

## Ocean-Born Mary

1962

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To the Editors: I was born in Henniker, N. H. and I grew up knowing the true story of "Ocean-Born Mary" as it is given in the town history. I often went into the little museum in the library in Henniker and gazed at the faded bit of silk which had been a piece of her wedding-dress.

The true story is simple but romantic. An immigrant ship coming from Ireland to Boston in 1720 was boarded by pirates. A Mrs. Wilson had just given birth to a baby girl. When the pirate captain found them in a cabin his heart was softened. He asked Mrs. Wilson to name the baby Mary, after his wife, and he gave her a bolt of beautiful silk. He ordered his men to restore all the booty they had taken, and then they sailed away.

This story belongs even more to Londonderry, N. H., than it does to Henniker, for it was in Londonderry that the Wilsons and other immigrants settled. I believe it is true that for many years this deliverance from the pirates was commemorated by a day of annual thanksgiving in Londonderry. The Henniker town history states definitely that Mary Wilson married a Mr. Wallace of Londonderry, and that one of her sons built the beautiful mansion near Henniker which is called "the Ocean-Born Mary house." She did not live in Henniker until the latter part of her life. The above facts are history, not legend, because they were written into the "History of Henniker" while Mary Wilson Wallace's grandchildren were living.

But now one man has taken it upon himself to alter the story. He lives in the house and charges admission to see his display of antiques. I suppose he thinks he will attract more visitors if he tells a whopping good story. He tells them that the pirate captain later sailed up the Contoocook River with his men and built this house for Mary; that he lived there until he was murdered in the orchard, and that he is probably buried under the huge hearthstone in one of the rooms.

I myself heard him tell this story three years ago when I was back in Henniker for a summer visit, and like other Henniker people I just laughed it off. But since then I have been shocked to read his version of the story in two widely distributed books. One is "Legends of the New England Coast" by Edward Rowe Snow; the other is "Strangely Enough" by C. B. Colby. The latter book is particularly offensive in its welath of detail which is entirely untrue.

Since both of these books are in the Public Library of this small Canadian city where I live, no doubt they are in many libraries across the U. S. A. and Canada. Moreover our city newspaper carried an AP dispatch last Halllowen with the headline: "Hope to Again See 18th Century Beauty on Halloween Night," followed by Mr. Roy's colorful version of the story. This of course was even more widely distributed than the books.

I feel angry and distressed that one man has had the power to spoil a charming piece of New Hampshire history. It is a frightening thing to know that the incorrect can so easily be incorporated into history. I have always had love and respect for "the printed word," but now I am beginning to wonder if we can believe anything we read.

Sincerely Yours

FREDA NEWTON BUNNER

Ocean Sound, Ontario, Can.

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