

Torture And Hanging Of Witches Documented In English Puritan's 350-Year-Old Diary

The John Ryland Library at the University of Manchester in Manchester, England has added to its online rare documents collection a 17th century diary of Nehemiah Wallington, an English Puritan. Each page of the diary written 350 years ago was digitally photographed, and those photos are available online. Although the spelling of some words has slightly changed, the diary is remarkably easy to read since Wallington's handwriting is very legible.

Eight pages of the diary describe the treatment of alleged witches in the Essex area northwest of London.

Several pages are devoted to "The Confession of Rebecca West daughter of Anne West of Colchester in Essex." In 1645 Rebecca confessed to not only consorting with other witches, but that she had wed the devil. The techniques used to interrogate suspected witches were very effective. Before Rebecca's interrogation by Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins began, Wallington writes, "that when she was going to the Grand Inquest with one mother

Miller (indicted for a Witch) she told mother Miller that shee would confesse nothing, if they pulled her to pieces with pincers." Hopkins was notorious for his cruel treatment of women, and Rebecca's resolve was no match for him, because when "the tortures and the flames beganne to cease: whereupon she then confessed all shee ever knew..." (Diary page 179)

Rebecca was shown mercy when her life was spared because she confessed her sins to Hopkins. But 14 other "witches" were hanged, including Anne West who her daughter Rebecca identified as a witch. Wallington writes about a 15th condemned witch who claimed that "the divel (devil) had often told her she should never be hanged and said she beleevved they could not hang her. ... before she came to the Gallows shee dyed it seemes the Devill is truer to some of his servants then some wicked men are to their neighbours." (Diary page 182)

Wallington's diary provides a fascinating first-hand glimpse into what passed for justice in England in the mid-1600's. The account of Rebecca West's interrogation shows that regardless of one's intentions to



Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins

resist, if the right lever is pushed a person will confess to anything, including being married to the devil and that one's own mother is a witch — and then have to stand by as she is hanged.

To read the diary go to the John Ryland Library website at — <http://enriqueta.man.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet> — and enter into the search box, Nehemiah Wallington.

The 14 woman executed as witches were:

- Anne West (Rebecca West's mother)
- Mother Miller
- Mrs. Wayt a Ministers wife
- Jane Browne
- Jane Brigs.
- Mother Forman
- Rachel Flower
- Mother Clarke
Mother Benefield
- Mary Greene
- Frances Jones
- Mother Goodwin
- Mary Foster
- Mary Rhodes

Sources:

Nehemiah Wallington diary, John Ryland Library at the University of Manchester in Manchester, England.



Man's Conviction For Non-Existent Violation Of Federal Law Overturned By Appeals Court

Robert M. Langford was arrested by federal agents in July 2006 for allegedly attending a cockfight near Carnegie, Oklahoma. The cockfight was conducted on land held in trust for the Kiowa Indian tribe, and it is legally considered Indian land.

Langford was criminally charged with being a spectator at a cockfight in violation of the federal Assimilative Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. §13) and the Indian Country Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. §1152). He was convicted by a jury in 2007.

Langford appealed his conviction based on his claim that he couldn't have committed his convicted crime because it only applies to Indians, and he is a non-Indian.

The federal 10th Circuit Court of Appeals issued its ruling on April 11, 2011 in *U.S. v.*

Robert M Langford, No. 10-6070 (10th Cir., 4-11-2011). The Court wrote that an essential element of Langford's convicted crime is his status as either an Indian or a non-Indian. That is because there is no "federal jurisdiction for a victimless crime, perpetrated by a non-Indian in Indian country." The prosecution did not introduce any evidence during Langford's trial establishing he is an Indian and he specifically asserted he is a non-Indian, so the Court ruled, "the answer is clear. There is no jurisdiction."

The government futilely argued that Langford's status as a non-Indian was a "technicality" that should be overlooked in establishing the federal government's jurisdiction to prosecute him.

The appeals court vacated Langford's conviction since the prosecution did not prove the essential element that the federal govern-



Kiowa Chief Big Tree, who was a model for the Indian Head nickel minted in the U.S. from 1913 to 1938.

ment had jurisdiction over his alleged conduct. The Court also ordered the district court to dismiss his charge with prejudice, so he cannot be retried by the federal government.

There were at least 67 other non-Indians convicted of violating the same federal law as Langford for allegedly attending a cockfight on Kiowa land. Most of those defendants pled guilty and were fined \$300 to \$600. The 10th Circuit Court's ruling in Langford's case could result in the vacating of those convictions, since no crime was committed by any of the defendants.

Sources:

USA v. Robert M Langford, No. 10-6070 (10th Cir., 4-11-2011)

Appeals court overturns cockfighting conviction, *Tulsa World*, April 12, 2011



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