



The magnificence of
Life, when viewed through
the lens of Truth, is
... soul ...

The Witches OF FAIRFIELD, S.C.

When a community falls under the spell of a witch-hunt, who are the "possessed"—witches' victims or their persecutors?

By Lee R. Gandee

PSYCHOLOGISTS, parapsychologists and students of history are familiar with the witchcraft preoccupation that in the late 17th Century made Salem, Mass., notorious. Few are aware that almost a century later a community in South Carolina experienced a similar preoccupation and in 1792, in the 16th year of the independence of the United States, held witch trials, found guilty and punished the accused. It was not a legal trial but it was conducted like one.

If the story ever has been published I can find no reference to it but it is preserved as part of a manuscript, *History of Fairfield*

County, South Carolina, written sometime before 1854 by Philip Edward Pearson who emigrated from Fairfield County to Matagorda, Tex., and died there in that year. Probably he wrote the account while he was practicing law in South Carolina where he served for years as Solicitor of the South Carolina Middle Circuit of which Fairfield County was part. He was born long enough before 1792 to remember one of the accused witches clearly and as one incident mentioned in the trial allegedly occurred in General Pearson's apple orchard on Broad River, a property owned by a close kinsman of his, he was apparently in the midst

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the excitement and may have
 witnessed some of it.

Before leaving South Carolina he sold his manuscript to Dr. John H. Logan who later also emigrated, settling in Talladega, Ala. Logan had the manuscript in 1874 when Lyman C. Draper — whose historical manuscript collection is one of the nation's best-known historical source-material collections, now in the library of the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, Wis. — copied about 60 pages of the Pearson account. These pages are included in Volume 24, Series VV of the Lyman C. Draper Manuscripts, beginning at page one. Aside from a contemporary news item in the *South Carolina Gazette* in which the witches are all described as over 80 years old, and possibly in the court records at Camden, S.C., because of the suit brought by Mary Ingelman against John Crossland, there is little likelihood of other documentation.

* * *

IN 1792 Fairfield County was across Broad River from Lexington County (an arm of Richland County now separates them), where a generation earlier a bizarre cult called the Gifted Brethren practiced incredible excesses, deifying three of its leaders as God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. This

bizarre group practiced hypnosis and before it was broken up and its leaders hanged or banished for the murders they committed, many of the "gifted" members had come to be considered witches. Colonial records suggest that Mary Ingelman was a native of Lexington or a member of a family who had lived there and it seems possible that the impu- tation of witchcraft followed her when she moved to Fairfield, about 20 miles from the head- quarters of the Gifted Brethren. In any case, she was the princi- pal one of the accused, the others being an old Mr. Harding and his wife and an old crone named Sally Smith.

Lawyer Pearson stated that from the time of the first settle- ment of Fairfield there always had been persons reputed to be witches living there but that up to 1792 their activities had been considered harmless, more in the nature of white hex than of black magic. In 1792, however, a number of strange phenomena occurred, some of it clearly ma- licious and all of it disturbing. Cattle sickened; inexplicable ac- cidents occurred; women began to act possessed. Presently about one person in 20 yielded to un- reason and organized to stamp out witchcraft.

Apparently they realized they might be held accountable for

their acts, for in assembling their evidence they took depositions and also kept written records of the testimony at the trial of the four accused. Pearson had access to these depositions and the testimony and repeats enough of it to allow reconstruction of a few of the incidents on which the charges were based.

The "judge" chosen to decide the cases was a respectable planter, Thomas Hill, whose home was five miles from Winnsboro. He was a slaveholder and a man of considerable property. The accused were brought to his plantation for trial, Mary Ingelman from a distance of about 15 miles. A jury was selected and John Crossland, a poor man, apparently young and strong and perhaps a tenant on Hill's land, was named "sheriff" and "executioner." The "trial" was conducted at night in a hut or outbuilding on the Hill plantation.

Mary Ingelman was accused by Rosy Henley and her sister of having placed a spell on them. Of the two Rosy was the worse affected and the evidence suggests that she was psychically disturbed — if not actually possessed by devils. The manuscript reads: "Lying in her bed she could not be prevented by the utmost exertions of four strong men from rising up and clinging to the ceiling. They were both

bitten on the neck and and stuck over with pins and splinters. Their case was dreadful . . ."

Anyone can fake and two sisters could bite each other unobserved and if they were willing to undergo the discomfort, could stick pins and splinters into themselves or each other. But it is hardly possible to fake a levitation convincingly enough to withstand the efforts of four strong men to prevent it and equally difficult to give the impression of clinging to a ceiling while four men attempt to pull one down.

There seem to be only two possibilities: The individual supposed to be levitating, the four strong men and all witnesses were hypnotized and conditioned by suggestion to believe there was a levitation. Or the levitation actually occurred.

It is not possible to say whether autosuggestion could or could not simultaneously control the participants and witnesses of a supposed levitation. Hex and voodoo seem to utilize telepathic suggestion in a way which makes this possible but from admitting this it is only a short step to believing in witchcraft. Rosy Henley may have been unconsciously overwhelming the sense-impressions of those around her and filling their consciousness

Collins to accuse Mary Ingelman of consorting with Satan. "He testified that on one occasion he took his trusty rifle and went out on a deer hunt around McTyre's old field. He saw a deer and tried several times to fire at it but the rifle would not fire. He suspected witchcraft so he removed the ball, split it and inserted a sliver of silver. The gun then fired; the deer vanished; in its place a large black cat appeared with its front leg wounded and the cat limped away.

"A day or two later he was plowing corn and became thirsty. He went to a spring near the field and while he was resting there Mary Ingelman came up with her arm in a sling and told him that he was to blame for her injury and that she would not forget it.

"He testified that after that she turned him into a horse and rode him to a grand convention of witches. Where, he could not say, but he thought somewhere in North America; and on the way the Devil rode up by her side and observed, 'Mother Ingelman, you have a splendid horse.'

" 'Ah,' she said, 'This is that rascal Collins!'"

Faced with this accusation Mary Ingelman offered no defense, nor did any of the others to the charges made against

them. They were adjudged guilty and sentenced to be punished.

As punishment they first were tied by the wrists and hanged to joists in the building where they were flogged, the newspaper account says, brutally. They were taken down, "then placed with their feet to a bark fire and confined there until the soles popped off." After this torture they were released and allowed to crawl away. The Hardings and Mary Ingelman escaped further abuse but Sally Smith was found some distance from the Hill plantation by a vindictive man who "cast her down and placed a pine log across her neck. She could not stir and the next day was relieved by a benevolent person passing along the path."

Despite this treatment none of the four victims died as a direct result of it and the witch-hunters began to consider action against Hezekiah Hunt and his wife, Mourning Hunt, who were strongly suspected.

Evidently the group felt that public opinion protected them. Of the four only Mary Ingelman attempted to have anyone brought to justice for the outrages committed upon her. In all Camden District she found only one magistrate who would issue a warrant for anyone's arrest. He was The Rev. William Yon- gue, a Presbyterian minister, so

fantasies of her own mind but the psychic energy necessary to cause this probably could produce an actual levitation just as readily. Whether Mary Ingelman had any part in it at all seems doubtful.

Pearson makes it clear that he believed the levitations occurred. In fact, a wizard not brought to trial, one Joe Fairs of Lower Fairfield, was accused of affecting two of Drury Walker's daughters in the same manner. Pearson said, "It took four strong men to prevent her (the worse afflicted one) from rising out of her bed to the ceiling. Sometimes she would rise up the wall, slide across the ceiling and descend the opposite wall without injury. There was no doubt as to these phenomena at Walker's."

For a circuit court lawyer to risk his reputation by making such a statement indicates he had complete confidence in the truth of those who reported these levitations. He also must have believed persons still living could and would verify his claim.

Aside from the levitations of the Henley and Walker sisters, the most unusual phenomena occurred in the case of Willing Haw "alias Martha Holley." She testified that after Mary Ingelman bewitched her she "... put

up (vomited) balls of hair with pins sticking out, was all over the neck and shoulders stuck full of pins and splinters and deprived of all peace and comfort . . ."

The other testimony reads like all testimony in witch trials for as far back as records go. Adam Free, Mary Ingelman's son by a previous marriage, testified that his mother once asked him for one of his cows. When he refused Mary immediately cast a spell on it causing it to spring up convulsively, fall and break its neck.

His son, Jacob Free, testified that his grandmother once turned him into a horse and rode him to Pearson's apple orchard on Broad River six miles from his home. The manuscript relates quaintly, "While she was filling her bag with apples, his eye was attracted by the beautiful red apples that hung over him. He put up his long horse head to obtain a stealthy supply and while he was attempting to do so, she drove a punch into his cheek from the effects of which he did not soon recover."

One is tempted to say that a young man must really be bewitched to make such a statement or impelled by motives that a psychiatrist would find interesting.

However, it remained for Isaac

They were adjudged by the circumstances that he ignored public opinion. He issued a warrant for the arrest of John Crossland who was tried in the County Court, found guilty of aggravated assault and sentenced to be fined five pounds. He never paid it but fled to "the far west," which in 1792 meant Georgia or Alabama. Pearson expressed some sympathy for him, saying that "... other better-informed men than Crossland also participated..." and were not punished.

Early in the account Mr. Pearson referred to Mrs. Ingelman as "... the dreadful old Mary Ingelman" but apparently this was intended as irony. In concluding his account he wrote: "Some persons now living may remember the great witch Mary Ingelman. She was a remarkably neat, tidy and decent old lady. She was of German extraction and probably a native of Germany. Her conversation was pleasant, entertaining, instructive; her manners mild, simple and agreeable. Her knowledge in pharmacy was considerable and her application of simples in the cure of country complaints was the result of much observation and gratuitous practice..." He added that she was a pious old soul, and that when her spirit left this earth it probably went to a better place.

Ingelman, s.c. 41

In Salem, Rebecca Nurse was described in much the same way and Rebecca Nurse was put to death. Being a "remarkably neat, tidy and decent" person is no protection, nor is benevolence and piety when a community falls under the spell of a witch-hunt.

In Salem horror and excess brought about its own reaction. In Fairfield the delusion was broken by a wise minister, "Preacher Woodward," who announced that he would preach on witchcraft and thus attracted a huge crowd. The crowd was keyed to a high pitch of expectancy and the minister began by admitting that sorcery and magic exist, that indeed there are witches. However, he declared with mock seriousness, people should not imagine that old or ugly women were witches. What woman with supernatural powers would use them to make herself ugly or old, he asked the congregation. Rather, he said, suspect beautiful young girls of witchcraft, since with a look and a few words murmured in a certain way they can draw boys away from their families, turn them first into lackeys and at last into lifelong toilers. Wizards, he averred, are not to be found among old, broken men but among the young and handsome who with a touch and a murmur

can deprive a girl of her senses and turn the most lissome and carefree maiden into a servant and a household drudge.

The tension broke. The crowd laughed and the Fairfield witch-hunt was over. No more did Rosy Henley and the Walker girl rise to the ceiling. No more did William Haw "put up balls of hair with pins sticking out." Witchcraft and laughter cannot coexist.

For 15 years I have studied Hex among the descendants of people such as Mary Ingelman. I once would have dismissed the Fairfield matter as sheer delusion. Now I cannot. I have seen Hex in South Carolina used to remove warts, to stanch bleeding and to cure the effects of burns. I know men who are graduates of reputable universities and of seminaries who tell me they have no doubt whatsoever that a generation ago there were persons in the area who could extinguish fire with an incantation. Men in whose truthfulness I believe have told me their parents could order a broom out of its corner to stand upright and move to music. I have sat in a darkened room with a grave lamp and a dead man's mirror and listened as a youth described buildings, persons and activities from the past as they swam into view in the mirror,

while an ecstatic old man related these visions as places and persons he knew 40 years before the boy was born. And what I have seen has changed my point of view. I now believe that what happened in Fairfield was as Pearson said; the women actually levitated or seemed to do so; William Haw did vomit balls of hair or what appeared to be that to all present; young Jacob Free actually experienced being turned into a horse and being struck on the cheek. I do not consider any of this witchcraft. Rather, what here is called witchcraft is a manifestation of psychic energy following its own set of laws and producing effects that seem strange only because they are not yet understood.

Only when reality is better understood can men expect to know more about the principles that govern such phenomena. Fortunately man's comprehension of the nature of reality is widening every day and pioneers in the field already have made great advances. At Yale University the Foundation for Integrative Education works tirelessly in this direction. Its journal, *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, presents articles which closely identify science, philosophy and religion as facets of the same reality. In order to understand reality, life and man himself must be