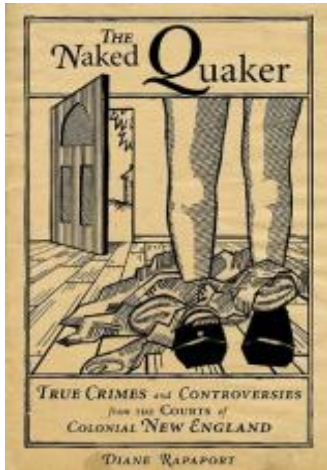


# The Naked Quaker: True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of Colonial New England

by Diane Rapaport



## About the Book

Lawyer and historian Diane Rapaport brings colonial history to life with 25 surprising true stories from court records. Chapters include "Witches and Wild Women", "Coupling", "Tavern Tales", "Slaves and Servants", and "Neighbor vs. Neighbor". **The Naked Quaker** reveals how our ancestors behaved and spoke. A woman walks into Puritan Sunday meeting and drops her dress as a protest tactic. A highway robber threatens his victim: "I will take you by your eyelids and make your heels strike fire!" A mysterious vagabond wields "enthusiastical power" over men, who break the law to follow her. The word "Puritan" conjures up our images of 17th-century New Englanders. We rarely think of Puritans as people who had fun, or sex, but human nature was not so different 350 years ago.

## Discussion Guide

1. Did you learn anything new or unexpected from **The Naked Quaker** about Puritans and life in colonial New England? Do you see aspects of Puritan values that carry over into modern American life?
2. Do you agree with Rapaport's observation that "human nature was not so different three hundred fifty years ago" [p. 34]? What do the stories in **The Naked Quaker** tell you about human nature?
3. Why did Lydia Wardell (the "naked Quaker") choose nudity to call attention to her grievances? Do you think she achieved her goals? Can you imagine circumstances where you would take similar dramatic action to express your views?
4. In the chapter "Witches and Wild Women," and throughout the book, we meet colonial women of varying ages and

social classes. Did these women share similar traits? How would you judge their behavior by today's standards? Why did outspoken unmarried women? [p. 1] face so much community suspicion and disapproval in Puritan times?

5. The witchcraft hysteria in 17th-century New England (most notably at Salem Village, Massachusetts) continues to fascinate us today. Why? Although we no longer accuse people of being witches, do you see any parallels in our modern world?

6. Rapaport says, in chapter 10 [p. 117]: "If I could travel back in time somehow to meet just one person in colonial New England, I would choose Thomas Danforth." Which of the people profiled in **The Naked Quaker** would you most like to meet? Why? What questions would you ask him or her?

7. What does Rapaport mean when she says: "the distinction between slave and servant was often blurred, especially in the 1600s" [p. 51]? What can we learn from **The Naked Quaker** about servitude and social mobility in 17th-century New England?

8. What role did law and courts play in the daily life of colonial New Englanders? How does the 21st-century legal system affect you? Do you see similarities and differences? Why do you think we enjoy watching *Court TV* and reading accounts of trials and crime?

9. Several stories in **The Naked Quaker** involve the legal consequences of words --- insulting, slanderous, angry --- spoken to or about other people. Did the spoken word have more significance for people in colonial New England than for us today? Why or why not?

10. Discuss the author's use of language and writing style. Does her focus on separate narrative stories make history more accessible to modern readers? Do you see advantages and drawbacks to presenting history in this way?

11. Does this book make you curious about the lives of your own ancestors? Do you have stories to share from your heritage?

## Author Bio

Diane Rapaport, a former trial lawyer, has made a new career as an award-winning author and speaker. She brings history to life with true stories from colonial New England, and she uses her legal training to help people find ancestors and trace regional history in underutilized court records. Her special interests include 17th-century New England, American legal history, and Scottish heritage.

Her latest book is **The Naked Quaker: True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of Colonial New England**, published by Commonwealth Editions. Her first book, **New England Court Records: A Research Guide for Genealogists and Historians** (Quill Pen Press, 2006), received three 2007 Benjamin Franklin Awards from PMA, the Independent Book Publishers Association --- for Best History Book, Best Reference Book, and finalist for Best New Voice in Nonfiction. Diane's articles for *New England Ancestors* magazine, some of which appear in **The Naked Quaker**, have earned three "Excellence in Writing" awards from the International Society of Family History Writers and Editors. She also writes a Scottish genealogy column for *The Highlander* magazine, and she is currently working on a historical

novel about 17th-century New England and Scotland. Diane lives in Massachusetts, in the Boston area.

## Critical Praise

"**The Naked Quaker** lays bare Colonial justice through the colorful tales of a woman accused of witchcraft because chickens died after she passed by, a man named Bacon charged with stealing pigs, a semi-literate sailor whose sentence for illegally selling wine included serving as a constable . . . Court TV is no match!"

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