

Woman finds 20th century not without witch trials

By Terry Head
The Ledger

Another chapter in a witch trial ends today in Atlanta. The state is dismissing its most recent charges against Lady Siantana, the only American high priestess of the Old Religion who has relinquished secrecy and opened a pagan church.

Over the doorsteps of Ravenwood Church and Seminary of the Old Religion, she plans to hang a sign especially intended for Christians: "If you believe in the devil, please leave him outside when you come in."

She says legal hassles, Molotov cocktails and fundamentalist demonstrators have haunted her since she opened Ravenwood seven years ago. And she's fought back, hoping people will understand that she teaches a legitimate religion and is not in league with the devil.

"Religious freedom doesn't exist until it's tested," says Lady Siantana. "It's not like I want to see mom-and-pop churches popping up for tax-evasion purposes. But people take a lot for granted. It's very easy to be a Christian in a Christian country. It's very difficult to be a witch." She was in Lakeland last week to see author Sara Harris, who's writing a book on the craft.

Lady Siantana's latest legal battle erupted soon after she won a U.S. Supreme Court appeal that exempts the church from paying state property taxes. Three fundamentalist ministers and the mother of a 15-year-old girl whose father was in training at Ravenwood took their complaints to Solicitor General Hinson McAuliffe.

Based on information from the 15-year-old, charges were filed against Lady Siantana for giving alcohol to a minor, possessing marijuana and running a disorderly house where marijuana was openly used.

"The solicitor general has been on a great cleanup campaign," says Lady Siantana. "But I'm not a bath house or porno parlor."

The only substance to the charges, she says, is that she gave the girl a glass of wine at her 16th birthday party, which her father also attended. As for marijuana,

