

Witchcraft in Early Orange County

From an article in an *Orange County Historical Society Newsletter*:

“Orange Co. Notes

...we present Orange Co.'s only known witchcraft case. Apparently arising from an argument between two members of the Hebron community in what is now Madison Co. [Was then Orange County], the incident stems from the epithets 'witch' and 'buttermaker,' hurled against Frau Moyer by Frau Bomgardner. ('Buttermaker' is apparently a reference to being able to curdle cream by magic, or perhaps to an imagined ability to produce butter without the traditional churning.) It is indicative of the rapidly changing temper of the times that, a few years earlier, this charge might have been treated most seriously. At this date, though (1743), in spite of an admission of guilt by the defendant, the whole case was treated humorously by the Orange Co. Court, and the **jury found for the defendant, with no damages allowed.**”

From *Orange County Court records*, the spelling and punctuation are original.

“(George Moyer and Barbara) his wife complain of [Frederich] Bomgardner (and his wife, Catherine)...that the said Barbara is a good true Honest and faithfull Subject of our said Lord the King...and his predecessors hath from the time of her nativity always hitherto behaved [behaved] her self from any imputation of felony witchcraft and all other heinous Crimes altogether free clear and unsuspected by wch [which] She had deservedly obtained the good will of her neighbours and others his Maties (i.e. Majesty's) good Leige Subjects nevertheless the said Catherine not being ignorant of ye premises but envying the Happy Estate & condition of ye sd Barbara & intending not only to rob her of her good name fame credit and reputation among her neighbours but also to bring her in danger of being prosecuted for witchcraft the VIth [6th] day of April 1743 in ye Parish of St. Mark [Orange County's parish] in the county afd. In the presence and hearing of divers of his Maties Liege people to and of ye sd Barbara with false feigned Scandalous Malitious and opprobrious words She the said Catherine did then and there falsely & Maliciously Say Speak publish utter and declare that this is to say, Barbara Moyer/ : meaning the plt. Barbara :/ is a witch and also ye sd Catherine of ye sd Barbara, the day and year afd. At ye County afd. These other false and Scandalous words did Say you /: the said Barbara again Meaning : / are a Buttermaker meaning thereby that the said Barbara is a witch by reason of wch false and Scandalous Speaches the said Barbara is not only very Much hurt in her good name and reputation among her neighbors but is in danger of being prosecuted upon the Law of such like crimes made and provided whereupon the said plts Say they are damnified & damage have Sustained to ye value of fifty pounds Sterling and thereof they bring Suit., etc.”¹

¹ Author unknown, “Orange County Notes,” *Orange County Historical Society Newsletter*, Vol. 14, No. 10 (October 1983), 2.