

## History is His Story

The propensity of people to be gripped by self-righteous panic has been extensively studied. **Salem witch trials**, Red Scare of 1920, McCarthyism, Watergate hysteria, have all been implicated. A major television network is running a documentary of the **Wenatchee**, Washington child molestation scandal that came at the conclusion of 17 day-care scandals of the 1980s and early 90s --all proven baseless. These hysterias prove an important point. Neither science, nor politicians, nor media brought an end to the false charges. Christians, speaking in faith did.

In the Salem Witch trials of the summer of 1692, two young girls began acting erratically—screaming, hysterical behavior, and rolling on the floor. Two local women were implicated as witches by the children's screams. Subsequently, accusations of over 150 people being involved in witchcraft ensued. The Massachusetts authorities responded with an investigative court that implicated many of them. The newspapers spurred on the hysteria and 19 people were convicted, hung or drowned. One man who refused to plead guilty was pressed to death with heavy stones, the old English *peine forte et dure*, contempt of court—the only time it has been used in American history. Cotton Mather, son of Harvard College's President, was strongly involved with the prosecution. Where was the new thing called science? Many scientists of the day believed that indeed, witchcraft might be happening. But when Increase Mather, Cotton's father and President of the Harvard Seminary arrived home from a trip to England, he observed the trials and was appalled that Christians would treat others this way. He called for an end. Thereupon, even the Governor's wife was implicated and that caused the authorities to come to their senses and disband the inquiry, and release those awaiting trial. This was the only 'witch hunt in American history. In 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, there were 160,000 witch trials. The anxiety of the local government in MA to confess wrongdoing, make reparations, and search for truth was the singular bright spot in the affair.

At Wenatchee, like the McMartin daycare and many others in the 80s and 90s, investigators used anatomically correct dolls and 'dream memory' to draw out stories from children. Interviewer bias also influenced child testimony. When an interviewer has a preconceived notion of the truth of the matter being investigated, the questioning is performed in a manner to extract statements that evidence these beliefs. As a result, evidence that could disprove the belief is never sought by the interviewer. Records also reveal, that many stories were coerced. Wenatchee filed 29,726 charges against several dozen people after a mentally disturbed foster child of a policeman said she had been raped. One case worker, Paul Glassen, criticized methodology only to find himself charged with molestation. He fled with his family to Canada. When Pastor Robert Robertson criticized the prosecution and evidence-gathering in a town hall, he found himself immediately charged with 8 counts of molestation of his church's children. He was tried but found not-guilty of all counts and jurors were incensed with the prosecution's handling saying it should never have gone to trial. Yet the state of Washington steadfastly praised the investigation. So some Christians from Pastor Robertson's church formed Concerned Citizens for Legal Accountability and joined by others, filed complaint with the State Commission on Judicial Conduct. Governor Mike Lowry's hand was then forced to investigate the investigators. But when he asked US Attorney General Janet Reno for help, it was flatly refused. Eventually all those implicated, who fought in court, won. Wall Street Journal had an expose and a 2001 jury found Wenatchee and Douglass County negligent in "record keeping" and were ordered to pay damages to falsely accused citizens. However, many of the accused had plea-bargained and were poor or had mental disability. Some had to fight for years to recover custody of their children.

Science, stonewalling authorities, even judges proved to not bring down these hysteria scandals. Christians acting in faith did. None of the abusive authorities went to trial over their mishandling. No journalist did a mea culpa of a false story. Nor did any imaginative case worker or psychologist who coerced improper testimony of a child. Nobody went to jail over that either. The same was true for the McMartin daycare, Country Walk daycare, Fells Acres daycare or the other 14 in the 1980s. What would the world be without Christians to stand in the gap?