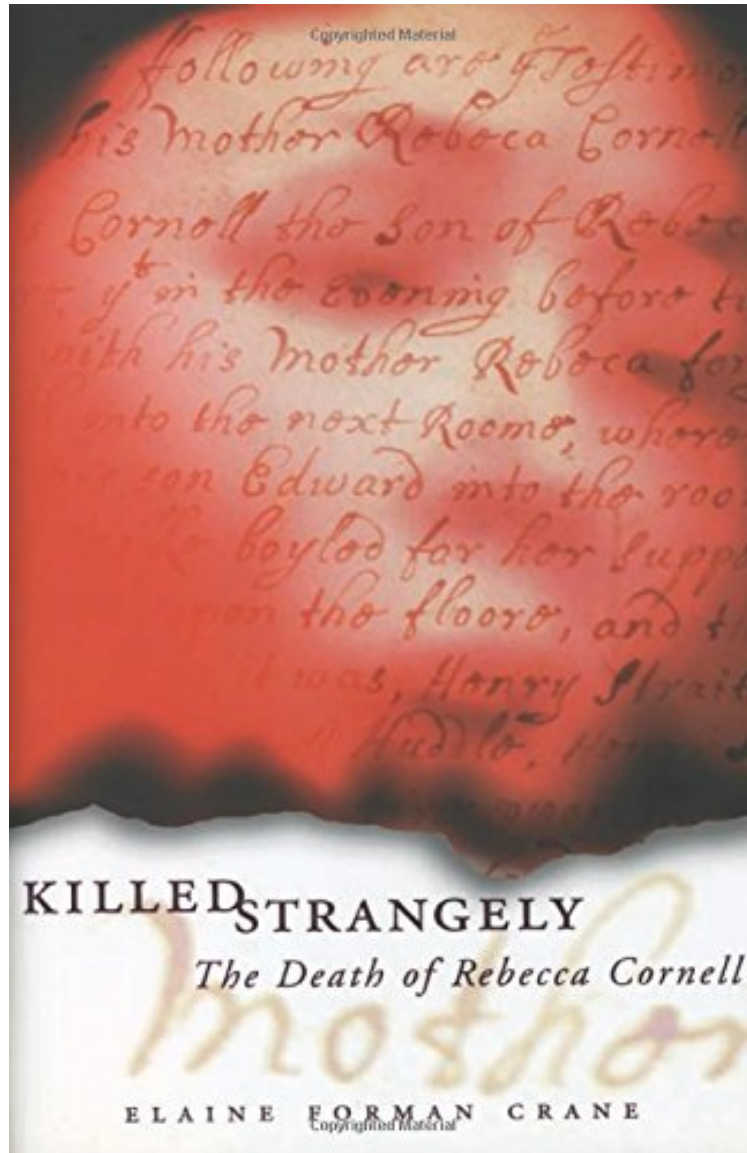


(Read now) Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell

## Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell

*Elaine Forman Crane*

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**Elaine Forman Crane : Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Real 1673 Mystery, Excellent for Genealogists, History Buffs, and Mystery readers. By CustomerEnjoyable easy-to-read 1673 "real mystery," with insights to Portsmouth, Rhode Island colonial culture. [Died by fire, no one smelled or heard anything. "Her" ghost appeared to her brother and said, 'See

how I am burned,' but made no accusation or naming of anyone being at fault, yet her son was hung for murder.]Excellent resource for genealogists, mystery buffs, history buffs and legal system researchers. Detailed index, comprehensive citations and footnotes, complemented with chapter endnotes (in one section at the back of the book). Author names ALL individuals identified in any document she found, including witnesses with little information, people who were "present" but gave no testimony, and people from other towns who came for some reason. Author's presents detailed research and explanations beyond the basic mysterious death. Very smooth continuity while sharing the colony's--demographics--various religious and non-religious philosophies/beliefs--"recent" events and a couple of specific incidents with the local Native American Indians--the local Portsmouth government (and/or lack thereof)--the provincial government (i.e. the colony's government)--the colony's evolving democratic ways and legal methods (with some contrast to British rule)--changing attitudes and beliefs among colonists (and some in England)Relevant to modern readers from the human nature perspective. (Rebecca's an old woman with complaints, yet sometimes she gave few or no specifics and answered a question with a question such as "how do you think?" She also put conflicting demands on one son. Such behavior can be aggravating, which definitely influenced the verdict to hang her son for killing her.)0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An informative book. Quite readable and Ms. Crane ...By CrazypiecesAn informative book. Quite readable and Ms. Crane covers every aspect of this Grandmother's death.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Purchased and read for genealogical information contained in the book ...By PlayingpossumPurchased and read for genealogical information contained in the book. It provided much factual information on the Cornell incident and family history which was what I was seeking. Not sure about interpretative aspects of the book since it was possibly colored by the modern mind and academic approaches of the author. I would probably not trust some of the social and gender characterizations.

"It was Rebecca's son, Thomas, who first realized the victim's identity. His eyes were drawn to the victim's head, and aided by the flickering light of a candle, he 'clapt his hands and cryed out, Oh Lord, it is my mother.' James Moills, a servant of Cornell . . . described Rebecca 'lying on the floore, with fire about Her, from her Lower parts neare to the Arme pits.' He recognized her only 'by her shoes.'"from *Killed Strangely* On a winter's evening in 1673, tragedy descended on the respectable Rhode Island household of Thomas Cornell. His 73-year-old mother, Rebecca, was found close to her bedroom's large fireplace, dead and badly burned. The legal owner of the Cornells' hundred acres along Narragansett Bay, Rebecca shared her home with Thomas and his family, a servant, and a lodger. A coroner's panel initially declared her death "an Unhappie Accident," but before summer arrived, a dark web of eventsrumors of domestic abuse, allusions to witchcraft, even the testimony of Rebecca's ghost through her brotherresulted in Thomas's trial for matricide.Such were the ambiguities of the case that others would be tried for the murder as well. Rebecca is a direct ancestor of Cornell University's founder, Ezra Cornell. Elaine Forman Crane tells the compelling story of Rebecca's death and its aftermath, vividly depicting the world in which she lived. That world included a legal system where jurors were expected to be familiar with the defendant and case before the trial even began. Rebecca's strange death was an event of cataclysmic proportions, affecting not only her own community, but neighboring towns as well.The documents from Thomas's trial provide a rare glimpse into seventeenth-century life. Crane writes, "Instead of the harmony and respect that sermon literature, laws, and a hierarchical/patriarchal society attempted to impose, evidence illustrates filial insolence, generational conflict, disrespect toward the elderly, power plays between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, [and] adult dependence on (and resentment of) aging parents who clung to purse strings." Yet even at a distance of more than three hundred years, Rebecca Cornell's story is poignantly familiar. Her complaints of domestic abuse, Crane says, went largely unheeded by friends and neighbors until, at last, their complacency was shattered by her terrible death.

From *Publishers Weekly*If this book consisted only of the first chapter, it would be a satisfying account of the mysterious death in 1673 of a 73-year-old Rhode Island matriarch (and ancestor of Ezra Cornell, founder of Cornell University), for which her son, Thomas Cornell, was hanged. Rebecca Cornell was at home with her family including 46-year-old Thomas, still dependent on mom's largesse but remained in her chamber at suppertime; while the others dined, she died and her body caught fire from the hearth. But the author, a Fordham University professor who's written several books on colonial history, doesn't stop there, and subsequent chapters about Rhode Island society of the time will be of most interest to scholars and local historians. Even those readers may question Crane's methods and intent as she resorts to anthropology, psychohistory and fashionable experimentation with "narratives" to try to fulfill a mission she never clearly articulates. In one bizarre aside, she turns to three 19th-century cases of violent death, each involving Cornell descendants (one, the infamous Lizzie Borden) to demonstrate... what? If Thomas's guilt were unassailable, arguing for violence as a family trait might be useful, but his guilt, despite his conviction, remains in doubt, with such evidence as the appearance of a ghost to the victim's brother and neighbors' gossip. Without clear answers to whodunit or why, perhaps the author's extensive research into "the society in which this grim episode played out" and her proven scholarly track record could have been put to better use. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A satisfying account of the mysterious death in 1673 of a 73-year-old Rhode Island matriarch (and ancestor of Ezra Cornell,

founder of Cornell University), for which her son, Thomas Cornell was hanged. Rebecca Cornell was at home with her family including 46-year-old Thomas, still dependent on mom's largesse but remained in her chamber at suppertime; while the others dined, she died and her body caught fire from the hearth. But the author. . . doesn't stop there, and subsequent chapters about Rhode Island society of the time will be of most interest to scholars and local historians."Publishers Weekly, 27 October 2002" For sleuthing historian Elaine Forman Crane in *Killed Strangely*, the jury's 'willingness and ability to reconcile medieval superstitions with modern evidentiary standards makes the Cornell case a striking example of the friction between traditional Christian folklore and evolving common law.' And Crane's examination of the case in the context of its place and time 1673, 19 years before the Salem witch crisis is a fine example of the 'microhistory' genre. She found it an opportunity to study 'the prescriptive values of Puritan society' and 'the ways in which people . . . actually lived out their lives.'"Boston Globe, 3 August 2003" This excellent book by a Fordham University history professor presents a true 1673 murder mystery. . . . This well-written, integrated, historical perspective on this mystery fascinated me. Think of it this way when was the last time you heard about the testimony of a crime victim's ghost being admissible in a court of law?"Virginia Quarterly "Well written, thorough, scholarly, and entertaining. Summing Up: Recommended."Choice, June 2003" *Killed Strangely* is an engaging read that will entrance and inform readers who are at once murder mystery and history buffs."Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Common-Place*, October 2003" This book is brief and compulsively readable, the kind of work tailor-made to grip and hold the imaginations of undergraduates in early American survey courses everywhere. . . . Crane's use of material culture is also marvelously adept. . . . Her book succeeds nicely as a mystery story and admirably as a teaching tool."Nicole Eustace, *Journal of American History*, September 2003 "Killed Strangely is itself a strangely haunting work. Based on meticulous, often ingenious, research, it unfolds a compelling story of lives gone awry in the lost world of colonial America. Some parts are highly specific to that world; others are of universal significance. As such, the book makes a signal contribution to genre of microhistory."John Demos, Yale University" *Killed Strangely* takes us to a seventeenth-century New England hearth that does not radiate the warmth and ultra-piety we commonly imagine when we visit picture-perfect historic colonial houses. Rebecca Cornell's hearth was the scene of her death, by burning and perhaps also by stabbing. Was it matricide? Intruder murder? Suicide? Elaine Forman Crane sorts through the suspects and possibilities, skillfully exploring the tensions generated in the Cornell household over marriage and remarriage, elder care and filial duty, money and inheritance. Her absorbing recreation of this one family's history, from English origins through Atlantic migration, from Puritanism to Quakerism, from Indian wars to the Barbados trade, from murder conviction and execution to the birth of a baby named, Innocent, opens a window onto a rarely-seen slice of the American colonial past."Patricia Cline Cohen, University of California, Santa Barbara" *Killed Strangely* is a page turner! I don't think I have ever devoured a nonfiction book so quickly and with so much pleasure. Elaine Crane has mastered the art of suspense; she sets up the circumstances of this unusual case of matricide and only divulges its details to the reader a piece at a time until the puzzle is complete. In addition to writing a superb 'whodunit,' Crane has painted a vivid portrait of seventeenth-century New England."Elizabeth Reis, author of *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*" *Killed Strangely* is an engrossing piece of microhistory, a detective story, and a wonderful 'thought experiment' all rolled into one book. Crane's explorations of different possible explanations for Rebecca Cornell's mysterious death should prove fascinating to scholars and students alike."Mary Beth Norton, Cornell University

From the Back Cover" *Killed Strangely* is itself a strangely haunting work. Based on meticulous, often ingenious, research, it unfolds a compelling story of lives gone awry in the lost world of colonial America. Some parts are highly specific to that world; others are of universal significance. As such, the book makes a signal contribution to the budding genre of \*microhistory\*."--John Demos, Yale University " *Killed Strangely* takes us to a seventeenth-century New England hearth that does not radiate the warmth and ultra-piety we commonly imagine when we visit picture-perfect historic colonial houses. Rebecca Cornell's hearth was the scene of her death, by burning and perhaps also by stabbing. Was it matricide? Intruder murder? Suicide? Elaine Forman Crane sorts through the suspects and possibilities, skillfully exploring the tensions generated in the Cornell household over marriage and remarriage, elder care and filial duty, money and inheritance. Her absorbing recreation of this one family's history, from English origins through Atlantic migration, from Puritanism to Quakerism, from Indian wars to the Barbados trade, from murder conviction and execution to the birth of a baby named, Innocent, opens a window onto a rarely-seen slice of the American colonial past."--Patricia Cline Cohen, University of California Santa Barbara " *Killed Strangely* is a page turner! I don't think I have ever devoured a nonfiction book so quickly and with so much pleasure. Elaine Crane has mastered the art of suspense; she sets up the circumstances of this unusual case of matricide and only divulges its details to the reader a piece at a time until the puzzle is complete. In addition to writing a superb 'whodunit,' Crane has painted a vivid portrait of seventeenth-century New England."--Elizabeth Reis, author of *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* " *Killed Strangely* is an engrossing piece of microhistory, a detective story, and a wonderful 'thought experiment' all rolled into one book. Crane's explorations of different possible explanations for Rebecca Cornell's mysterious death should prove fascinating to scholars and students alike."--Mary Beth Norton, Cornell University