

Samuel Sewall



Samuel Sewall
(March 28, 1652 –
January 1, 1730) was a
Massachusetts judge,
best known for his
involvement in the
Salem witch trials, for
which he later
apologized, and his
essay *The Selling of
Joseph* (1700), which
criticized slavery.

Life and creative development

Sewall was born in Bishopstoke, Hampshire England, on March 28, 1652, the son of Henry and Jane Sewall and grandson of Henry Sewall, the mayor of Coventry, England. He emigrated with his parents from England to the Massachusetts colony in 1661. It is there the young Samuel "Sam" grew up along the Parker River and Plum Island Sound. Like other local boys he attended school at the James Noyes House. A devout Puritan, he later moved to Boston to attend Harvard University (graduating in 1671), hoping to study for the ministry, but he eventually left to pursue a career in business. He also entered local politics, and was elevated to the position of assistant magistrate in the judiciary that in 1692 judged the people in Salem accused of witchcraft.

A black and white photograph of a two-story wooden house with a gambrel roof and a central chimney. The house has multiple windows with shutters and a small portico over the front door. To the left, there is a smaller structure with a thatched roof and a large pile of brush or debris in the foreground. The house is surrounded by trees and a dirt path leads to the front.

Exterior of the Samuel
Sewall house



Interior of
the Samuel
Sewall
house

Apart from his involvement in the trials, Sewall could be very liberal in his views. In *The Selling of Joseph* (1700), for instance, he came out strongly against slavery, making him one of the earliest colonial abolitionists. There he argued:

"Liberty is in real value next unto Life: None ought to part with it themselves, or deprive others of it, but upon the most mature Consideration."

His 1725 essay "Talitha Cumi" refers to the "right of women." It is republished for the first time since 1725 in the appendix to the most recent biography of Sewall.

His *Journal*, kept from 1673 to 1729, describes his life as a Puritan against the changing tide of colonial life, as the devoutly religious community of Massachusetts gradually adopted more secular attitudes and emerged as a liberal, cosmopolitan-minded community. As such, the diary is an important work for understanding the transformation of the colony in the days leading to the American Revolution.

In 1717, Sewall was appointed chief justice of Massachusetts.



Family of Samuel Sewall, Jr. 1899 2
photographs : b&w.

Sewall married three times. His first wife was Hannah Hull, daughter of John Hull, mint-master of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, whom he married on 28 February 1676 in Boston. She was mother of all fourteen of his children. She died in 1717; two years later, in 1719, Sewall married Abigail (Melyen) Woodmansey Tilley, who died seven months later. In 1722, Sewall married Mary (Shrimpton) Gibbs, who survived him.

Sewall died in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 1, 1730 at age 77 and was interred in the family tomb at the Granary Burying Ground, Tremont Street, Boston. His great grandson Samuel Sewall would later represent Massachusetts in the U. S. Congress. A biography of Sewall was published by Richard Francis in 2005. SALEM WITCH JUDGE, a biography of Sewall published by his descendant Eve LaPlante, won the 2008 Massachusetts Book Award in Nonfiction.



Samuel
Sewall Jr.
on the
steps of
the second
Sewall
house 1900
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photograp
hs : b&w

The Diary and Life of Samuel Sewall

Edited with an Introduction by Mel Yazawa



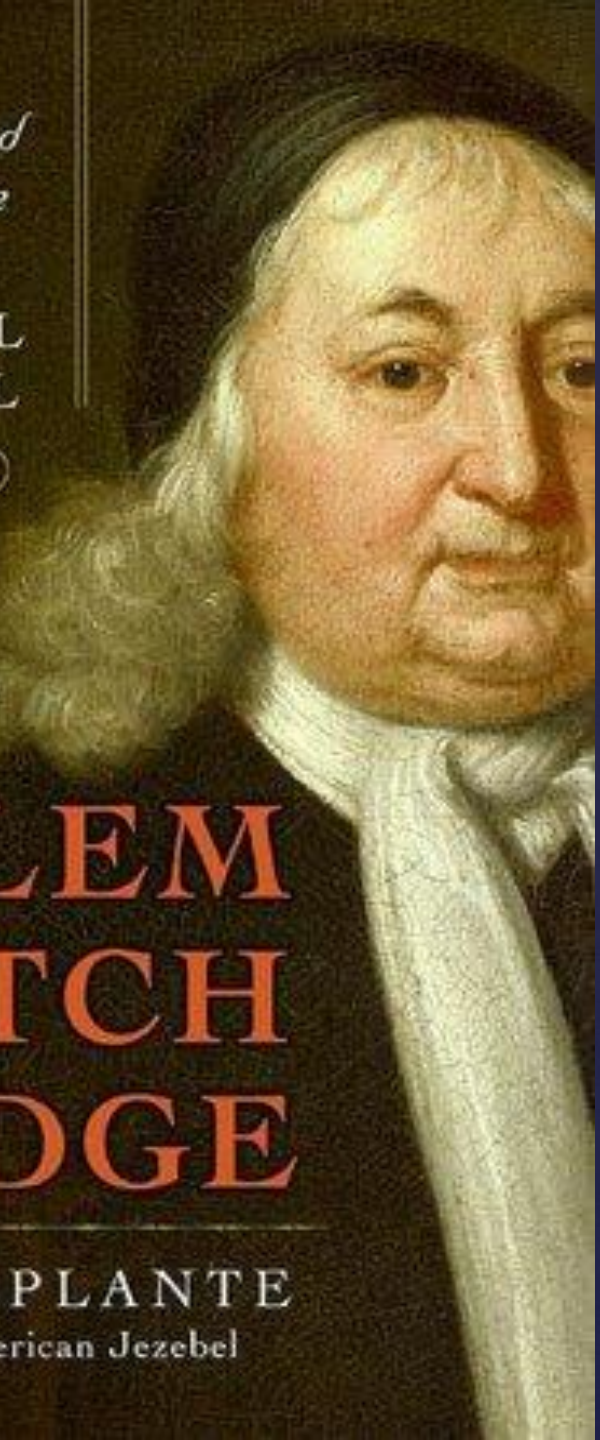
*The Life and
Repentance
of*
**SAMUEL
SEWALL**



"Splendid."
—*Publishers Weekly*

SALEM WITCH JUDGE

EVE LAPLANTE
author of American Jezebel



To Mr. Caleb Ray Keeper of the Prison in Boston
Greeting.

Whereas Mary Watkins single woman was lately ^{remanded} ~~committed~~
to Prison till she should find Sureties for the good Behaviour
with she hath not been able to procure, by reason of her deep
poverty & want of Friends; And whereas the said Wat-
kins is very infirm, and like to prove burdenson to the
publick if longer continued in Custody. There-
fore upon further consideration, these are to order
you to discharge said Mary Watkins the Prison, she
paying her Fees. Dated in Boston; July, 14. 1693.
Annoq3 RRE & Regina Gulielmi & Mariae nunc Anglie
&c Quinto.

Wm Stoughton.

Tho: Danforth,

John Richard,

Sam Sewall, Wait White,

Samuel Sewall letter to Caleb Ray regarding Mary Watkins' imprisonment in the Boston Prison. This letter asks for her release due to her infirm health and poverty.

She was imprisoned for falsely accusing Goody Swift of being a witch and murdering her child. She also accused herself of being a witch, but was not indicted.

She lived in Milton, but had earlier lived in Maine and was in Maine during the Indian conflicts and left Maine as a result.



He regarded "man-stealing as an atrocious crime which would introduce amongst the English settlers people who would remain forever restive and alien," but he also believed that

"There is such a disparity in their Conditions, Colour, Hair, that they can never embody with us, and grow up into orderly Families, to the Peopling of the Land."