

TRAVEL

FOR BREAKING NEWS AND SPORTS
24 hours a day go to www.delawarecounty.com

Salem: Where Halloween really lives!

■ This haunting Mass. town has a bewitching past, partying at this time of year.

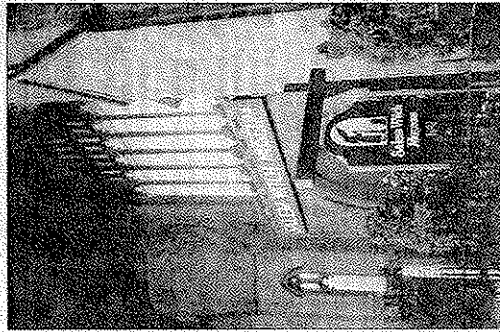
By RUTH ROVNER
Special to the Times

No city gets into the spirit of the holiday the way Salem does. During a month-long celebration, vaqueros and sorceresses take to the streets at night. Young and old join in candlelight parades and masquerade balls. Witch dolls dangle from tree branches. Local restaurants serve witches' brew, ghost stories are told at the museums, and tourists walk the Witch Trial Trail by candlelight. It's all part of the Salem extravaganza known as Haunted Happenings. This year's schedule of events that this year includes a costume ball, a psychic festival and masquerade balls galore. All of it culminates on Halloween night, Oct. 31.

Located just 16 miles from Boston, an easy day trip by train, Salem is a sedate New England town — except when it comes to Halloween. Then it's the unofficial Halloween capital of the U.S. It's understood while here this happened. Halloween is associated with witches and so is Salem. Despite its varied attractions, what makes the city famous is one chapter in its 300-year history: the infamous witch trials of 1692.

While some visitors come for the novelty and the festivity of Haunted Happenings, the city also offers year-round sites that treat the witch trials in a serious and educational way, although not as a dry history lesson.

When I visited the Witch Dungeon



Special to the Times / ROBERT FRESCHETTI
Salem Witch Museum in Salem, Mass.



Special to the Times / JEROME HALDERHARD
Witches in Salem are everywhere during the Halloween season. Throughout the year, witches and warlocks can be found as merchants in specialty stores.

Museum, we first entered a darkened auditorium where ominous music played, and a recorded narrator said solemnly, "If you'd lived in Salem in 1692, most likely you'd have been accused of witchcraft."

Then we heard a judge proclaim the start of the trial of Sarah Goode. At 24, 38 and while pregnant, she was accused of being a witch by Ann Putnam, a young resident of Salem Village. A brief drama was then enacted on the stage. It featured two live actors who played Goode and Putnam, along with dummy figures of the judge, juror and scribe.

The script is based on actual transcripts of the trial. "You serve the devil!" accused Putnam. An impassioned Goode retorted: "You lie! I am not a witch — I am innocent! But if you hang me, then God shall give you blood to drink!"

After this compelling drama, we trooped down winding, narrow steps to find ourselves in a dark, dark basement with stone walls. It was a replica of the dungeon that once stood right on Federal Street, where those accused of witchcraft were detained.

As we looked at this grim scene, our guide described the climate of hysteria and the details of the prisoners' lives in the dungeon. The original dungeon was built to hold 50, said our guide, but at the height of witch hysteria, 200 people were held here. If they didn't confess, they were hanged. If they did, they stayed in shackles and chains in the tiny cells.

The visual displays near the cells added their own drama. One depicted the crushing of Giles Corey ("crushing was a horrifying form of fatal torture). Another showed Gallows Hill, where the accused were brought to be hanged.

The final display, titled "Ann Putnam Confesses", was about Putnam's public

One highlight of my exploration was the Peabody Essex Museum, where more than 30 galleries present exhibits covering centuries of art, architecture, and culture, not just from New England but from around the world.

The items on exhibit included portraits of sea captains, decorative ship's figurheads, displays of ship's bells, and exotic treasures from the glory days when Salem was one of America's major seaports and its captains traded in the Far East.

One unique display was a 200-year-old house from China (it was transported in pieces) that's the only example of Chinese domestic architecture in the U.S.

Next stop: the waterfront, where the Maritime National Historic Site had visual displays detailing the highlights of Salem's seafaring days. Across from the harbor and park is the stately Custom House where author Nathaniel Hawthorne worked when he was appointed Surveyor of the Port of Salem in 1846.

Another waterfront attraction is Pickering Wharf, a charming harborside village of colonial shops and waterfront restaurants. The schooner *Panic* is docked here: it's a full-scale replica of a warship from the War of 1812.

Not far from here, on Derby Street, is The House of Seven Gables, the oldest wooden mansion in New England. The distinctive gabled house is said to be the inspiration for Hawthorne's novel of the same name. Tours of the house show period furnishings and portraits of the author whose imagination was fired by the dark and mysterious aspects of Salem.

On the same street is the New England Pirate Museum, where young and old can board a pirate ship and see artifacts from sunken ships and pirate treasures.

Two witch-related sites are also on Derby Street. The Salem Wax Museum displays figures related to the witch trials and also to the city's maritime history.

And the Salem Witch Village offers a perspective that goes beyond the witch trials. Here visitors take a 15-minute guided tour that shows scenes marking landmarks in witchcraft history. The tour focuses on myth versus reality of witchcraft in the past and present.

It's one more example of the way Salem has taken the theme that is most fascinating to tourists and presents it in innovative and educational ways.

"The Salem witch trials are a key component of our tourism industry," admits Kate Fox, executive director of Destination Salem. "And we hope we inspire our visitors to learn more about the trials and take home the lessons of tolerance."

For general information about Salem or free visitors guide, visit www.salem.org or call 877-SALEM MA (877-715-3661)

For complete schedule of Haunted Happenings events, visit www.hauntedapp-happenings.org.