

HARTFORD - LYDIA GILBERT

Old State House

Trial by Whisper: Lydia Gilbert

Hartford's Old State House has all the ingredients for a haunting - colonial architecture, creaky courtrooms, and the spirit of a woman wrongfully condemned.

In 1654, about 140 years *before* the building of the Old State House, Lydia Gilbert of Wethersfield was accused of witchcraft after a neighbor's death by musket fire. Everyone knew the weapon had gone off accidentally. But Lydia was a widow, and a solitary woman was an easy scapegoat. Rumors hardened into charges: she had "familiarity with Satan." Accused of witchcraft, she stood trial where gavel and superstition collided.

Records say Lydia protested fiercely, denying the charge. It's said she spoke with such conviction that her refusal to "confess" felt like proof of guilt to the frantic. On the benches, the jurors weighed not evidence but fear. The verdict: guilty.

 Imagine walking home at night with winter-starved wolves in the woods looking at you like a warm snack. The neighbors could turn on you, crops often failed, and long harsh months led to famine. Bread made with moldy grain, infected with ergot, caused twisted hallucinations. The "authorities" were little more than neighbors in wigs, trying to keep order in a colony that always felt one full moon away from chaos. In that fearful world, many felt witchcraft - and peer pressure - were tidy excuses for every shadow, illness, and accident.

If Lydia was executed, it was likely on the grounds of what's now the State House. Did she hang, coldly erased from the colony's books? Or was she spirited away by sympathetic friends? All that remains certain is that accusations of witchcraft continued to ripple through the colony for years. Her story may have ended - but not the haunting.



Visitors to the State House report hearing the scrape of chairs, as though 12 haunted men are still shifting uncomfortably in their seats. And every so often - *pop...pop...pop* - like ghostly kernels bursting. Listen closely and you might catch the rest: a phantom jury, sneaking their cooked corn in for Lydia's eternal trial. The smell of hot popcorn is undeniable.

Today a historical landmark, the Old State House has hundreds of interesting bygone tidbits on display; it's a chocolate box of curios of the natural world and beyond. 1000 Hartford St., Hartford, CT 06103. Ask your library if they offer a free pass.

Whether Lydia's moved in and seeking justice...or eavesdropping on modern citizens while enjoying the scent of melted butter...the Old State House remains one of Hartford's eeriest sites.

Snack Pairing: *Bewitched Popcorn Mix* - a cauldron of symbolism - defiantly crunchy and salty, with just a few scorched kernels (burned at the stake optional)

Doorknob Rattle Rating:  out of 5 (guilty of goosebumps)

👉 Lydia's Legacy

Some say Lydia's spirit still lingers, protesting her innocence to anyone who'll listen. Others claim she's become a popcorn aficionado, sneaking buckets into the Old State House's displays rooms. One thing's certain: her trial heightened Connecticut's obsession with witches. And it's long fascination with ghosts, gossip, and things that go *pop* in the night.

👤 Ghostly Game Nights

Legend has it that on certain nights, the Old State House transforms into a spectral salon. Lydia's spirit gathers with other colonial cronies to discuss the good old days - or perhaps debate the finer points of witchcraft accusations. If you're lucky (or unlucky), you might stumble upon one of these enchanting repartees... and if you've brought popcorn soup to share, you may be spared.



🍷 Roberto's Real American Tavern

This East Windsor restaurant - at 31 South Main Street - is said to be haunted by a "Lady in White", believed to be Elizabeth Pasco, the wife of the building's original owner. Guests have reported cold spots, apparitions, and glasses falling off tables (could be a sign to ease up on wine).

👤 Not Every Whisper Can be Confirmed

While Lydia Gilbert's trial is a matter of record, ghostly snacks in the jury box...not so much. Most strange crunching sounds in the Old State House can be chalked up to creaky wood, street noise, or an overactive imagination fueled by antique radiators and too much fiber.

🕒 Courtroom Curios...

...your collection

📖 Field Notes

Date/time of hunt: _____

Chill on stairs? _____

Camera glitch? _____

Just the wind...indoors? _____

Heated debate whispered? _____

Stuffed specimens sashayed? _____

Kept snacks close at all times - Yes No

🍏 Notions, Potions and Pie

If Lydia had been a witch, her muttered hex would have been sharp as a musket crack: "May your butter curdle, your pewter tarnish, and every candle smoke black in your face." A curse not of death, but of endless domestic annoyance.

To balance the tale, we can look at what a real 1654 Goody or Mistress might have stirred up instead. A simple receipt (recipe) of the day: *Take apples sliced thin, stewed with a little molasses, and laid betwixt two crusts of paste. Bake till browned.* Witchcraft? No - just the earliest whisper of apple pie.