

DESCENT FROM REBECCA (____) (ELSEN) (MUDGE) GREENSMITH
(1620-1663), WIDOW SUCCESSIVELY OF ABRAHAM ELSEN AND
JARVIS MUDGE, AND WIFE OF NATHANIEL GREENSMITH, WHO
WITH HER THIRD HUSBAND WAS EXECUTED FOR WITCHCRAFT
IN HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, ON JANUARY 25, 1662/63

Rebecca — (1620-1663), m.1640 Abraham Elsen (1618-1648); parents of Sarah Elsen (1644-1720), m. William Hill (1640-1693); parents of Hannah Hill (1672-1743), m.1695 William Butler (1670-1714); parents of Peter Butler (1700-1732), m.1723 Phebe Stow (1704-1782); parents of Mary Butler (1726-1814), m.1744 Nathaniel Gilbert (1723-1787); parents of Dorothy Gilbert (1745-1812), m.1764 John Plum (1742-1803); parents of John Plum (1765-1850), m.1783 Tryphena Hunt (1766-1858); parents of Oliver Jones Plum (1800-1877), m.1821 Elizabeth Van Duzer (1800-1873); parents of Elizabeth A. Plum (1829-1889), m. Enoch White (1827-1881); parents of Minnie White (1868-1953), m. Emron Osborne Carpenter (1868-1950); parents of Clayton Enoch Carpenter (1888-1972), m.1907 Rose Lorena DeCator (1887-1971); parents of Laura Lucille Carpenter (1920-1990), m.1937 Donald Milton Webber (1918-1976); parents of David Milton Webber (1938-2008), m.1959 Joy Ann Balint (living); parents of David Jay Webber (living), m.1984 Carol Ruth Wimble (living); parents of Paul Morgan Edward Webber (living), m.2014 Marta Kathleen Krause (living); parents of Dorothy Jean Webber (living)



"The origins of the Hartford outbreak are obscure, but the trouble apparently began in the spring of 1662, with the possession and subsequent death of eight-year-old Elizabeth Kelly, who in her fits had cried out on her neighbor, Goodwife Ayres. Convinced that their child had died from bewitchment, her parents demanded an investigation. Ayres was probably the first person named, but two other people, Mary and Andrew Sanford, were brought up for examination not long after. Ayres's husband, who would eventually come under suspicion himself, accused Rebecca Greensmith, who in turn supported accusations against her own husband and implicated several other Hartford residents. And so it went. The community was caught in the grip of a witchcraft fear that would eventually result in accusations against at least thirteen people, and that would take the lives of four of them. At some point during the early period of the Hartford outbreak, Ann Cole, whom minister Increase Mather described as a 'person of real Piety and Integrity,' succumbed to possession. She was, he said, 'taken with very strange fits, wherein her Tongue was improved by a Daemon to express things which she her self knew nothing of. In the presence of several local ministers, the demons said that such and such persons... (who were then named and who included some of the people already accused) were consulting how they might carry on mischievous designs against her and several others...' Statements made by Cole that a number of witches were at work in the area seem to have intensified the community's desire to ferret them out. One of the women mentioned by Cole was her next-door neighbor, Rebecca Greensmith, who was already in prison awaiting trial. When Greensmith was confronted by the ministers and magistrates, she fully admitted her 'familiarity with the Devil.' She denied making 'an express Covenant with him,' but said that 'at Christmass they would have a merry Meeting' and seal their bargain. She also acknowledged that 'the Devil had frequently the carnal knowledge of her Body,' and that she and the other accused witches 'had Meetings at a place not far from her House.' Greensmith was hanged in January 1663, along with her husband, who steadfastly denied his own guilt, and a Farmington woman, Mary Barnes, about whom little is known. According to Mather, Ann Cole was 'restored to health' after their executions."

"In March 1662, John and Bethia Kelly grieved over the body of their 8-year-old daughter inside their home. Little Elizabeth had been fine just days before when she returned home with a neighbor, Goodwife Ayres. The distraught parents, grasping at any explanation for their loss, saw the hand of the devil at work.

"The parents were convinced that Elizabeth had been fatally possessed by Goody Ayres. The Kellys testified that their daughter first took ill the night after she returned home with her neighbor, and that she exclaimed, 'Father! Father! Help me, help me! Goodwife Ayres is upon me. She chokes me. She kneels on my belly. She will break my bowels. She pinches me. She will make me black and blue.'

"After Elizabeth's death, accusations of bewitchment flew, and fingers were pointed at numerous townspeople. Hysteria gripped Hartford... Witchcraft was one of 12 capital crimes decreed by Connecticut's colonial government in 1642. The legal precedent cited by the devoutly Puritan colonists was of a divinely higher order: biblical passages such as Exodus 22:18 ('Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live') and Leviticus 20:27 ('A man also or woman that

hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death'). ...

"Shortly after Elizabeth Kelly's death, the pious Ann Cole suddenly became 'afflicted,' shaking violently and spouting blasphemy. According to one account, Cole was 'taken with strange fits, wherein she held a discourse for a considerable time.' Cole blamed her bewitchment on neighbor Rebecca Greensmith, described by one townsman as 'a lewd, ignorant, considerably aged woman,' and others already suspected of witchcraft in the Kelly case. The accused began to accuse others, and even their spouses, of being the true witches. In what became a vicious circle, neighbors began testifying against neighbors. Goody Ayres' husband, perhaps in an attempt to save his wife, joined in the chorus of Greensmith's accusers.

"The most damning testimony supposedly came from Greensmith herself, who reportedly admitted to having 'familiarity with the devil' and said that 'at Christmas they would have a merry meeting' to form a covenant. Greensmith implicated her husband and said she had met in the woods with seven other witches, including Goody Ayres, Mary Sanford and Elizabeth Seager. Neighbors testified that they saw Seager dancing with other women in the woods and cooking mysterious concoctions in black kettles.

"Two of the suspects, likely the Greensmiths, were subjected to the swimming test in which their hands and feet were bound and they were cast into the water to test the theory that witches are unable to sink. After they were tried, the Greensmiths were indicted 'for not having the fear of God before thine eyes; thou hast entertained familiarity with Satan the grand enemy of God and mankind and by his help hast acted things in a preternatural way.' The court's verdict: 'According to the law of God and the established law of this commonwealth, thou deserves to die.'

"Rebecca Greensmith had confessed in open court. Nathaniel Greensmith had protested his innocence. But they both met the same fate: the noose. Sanford was also sent to the gallows. After their executions, Cole reportedly was 'restored to health.' Ayres fled Hartford, while Seager was finally convicted of witchcraft in 1665, although the governor reversed the verdict the following year. Mary Barnes of Farmington, Connecticut, was also swept up in the region's witch hunt and executed alongside the Greensmiths."



