poland.





Books on Witch Hysteria and Witch Trials in New England

The St. Louis Public Library's genealogical collections provide a host of materials covering witchcraft trials in Europe and colonial New England. For example:

1. Essex Institute. *Essex Institute Historical Collections*. Vols. 1-46 and *New Series*, Vols. 1-4. Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1859-1910. Central Stacks, 974.4. Index, Vols. 1-40, Genealogy Room, 974.4.

Collections of histories, genealogies, records, papers, letters, and much more relating to Salem and Essex County, Massachusetts.

2. Foulds, Diane E. *Death in Salem: The Private Lives Behind the 1692 Witch Hunt*. Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot, 2010. Genealogy Room, 133.4309744.

Biographical sketches for each of the accusers, so-called witches, clergymen, and judges in the Salem Witch Trials provide clues as to why they became involved in the tragic events.

3. *Genealogical Research in New England*. Ralph J. Crandall, ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1984. Genealogy Room, 929.374.

Compiled by a former Director of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, this guide provides a discussion of the records, collections, and repositories available for genealogical research in each of the six New England states.

4. Hoffer, Peter Charles. *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Central Stacks, 345.7445028.

The author, a legal and social historian, offers a fresh look at the numerous causes of the breakdown in family, social, religious, governmental, and judicial structures that helped fuel the mass hysteria of the Salem Witch Trials.

5. *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. Boston: New England Historic and Genealogical Society, Volume 1, 1847 to present. Central Stacks, "P" Current issues and indexes, Genealogy Room.

The Library owns the entire run of this esteemed magazine. Includes many articles on the ancestry of witches and other figures in the Salem Witch Trials. The magazine is indexed in *PERSI (Periodical Source Index)*, which is available via *Heritagequest*, a genealogy reference database available to SLPL cardholders.

6. Perley, Sidney. *The History of Salem, Massachusetts*. 3 vols. Salem, MA: Sidney Perley 1924. Central Stacks, 974.4.

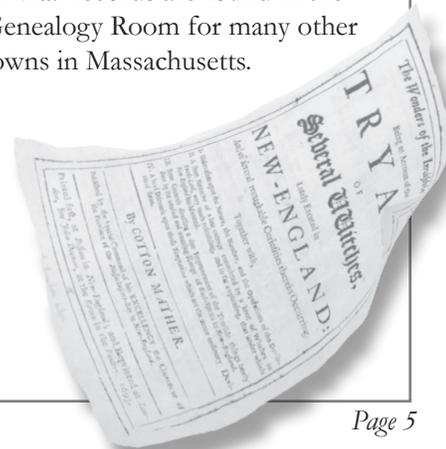
An extensive history of Salem includes genealogies of the early planters and settlers. Volume 3 contains an account of the "witchcraft delusion." Includes signatures of many of the subjects of biographical sketches as well as photos and drawings of Salem buildings and homes.

7. *Records of Salem Witchcraft, Copied From the Original Documents*. Roxbury, MA: Privately printed for W. Elliot Woodward, 1864. Genealogy Room, 133.4 and Rare Books and Special Collections, 133.4, Vols. 1 & 2.

Contains various records for each accused "witch," including oaths, warrants for jurors, warrants for the arrests of witchcraft suspects, summons for witnesses as well as the courtroom examinations, testimonies, and indictments. Original wording and spelling of these documents is produced verbatim.

8. Salem, Massachusetts. *Vital Records of Salem, Massachusetts to the End of the Year 1849*. 6 vols. Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1916-1925. Genealogy Room, 929.3774 ESSEX.

Records of births, marriages, and deaths are listed under each category. Records are taken from town clerks, churches, courts, cemeteries, and family Bibles. The source is given for each entry as well as dates and parents' names for births. Relationships are noted in the death records. Similar sets of vital records are found in the Genealogy Room for many other towns in Massachusetts.





SITE SEEING



Websites with information on colonial New England and European witch trials.

Cyndi's List: Unique People & Cultures—Witches

www.cyndislist.com/unique-peoples/witches/

Links to 11 info-packed websites, some of which focus on the Salem Witch Trials. Jumpstart your research on high-flying ancestors with a trip to *Cyndi's List*!

Associated Daughters of Early American Witches

www.adeam.us/

Members are living female descendants of people accused, tried, convicted, and/or executed for witchcraft in the American colonies prior to January 1, 1700. Includes a list of approved ancestors and sources of further information.

A Brief History of Witchcraft Persecutions Prior to Salem

<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/witchhistory.html>

A concise history of early witchcraft persecutions and trials.

Famous American Trials—Salem Witchcraft Trials

<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/salem.htm>

Numerous court documents, biographies, maps, and images concerning these infamous trials.

List of People Executed for Witchcraft

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_executed_for_witchcraft

Lengthy list of persons in Europe and North America executed after conviction as witches.

Salem Witch Museum

www.salemwitchmuseum.com/about/

A virtual tour of sites associated with the trials; helpful Salem Witch Trials FAQs; plus an online store offering books and collectibles associated with the Salem Witch Trials and colonial New England witch trials generally.

Salem Witch Trials—Documentary Archive and Transcription Center

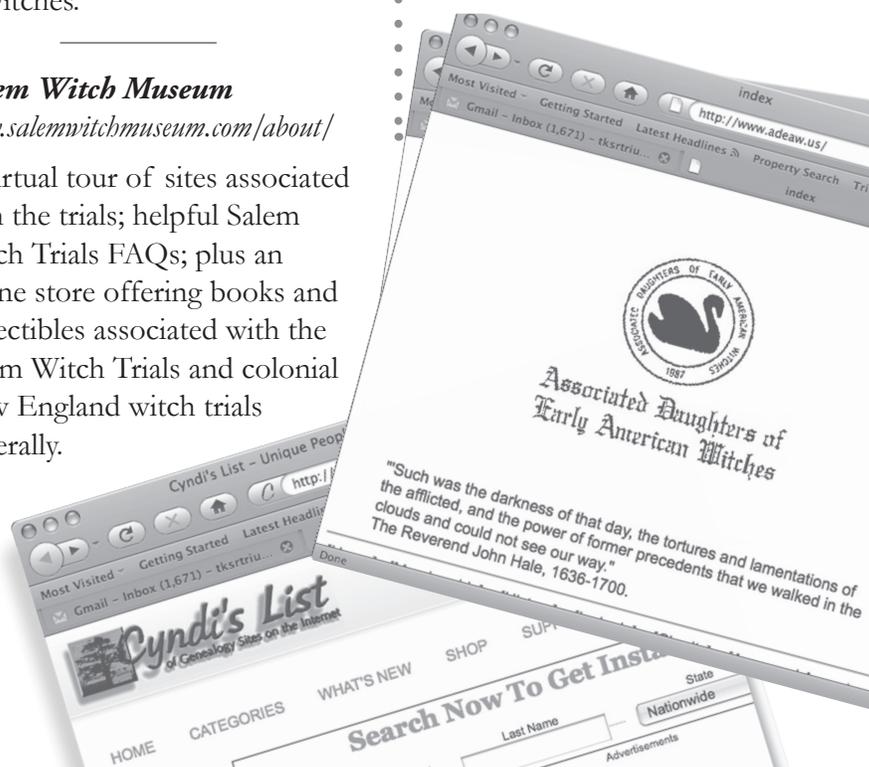
<http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/home.html>

Digital archive of court records, historical maps, contemporary books about, and literary fiction dealing with the Salem Witch Trials.

The Witch Trials in Europe

www.localhistories.org/witchtrials.html

A basic but nicely done history of European witch trials, 1500-1790.





Persons Hanged as Witches at Salem Witch Trials

Most of the convicted witches at Salem died in three mass hangings. Only Bridget Bishop was alone on the gallows. Giles Corey was pressed to death with heavy stones for refusing to enter a plea to a witchcraft accusation.

Hanged on
June 10, 1692

Bridget Bishop

Hanged on
July 19, 1692

Sarah Good
Elizabeth Howe
Susannah Martin
Rebecca Nurse
Sarah Wildes

Hanged on
August 19, 1692

George Burroughs
Martha Carrier
George Jacobs, Sr.
John Proctor
John Willard

Hanged on
September 22, 1692

Martha Corey
Mary Easty
Alice Parker
Mary Parker
Ann Pudeator
Wilmot Redd
Margaret Scott
Samuel Wardwell

We Could Use Your Help, Too...

The St. Louis Public Library loves to help so many genealogists. We are sometimes asked if there is anything you can do to help us. If you would like to support the Library, consider donating a copy of your printed family history book to us, which we will gladly add to our permanent collection. We also appreciate Missouri county, town histories, and compilations of Missouri county records.

You might also consider making a Tribute donation through the St. Louis Public Library Foundation. Tributes allow you to donate tax-deductible funds for the purchase of books or materials that will be added to the genealogy collection. You can honor a family that you are researching or an individual of your choice with a bookplate that is added to each Tribute item. This program benefits the Library and your fellow genealogists. If you would like to consider making a Tribute gift, visit the Foundation's website at www.slplfoundation.org. Thanks to all our readers for your continuing support of the Library!

Our Town – Events at the St. Louis Public Library

Check the St. Louis Public Library Events Calendar (www.slpl.org/events/calendar.asp) to find up-to-the-minute listings of what's happening at all St. Louis Public Library locations!

During Central Library's restoration and renewal, genealogy and military history programs are being held at the Buder Branch. You can also follow the History & Genealogy Department blog at <http://hgdept.blogspot.com/>.

Buder Branch
4401 Hampton
St. Louis, MO 63109-2237
314-352-2900

It's also easy to be added to our program notification list. Simply e-mail tpearson@slpl.org and use NOTIFY in the subject line.



Gateway Family Historian

Co-editors:

Cynthia Millar & Thomas A. Pearson

A co-publication of the History & Genealogy
and Special Collections Departments.



slpl.org

St. Louis Public Library
Compton Library/Research Facility
1624 Locust Street
St. Louis, MO 63103
314.539.0385
Fax: 314.539.0393
E-mail: tpearson@slpl.org
or webref@slpl.org

Contact!!

Compton Library/ Research Facility

1624 Locust Street
St. Louis, MO 63103-1802

M-F: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

First Saturday of the Month:

9 a.m.-5 p.m.

FREE onsite parking.

Compton Library is home to our Government Documents Collection as well as genealogy and local history materials. Items from Special Collections are not stored at Compton, but most can be delivered there upon request.

Compton's focus is on the needs of researchers. It is not a full-service Branch, so only patrons requiring access to its specialized materials and subject specialists can be accommodated. *Seating is limited.* Please call in advance so we can have your materials ready and a place for you to study when you arrive. **To reserve your space, call 314-539-0385.**

Requests for genealogical materials can be made to cmillar@slpl.org.

The St. Louis Public Library's website is slpl.org. It contains our

online catalog, events calendar, special indexes for St. Louis historical and biographical materials, an index of selected *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* newspaper obituaries, death notices, burial permits, and an archive of past issues of this newsletter.

The History & Genealogy Department's blog is located at <http://hgdept.blogspot.com/>.