

# 'The Witch City' Dusts Off Its Past

By MARY B.W. TABOR Special to The New York Times  
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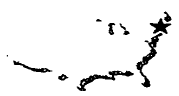
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## Salem Journal

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SALEM, Mass., Sept. 7 — For the last three centuries, this tiny seaport 15 miles north

of Boston has struggled to make the most of its reputation. The city was home to the witch trials of 1692, a murky period in American history when more than 200 people were accused of witchcraft; 19 were hanged, 1 stoned to death and 3 died in prison.

Sometime after its heyday as a port ended in the mid-1800's, Salem took "The Witch City" as its unofficial name. It opened a "Salem Witch Museum" and a "Witch House." The uniforms of the city's police officers and fire fighters now include patches with the silhouette of a witch on a broomstick. Even the city's newspaper, The Salem Evening News, put a witch on its masthead.

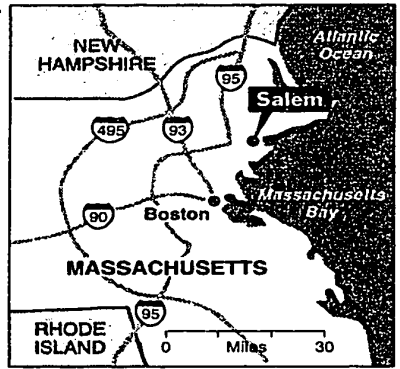
Starting this month, Salem will begin a series of events commemorating the 300th anniversary of the trials.

The primary goal of the events, which go into full swing in January, is to educate visitors about wrongful persecution and the evolution of the American justice system, using the witch trials as a point of reference, said Linda C. McConchie, executive director of the committee planning the events.

But the other major goal, said Mayor Neil J. Harrington, is to put Salem on tourists' maps.

"A city like Salem doesn't get that many chances to show the world what it has to offer," said Mr. Harrington, who is running for re-election this fall. He said he hoped the number of visitors would jump from 600,000 to more than a million next year.

So far, the warm-up events have generally gone well. Contests to design a memorial and an emblem have



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elicited entries from as far away as China and Czechoslovakia. An excerpt from "Salem's Daughters," a play about the witch hysteria, will be performed here later this month. Arthur Miller, the author of "The Crucible," a play that draws parallels between the 1692 trials and the McCarthy hearings, will announce the memorial design winner here on Nov. 14.

Two Harvard Law School professors, Alan Dershowitz and Arthur Miller, (not the playwright) have also agreed to help stage a reenactment of the witch trials using some original transcripts.

Many of Salem's 38,000 residents, especially the merchants, are ecstatic about the city's plans.

But Salem's witches, (yes, about 2,400 members of a witches' association live in the town) are not so enthusiastic. They complain the commemoration borders on exploitation.

"There is a major political issue here," said Laurie Cabot, known as the "official witch of Salem" and founder of the Witches' League for Public Awareness. As she sweeps

past the magic potions and wands in her witch supplies store on Essex Street, Ms. Cabot says city officials have failed to seek the counsel of Salem's witches and are giving an incomplete account of the persecutions tied to the trials. Witches, she said, "don't sacrifice animals or people or drink blood or eat babies or any of that stuff." They belong to a religious order that uses magic for good, she said.

"The politicians here are cheating the public," said Ms. Cabot.

Shawn Poirier, 25 years old, who describes himself as a Third Degree High Priest of the Coven of the Seventh Moon, based in Salem, agrees.

"I'd say exploited is the word," says Mr. Poirier, a self-proclaimed witch who works as a psychic in town. "It's like a sultry love affair. They don't mind making the money and promoting us during Halloween. But when it comes to us standing up during the tricentenary and saying what is witchcraft and what was going on during the trials, they don't want to have anything to do with it."

City officials say they have sought help from the witches, but will not use the commemorative events as a platform to discuss witchcraft as a religion.

So, feeling rebuffed, the witches have cast a spell on the city. "We have projected that what is correct for everyone will happen," Ms. Cabot said.

Regardless, says Mayor Harrington, the city plans to forge ahead with its current plans.

Lynn Gomberg, who opened a factory outlet store in downtown Salem earlier this summer, did not put much stock in the witches' complaints.

"Everyone has been capitalizing on the witch trials for years, so what's new?" she said.

That includes, she said, the witches.