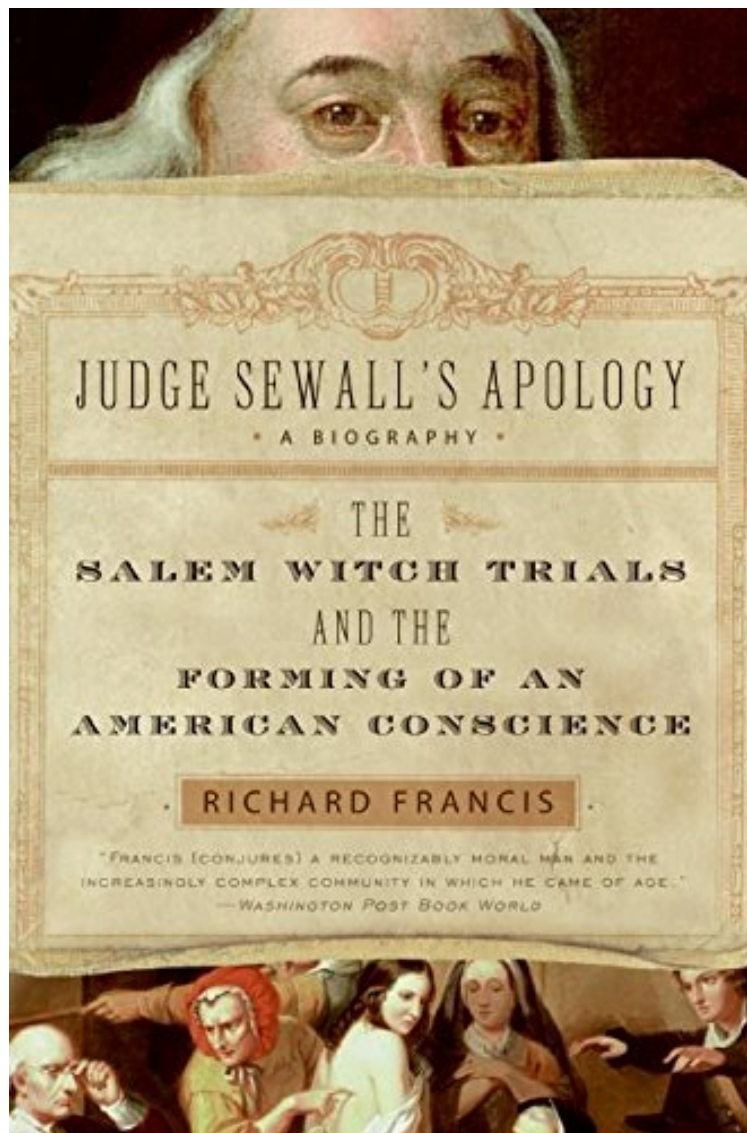


(Free read ebook) Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of an American Conscience

## Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of an American Conscience

*Richard Francis*

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#994776 in Books Richard Francis 2006-08-01 2006-08-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .69 x 5.311, .77 #File Name: 0007163630432 pages Judge Sewall s Apology The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of an American Conscience | File size: 24.Mb

**Richard Francis : Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of an American Conscience** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of an American Conscience:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A good read about a very "human" Puritan man  
By K. Davidson  
I'm a student of the witch trials, and as Sewall was the only public figure to stand before his fellow congregants and issue an apology for his part, I had to learn more about him. Despite his being a well-connected and well-off Puritan man, I discovered that I sort of like and admire him. In many ways he was ahead of his time (abolitionist, quasi-women's rights supporter, student of nature), but spiritually and morally he could out-Puritan most other Puritans! He was a curious combination of intellect, ambition, industry, mild obsessiveness, and self-doubt. I fully intend to learn more about him in the future, and this book was a great way for me to get started.  
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. informative and enjoyable with minor issues  
By Customer  
Interesting view on the witch trials taken from someone who passed judgement on the people that were executed but only two chapters were spent talking about the trials. Perhaps the title is not appropriate in stating it is about the Salem Witch Trials since Sewall waited years until after their conclusion to document them and only two chapters are dedicated to the event. Memories often do not give justice to what happened. Also the experience of one man is not forming the American Conscious especially since he is a wealthy white man with political clout. However, the book was a great read, a history book disguised as a novel and a whole chapter on this man's hatred of wigs, literal wigs that made it quite enjoyable.  
19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Francis brings Massachusetts in the late 17th century to life  
By Ellis O. Jones  
This is a well-researched and revealing account of the inner experience of a wealthy and powerful member of the Boston community. Largely based on Samuel Sewall's voluminous diaries, it covers his life from birth to death. It goes into detail about all sorts of events in Boston and Newbury. The cover blurb ("The Story of a Good Man and an Evil Event") and the title inflate the importance of the notorious Salem witch trials in the book. The publisher can be forgiven for this exaggeration: scandals grab public attention just as much now as then. If the witchcraft "angle" induces more people to take a look at this interesting book, the exaggeration will prove worthwhile. The witchcraft angle made me pick it up. I live scarcely a mile from the homestead of one of the women accused in that terrible crisis, and I am quite interested in what happened. Sewall was a Puritan magistrate. They sat in a panel over various trials, including the witchcraft trials. The nuances of Sewall's interior experience of those trials are revealing about the late Puritan age's issues of gender, social standing, and economic class that underlay the witchcraft panic: it started among women in run-down rural Salem Village (now Danvers) and was prosecuted by men in wealthy Salem Town. Both Sewall and his biographer convey an understanding of these struggles straightforwardly without polemic. Francis just tells the stories, and resists the temptation to draw simple moral lessons from what happened. By doing this he cuts through the illusion that Puritan culture was morally simple-minded and brings it to life. The people of the Puritan Commonwealth felt the presence of God looming over them with a clarity and intensity that is very difficult for us to understand in the 21st century. Those people thought their culture was destined to be the fulfillment God's divine Providence. Everything that happened, from earthquakes to the birth of infants to the attacks of Native Americans, they understood as expression of God's approval or disapproval of their personal conduct. Sewall was a diligent student of meteorology. He repented and apologized for his role in the witch trials partially because he saw signs of divine disapproval in the elements, and believed that the trials were a sign of collective delusion. Sewall's accounts of trying to persuade his contemporaries of this position are especially revealing about the complexity of the American attitude towards official mistakes and misconduct. He worked hard to declare a day of public fasting and repentance five years after the trials. He tried to get Minister Cotton Mather (that ghoul!) to write a declaration for the fast day specifically acknowledging the collective evils committed during the trials, but Mather would not go beyond broad generalities. Sewall's acceptance of personal responsibility for official misconduct is as American as roast turkey and apple pie. Unfortunately, so is Mather's refusal to accept it. This fine biography presents clearly that contradiction in American character in all its complexity.

The Salem witch hunt has entered our vocabulary as the very essence of injustice. Judge Samuel Sewall presided at these trials, passing harsh judgment on the condemned. But five years later, he publicly recanted his guilty verdicts and begged for forgiveness. This extraordinary act was a turning point not only for Sewall but also for America's nascent values and mores. In Judge Sewall's Apology, Richard Francis draws on the judge's own diaries, which enables us to see the early colonists not as grim ideologues, but as flesh-and-blood idealists, striving for a new society while coming to terms with the desires and imperfections of ordinary life. Through this unsung hero of the American conscience -- a Puritan, an antislavery agitator, a defender of Native American rights, and a Utopian theorist -- we are granted a fresh perspective on a familiar drama.

From Publishers Weekly  
In this lively chronicle, historian Francis (*Transcendental Utopias*) offers a compelling portrait of the decline of Puritan ways in the late 17th century and the ascent of a secular spirit in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Although devout, Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) turned away from an early religious vocation to pursue a career in public office and married into the colony's aristocracy. He found himself catapulted into the limelight as one of nine judges who condemned the alleged witches of Salem in 1692. Francis calls this the turning point in Sewall's life and work. Never convinced that the condemned women were guilty, Sewall felt remorse; in 1697 he walked into a

Boston church and offered a public apology, the only one of the three judges to do so. As a result, he was rebuffed by his social circle. Yet, according to Francis, Sewall's courage is magnified by his taking a stand he knew would result in ostracism. In his later years, Sewall wrote tracts opposing the colonists' treatment of Indians and slaves. Francis beautifully captures not only Sewall's personality and significance but also the shifting times in which he lived, when it was becoming no longer possible to "see the world as a simple allegorical struggle between... good and evil." *Bw illus.* Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Booklist* Disquiet about the propriety of the Salem witch trials of 1692 existed even when they were under way, and the affair was quickly terminated when accusations of devilry began to nick the Puritan elite. One of the doubters was Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), a member of the court and a diligent diary keeper. Biographer Francis exploits this primary document to present Sewall as a figure imbued with the Calvinist mentality of the Puritans who shed some of its strictures, at least concerning law; theologically, Sewall remained true. More to the point of reading interest, Francis finds through the diary a genial but psychologically complicated figure who recorded the panoply of daily occurrences, such as his business and legal affairs, harmony and strife in his family, and, after the death of his wife, his courting of widows. Sewall was a remarkable witness to colonial life, but it is his repudiation of his role in the witch trials that centrally engages the author's curiosity. Evocatively detailed and clearly written, Francis' biography will be crucial for students of Salem. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved A sensitive and scholarly rendering with far-reaching perspectives that bring Sewall off the page...fresh [and] insightfully written. (Kirkus s (starred review)) An engrossing biography [that] gives readers insight into the character of colonial America the author's gifts as a writer are evident. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch) Both an account of a troubling historical episode and the portrait of a troubled, complex man. (Wall Street Journal)