For Salem, a Reminder of a Dark Past

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SALEM, Mass., Oct. 25 — It is the witching season again in Salem, when residents and tourists don black costumes and attractions like the Witch Museum draw more than the usual number of visitors. But there are few reminders in this Boston suburb of the 1692 witch trials, whose dark events gave birth to this fascination.

Nearly 300 years after 20 people

Nearly 300 years after 20 people were executed in the colonial witch hunt, Salem's past seems an object of its residents' ambivalence.

A sculpture commemorating the victims is being forged and is to be given to the city this fall. But there is opposition to it and its sculptor says few Salem residents have supported the effort.

The 14-foot statue by Yiannis Stefanakis of Beverly, Mass., depicts three sisters who were witch trial victims — Rebecca Nurse, Mary Esty and Sarah Cloyce. Mrs. Nurse and Mrs. Esty were hanged and Mrs. Cloyce was imprisoned.

'We Do Want to Heal This Wound'

"These people were not witches," said Wayne Higley, a descendant of Mrs. Nurse and the registrar of the Sons and Daughters of the Victims of Colonial Witch Trial, a group based in Stoneham, Mass. "They were innocent people who lost their lives. Witchcraft should never be associated with them. We do want to heal this wound after 300 years."

The witch hunt here began in the win-

A statue depicts three victims of the witch hunts.

ter of 1691 after a West Indian slave told voodoo stories to a group of girls and taught them palmistry. After a doctor pronounced the girls bewitched, the slave was killed and hundreds of people were accused of practicing witchcraft.

Each year a million tourists visit Salem, where the police cars are emblazoned with a picture of a witch on a broom and the high school football team is called the Witches. The Witch Museum, a privately owned collection housed in an old church, holds a multimedia depiction of the witch trials.

In Halloween week, 100,000 visitors are drawn by the city's Haunted Happenings, a series of events that include ghostly readings in old houses and other diversions to raise hairs. For \$5, a visitor may even be made up as a witch with a hairdo to match, at a local beauty parlor.

Tourism, a \$7 million industry in this city of 38,000 people, depends heavily on Salem's witch lore.

But until Mr. Stefanakis offered to make a memorial sculpture, there was no commitment to commemorate the witchhunt's victims. Mr. Stefanakis said 13 artists before him were unsuccessful in seeking support for a memorial. His effort is backed by descendants of both the persecuted and the persecutors. Ann Hawthorn, a descendant of John Hathorne, the judge that ordered several of the hangings, is treasurer of the Foundation for the Witch Trial Memorial Fund, a nonprofit national organization based in Salem that was created to raise private funds for the sculpture. Nearly \$60,000 has been raised through the organization, but the artist said a minimum of an additional \$100,000 was needed to complete the project.

Approved by City Council

Three years ago, the memorial received the unanimous approval of the City Council, and after he initially vetoed it, Mayor Anthony Salvo of Salem endorsed the project. It is also supported by Salem business and community leaders.

But some people oppose the Stefanakis statue. Ann Farnham, director of the Essex Institute, a museum that has the original transcripts of the trials, said she would have preferred a competitive process to determine what kind of memorial the city would erect to the trial victims. "We were concerned at making it a public process," said Ms. Farnham, who is co-chairman of a committee selected by the Mayor to develop a program of educational and commemorative events to mark the 300th anniversary.

Another opponent of the Stefanakis sculpture is the Rev. John Szala. He is the pastor of the First Church of Salem, the oldest Protestant Church in Amer-

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The New York Times/Rick Friedman

Yiannis Stefanakis with a scale model of his statue commemorating the victims of the Salem witch trials.

ica, whose pastor in 1692, Alfred Noyes, "helped fan the flame of intolerance," Mr. Szala said.

Mr. Szala has questioned Mr. Stefanakis's motives in creating the memorial.

"This is his first heroic outdoor statue and he took this to the City Council and it was rushed through without a hearing and without the public being alerted to what he was doing," Mr. Szala said. "The community is divided as a result"

as a result."

In an interview in his studio in Beverly, the artist spoke of support he has received for the project: "I've got a pile of letters from across the country. However, I've received very, very few

letters and money from Salem. I don't think they were ready for this despite 300 years.

"If I ever knew the pain that I would go through in the last three and a half years to complete this, I would not do it again. I would wait until all the money was in and someone asked me to do it. It has cost me too much emotionally, financially and physically."

Ms. Hawthorn, the memorial fund raiser, said that although a small number of people would rather not disinter up the past, there are many people who support the statue. Two sites have been given preliminary approval by the city for the dedication of the statue. One is at the burial ground on Charter Street overlooking the grave of Judge John Hathorne.

"It's somewhat horrifying to think that somewhere in history a member of my family could be involved with what I would call a crime," Ms. Hawthorn said. "I think it's a major step and time will tell when we do have visitors coming in from other areas of the country. I think if the statue does end up in the cemetery, it will add a calmness. It's a final resting place for these people."

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