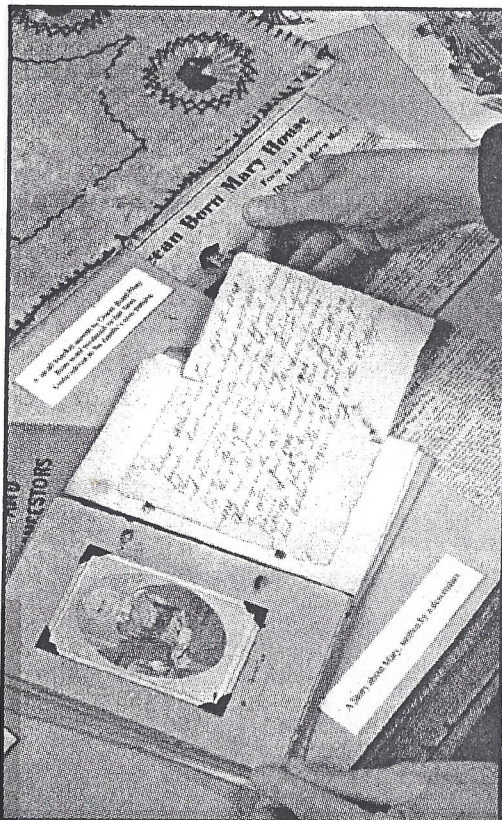




**Left:** Part of a display on Ocean Born Mary at the Henniker Historical Society. **Below left:** A book containing a story about Mary written by one of her descendants. Above the book is a weaving by the legendary figure.

**KEN WILLIAMS**  
Monitor staff



## Henniker

# *In search of the feisty ghost of Ocean Born Mary*

*Legend is said to haunt estate*

By **VICTORIA SHOULDIS**  
For the Monitor

**T**hey say a ghost or two walk – well ride, actually, in a horse-drawn carriage – in the Henniker Hills.

They say one is the Ghost of Ocean Born Mary, a reportedly vital and feisty redhead who was named by a pirate and came to live in her senior years on an imposing estate in Henniker, who haunts the house where she died and surveys the neighborhood in an eerily transparent coach.

Some even say that Mary's Ghost is accompanied by the apparition of Captain Pedro, the pirate who named Mary and later came to live with her in the hills, where he

■ See **GHOST STORY** – Page B-8

# GHOST STORY

Continued from Page B-1

treasure in the house and was later stabbed to death by a former pirate-acquaintance.

What they don't say is that Mary never lived - may never even have lived - in the house on Bear Hill that she is said to haunt. What they don't say is that it is only that Mary ever met up with the Pirate again and that it is a mathematical impossibility that they lived together in the house.

What they don't say is that the remarkable story of Mary's birth is apparently true, the legend of her ghost walking is relative and really didn't even exist until an enterprising and creagentleman named Louis Roy moved into the Bear Hill house in the 1920s.

## Mary is born

As much seems to be true. On Oct. 18, 1720, the vessel Wolf, carrying Irish and Scotch immigrants, including a young pregnant woman and her husband, was en route to its destination in New England.

The Wolf neared the Boston harbor when the ship was overtaken by a pirate vessel. As the buccaneers boarded the vessel, Elizabeth Wilson lay on the yellow deck, giving birth to a daughter.

As the story goes, the pirate captain was moved by the innocent woman and made a deal with those aboard the ship. If Elizabeth and her newborn would agree "to call the child Mary," the pirates would spare the ship and let Wilsons continue their journey.

The couple agreed, and the pirate captain and his crew departed within minutes the leader of the marauders was back, and the immigrants feared he would not be on his word.

Instead though, the pirate captain presented Elizabeth Wilson with a fine bolt of silk as a reward - according to one account, of "peril and deliverance." The captain asked that Mary wear the dress on her wedding day. That night, the pirate again departed and the Wolf completed its journey.

The Wilson family settled in Newbury, and in 1743 Mary, by then a tall, auburn-haired beauty, was said to have a "salty tongue," a trait James Wallace. For the rest of her life, Mary wore the silk

## Mary in Henniker

Mary bore four children, includ-

ing sons Robert and William. Robert moved to Henniker in 1797, and William arrived shortly after.

In about 1805, Mary, now 85 years old and widowed, went to Henniker to be taken care of by her son, William. According to transcripts of William's expense records compiled by the Henniker Historical Society, William charged his siblings equal shares of the estimated \$2 a week it cost him to board and care for his mother. Although son Robert also lived in Henniker, Mary never lived with him, according to William's expense records.

In 1810 William amended the weekly fee to \$3.50, because Mary was now 90 and in poor health. Mary died in 1814. Ocean Born Mary is buried in the old cemetery behind Henniker's Town Hall.

## The ghost

The amazing story of Ocean Born Mary's origin was already a legend in New Hampshire and throughout the states by the early 1900s, and early in the century Lois Lenski published the book *Ocean Born Mary*, a fictional account of Mary's birth and life.

By the late 1800s William's house in Henniker was abandoned, and in 1920 it burned to the ground. The Henniker Historical Society has one picture of the house, taken in 1918 when it was run-down and obviously not cared for.

However, Robert Wallace's Henniker home remained standing, and in about 1920 Louis Roy bought the residence on Bear Hill Road. His aged mother and their cats lived in the house.

Soon reports began to surface that the Roy family was not alone. There were stories of chairs rocking by themselves, even of ghostly hands helping to protect against the ravages of the hurricane of 1938.

Roy, a photographer, historian and student of the fine arts initially planned to fix up the Bear Hill home and restore it to the elegance of the period when Robert Wallace lived there.

But over time Roy became enchanted and then obsessed with the Ocean Born Mary story, and as he began spreading tales of apparitions and spirits around town folks easily forgot that Mary had likely never set foot in Roy's house.

A skilled publicity-seeker and salesman, Roy expanded the myth and encouraged stories about the haunting - the Historical Society displays clips of stories and drawings from the *New York Times*, and

the *Boston Post*, among others, writing about the haunting of Henniker. Noted ghost hunter Hans Holzer devoted many pages to Ocean Born Mary, and other writers have followed suit.

Hillsboro's Fuller Public Library has a 21-page, unpublished manuscript written by Roy in about the 1940s, fleshing out the legend and turning the Ocean Born Mary into a great sweeping melodrama, complete with lost loves, treachery and family betrayals, but in the end, contentment, as the still-vivacious Mary comes to Henniker to live with and take care of Captain Pedro, the pirate who named her all those years ago.

There are a few factual problems with this very appealing love story, even beyond the fact that Mary never lived in Roys house. Mary was 85-years-old when she moved to Henniker, probably no longer strongly vivacious and, according to her son's records, not in good health and probably not well enough to be taking care of Captain Pedro.

And then there's Captain Pedro. If Mary was 85, then Captain Pedro had to be at least 105 - probably even older, since you probably need a little maturity and seasoning to become a captain, even in the pirate world.

But no matter. Roy continued his tales, and was even charging admission to let folks see the house; he charged more if you wanted to bring a shovel and dig up the yard, seeking Pedro's buried treasure. It was said that Captain Pedro himself was buried under the hearthstone in the house.

By the 1960s the myth was huge, but Roy was old and alone in the Henniker house. In an interview reprinted in a 1968 edition of *New Hampshire Profiles*, Roy is lonely after the death of his mother and even most of their cats - except for a 21-year-old named Blackie - and increasingly caught up in the story of Mary's ghost.

By this time, it seems, Roy was using Mary and Pedro not so much for profit but for companionship. Roy died in 1965.

## The ghosts, today

Subsequent owners of the Ocean Born Mary House have generally had little use for the legend or the interlopers who come looking for the haunted carriage.

One report in the late 1960s tells of damage to windows as youth gathered in front of the home and threw small rocks at the house, trying to get the attentions of the

specters.

Since Roy's time, the road in front of the house has been re-routed so it is not as easily seen from the street; current owner Robert Gregg has reluctantly accepted that those looking for Mary are going to drive by his house sometimes.

"We did resist the whole thing in the past," said Gregg, who has the home up for sale now. "But people are not really invasive and you get used to it."

Gregg is fairly certain, however, that there are no spirits sharing the home.

"When the wind blows there are lots of creaks and crackles. But not any ghosts - not that I am aware of, anyway," he said.

But still, on certain overcast afternoons, with the clouds bright white in that chilled autumn way, one gets a sense of *something* not at rest in the Henniker hills.

"I believe there may be ghosts in town," said Barbara Gratton of the Henniker Historical Society, "but Mary isn't one of them."

If Mary is at eternal rest, one wonders about Roy, the man who loved to tell a tall tale, and, it seems, loved Mary. It might make sense that a certain ghost, lonely and striving to maintain the legend he created, might patrol the hills, keeping the myth alive.

And perhaps, he even travels in a ghostly horse-drawn carriage.

*(The Historical Society at 6 Academy Ave. in Henniker is currently displaying an exhibit of Ocean Born Mary memorabilia. Henniker's Tucker Free Library also has a piece of silk said to be from Mary's wedding dress.)*

## ■ GHOST STORY Continued from Page B-1

buried treasure in the house and yard and was later stabbed to death by a former pirate-acquaintance.

What they don't say is that Mary never lived – may never even have set foot in – the house on Bear Hill Road that she is said to haunt. What they don't say is that it is unlikely that Mary ever met up with her Pirate again and that it is indeed a mathematical impossibility that they lived together in the grand house.

And what they don't say is that while the remarkable story of Mary's birth is apparently true, the legend of her ghost walking is speculative and really didn't even exist until an enterprising and creative gentleman named Louis "Guy" Roy moved into the Bear Hill Road house in the 1920s.

### Mary is born

This much seems to be true. On July 28, 1720, the vessel *Wolf*, carrying Irish and Scotch immigrants, including a young pregnant woman and her husband, was nearing its destination in New England.

As *Wolf* neared the Boston harbor, the ship was overtaken by pirates. As the buccaneers boarded the vessel, Elizabeth Wilson was below deck, giving birth to a daughter.

As the story goes, the pirate leader was moved by the innocent baby and made a deal with those on the ship. If Elizabeth and James Wilson would agree "to call the newborn after the name of his wife, Mary," the pirates would leave the ship and let Wilsons continue their journey.

The couple agreed, and the pirate captain and his crew departed. But within minutes the leader of the marauders was back, and the immigrants feared he would renege on his word.

Instead though, the pirate captain presented Elizabeth Wilson with a fine bolt of silk as a remnant, according to one account, of "their peril and deliverance." The pirate asked that Mary wear the silk as a dress on her wedding day. With that, the pirate again departed, and the *Wolf* completed its journey.

The Wilson family settled in Londonderry, and in 1743 Mary, by then a tall, auburn-haired beauty, known to have a "salty tongue," married James Wallace. For the ceremony, Mary wore the silk dress.

### Mary in Henniker

Mary bore four children, includ-

ing sons Robert and William. Robert moved to Henniker in 1797, and William arrived shortly after.

In about 1805, Mary, now 85 years old and widowed, went to Henniker to be taken care of by her son, William. According to transcripts of William's expense records compiled by the Henniker Historical Society, William charged his siblings equal shares of the estimated \$2 a week it cost him to board and care for his mother. Although son Robert also lived in Henniker, Mary never lived with him, according to William's expense records.

In 1810 William amended the weekly fee to \$3.50, because Mary was now 90 and in poor health. Mary died in 1814. Ocean Born Mary is buried in the old cemetery behind Henniker's Town Hall.

### The ghost

The amazing story of Ocean Born Mary's origin was already legend in New Hampshire and throughout the states by the early 1900s, and early in the century Lois Lenski published the book *Ocean Born Mary*, a fictional account of Mary's birth and life.

By the late 1800s William's house in Henniker was abandoned, and in 1920 it burned to the ground. The Henniker Historical Society has one picture of the house, taken in 1918 when it was run-down and obviously not cared for.

However, Robert Wallace's Henniker home remained standing, and in about 1920 Louis Roy bought the residence on Bear Hill Road. His aged mother and their cats lived in the house.

Soon reports began to surface that the Roy family was not alone. There were stories of chairs rocking by themselves, even of ghostly hands helping to protect against the ravages of the hurricane of 1938.

Roy, a photographer, historian and student of the fine arts initially planned to fix up the Bear Hill home and restore it to the elegance of the period when Robert Wallace lived there.

But over time Roy became enchanted and then obsessed with the Ocean Born Mary story, and as he began spreading tales of apparitions and spirits around town folks easily forgot that Mary had likely never set foot in Roy's house.

A skilled publicity-seeker and salesman, Roy expanded the myth and encouraged stories about the haunting – the Historical Society displays clips of stories and drawings from the *New York Times*, and

the *Boston Post*, among others, writing about the haunting of Henniker. Noted ghost hunter Hans Holzer devoted many pages to Ocean Born Mary, and other writers have followed suit.

Hillsboro's Fuller Public Library has a 21-page, unpublished manuscript written by Roy in about the 1940s, fleshing out the legend and turning the Ocean Born Mary into a great sweeping melodrama, complete with lost loves, treachery and family betrayals, but in the end, contentment, as the still-vivacious Mary comes to Henniker to live with and take care of Captain Pedro, the pirate who named her all those years ago.

There are a few factual problems with this very appealing love story, even beyond the fact that Mary never lived in Roys house. Mary was 85-years-old when she moved to Henniker, probably no longer strongly vivacious and, according to her son's records, not in good health and probably not well enough to be taking care of Captain Pedro.

And then there's Captain Pedro. If Mary was 85, then Captain Pedro had to be at least 105 – probably even older, since you probably need a little maturity and seasoning to become a captain, even in the pirate world.

But no matter. Roy continued his tales, and was even charging admission to let folks see the house; he charged more if you wanted to bring a shovel and dig up the yard, seeking Pedro's buried treasure. It was said that Captain Pedro himself was buried under the hearthstone in the house.

By the 1960s the myth was huge, but Roy was old and alone in the Henniker house. In an interview reprinted in a 1968 edition of *New Hampshire Profiles*, Roy is lonely after the death of his mother and even most of their cats – except for a 21-year-old named Blackie – and increasingly caught up in the story of Mary's ghost.

By this time, it seems, Roy was using Mary and Pedro not so much for profit but for companionship. Roy died in 1965.

### The ghosts, today

Subsequent owners of the Ocean Born Mary House have generally had little use for the legend or the interlopers who come looking for the haunted carriage.

One report in the late 1960s tells of damage to windows as youth gathered in front of the home and threw small rocks at the house, trying to get the attentions of the

specters.

Since Roy's time, the front of the house has been re-ed so it is not as easily seen the street; current owner Gregg has reluctantly accepted that those looking for Mary going to drive by his house times.

"We did resist the whole the past," said Gregg, who home up for sale now. "But are not really invasive and used to it."

Gregg is fairly certain, however, that there are no spirits sharing home.

"When the wind blows the lots of creaks and crackles. E any ghosts – not that I am anyway," he said.

But still, on certain over afternoons, with the clouds white in that chilled autumn, one gets a sense of *something* at rest in the Henniker hills.

"I believe there may be ghost town," said Barbara Gratton, Henniker Historical Society. Mary isn't one of them."

If Mary is at eternal rest, wonders about Roy, the man loved to tell a tall tale, seems, loved Mary. It might sense that a certain ghost, and striving to maintain the he created, might patrol the keeping the myth alive.

And perhaps, he even tra a ghostly horse-drawn carriage.

(The Historical Society at 6 emy Ave. in Henniker is currently displaying an exhibit of Ocean Born Mary memorabilia. Henniker's er Free Library also has a picture of the silk dress.)