

PENNSYLVANIA WITCHCRAFT

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

The most conspicuous of the early provincial tribunals and by far the best known to the present day historian was the Provincial Council. The judicial duties discharged by the councils were many, and probably their most important functions. It's members were considered by all classes as the supreme judges of the land--in all things. In 1683, William Penn, Proprietor and Governor sat on the council with Pennsylvania's most important citizens. In one session of the council Margaret Mattson was tried for "witchcraft"--this on February 27, 1683 was our earliest trial of that sort. Margaret was examined and had to be proved to be a witch and her husband had to post 50 pounds for his wife's appearance on the 27th. Her indictment was read that day and she pleaded not guilty. Besides Penn and his Councilmen, a grand jury and a petit jury heard this case and others. The evidence was of such trifling nature yet it was heard. Henry Drystreet said he was told 20 years before that Margaret was a witch; she had bewitched several cows, James Sunderling's mother said Margaret had bewitched her cow. When Coolin's calf died, he took the heart which he said had died by witchcraft and boiled it, and as he did, Margaret Mattson entered. When she asked what he was doing he said boiling flesh and she said he'd do better if he'd boiled the bones. Obviously Margaret's suggestion would have made better soup, but according to the witness before William Penn, the council and both juries, she was a witch. Margaret Mattson denied everything, saying that the witnesses spoke only hearsay. The jury went out

and upon their return brought her in guilty of having the common fame of a witch, but not guilty of witchcraft. Mr. Mattson had to post 50 pounds for his wife's good behavior for six months. We have had few problems with witchcraft in Pennsylvania--less really than we do for hexing. Yet, as late as 1719 the judges of Chester County were sworn in and empowered to inquire of all witchcrafts, enchantments, sorceries and magic arts. George Shrunk, of Germantown, in Philadelphia gained great reputation later as "Old Shrunk" and was a great conjuror. He found stolen goods, could make thieves stand still when they ran, and many believed he knew where they could dig for money and stolen treasure. "Old Shrunk" got much business, but never found Blackbeard's money along the Delaware, where it was rumored to have been secreted. I know better. It's buried in the Susquehanna River--an old witch told me so. A Pennsylvania witch, of which there are no witcher--or for that matter, no more.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.