



An unusual 16-star Eagle overmantel painting graces the parlor fireplace surround, the work of an unidentified itinerant painter. (Another example is in the collection of Old Sturbridge Village.) The stars represent the first 16 states, from Delaware in 1787 to Tennessee in 1796. It was painted sometime between 1796 and 1803, the year Ohio became state number 17. Below is an American officer's sword with an ivory handle, c. 1810. The door at left opens to an original built-in china cabinet.

On the opposite wall stands a walnut tall clock, its works made by Cleaveland Salter of Portsey, England. Next to it is a c. 1840 Tennessee one-drawer side table. The late 18th-Century drop-front desk below the unidentified portrait is a family piece from New England. The commemorative pitcher on top is a tribute to Admiral Nelson's victory at the Battle of the Nile in 1799. The roundabout chair is 18th Century. In front of the window by the desk is an 1835 English game table. The blue seating furniture is American, c. 1850. In front of the sofa, an early 19th-Century silver tea set sits on a mid-18th-Century English birdcage tea table. Previous owners installed the custom curtains.



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The Stamps furnished the northeast room as a tavern—a second cooking hearth raises the possibility the building served as a public space in the past. The mantel is lined with 18th-Century pewter tankards and gin bottles beneath an early 19th-Century flintlock rifle, probably made in Pennsylvania. An early-19th-Century blown demijohn rests on the hearth at left beneath an 18th-Century pipe box. The banister-back side chairs are late 18th Century. The cherry heart box on the wall and the chandelier also date to the 18th Century.

tion Museum in Washington, D. C., and another in the Henniker Historical Society Museum. The couple had four sons and a daughter.

LAND-LOCKED MARY

James and Mary Wallace's son Robert married in 1776 and relocated to Henniker. He was the most successful of the Wallace sons, a leader politically and civically, remembered also for his "fine old-time mansion" and "large and highly cultivated farm." Robert's younger brother William also settled in Henniker, where he bred livestock. His substantial but far less pretentious house later served as the poor farm until arsonists burned it down in the 1920s.

Ocean-Born Mary's husband died in 1791 and for the last years of her life, 1798 to 1814, she made her home with William. She was buried in his plot in Henniker's Center Burying Ground (and not as legend holds, under the hearthstone at the

Ocean-Born Mary house). Reportedly she did not care for Robert and never even paid him a visit—she never set foot in the home now known for her.

At Robert Wallace's death in 1815, his property passed to son Robert Moore Wallace. The owner of a saw and grist mill complex in West Henniker, he did not occupy the family homestead. Rather, he rented it out until 1834, when he sold it to Washington Berry, a farmer who owned it for thirty years.

In 1864 farmer/blacksmith Harris Campbell acquired it but soon sold it to farmer James H. Dowlin. Records suggest that when James died in 1903, his son (who had succeeded to the title) left Henniker, abandoning the house.

In 1917, Roy, a young Wisconsin photographer, inquired of the Henniker postmaster/real estate agent if there were any interesting properties available. He learned of "the long

vacant and dilapidated old Wallace place," and within two weeks, Roy had purchased it and soon moved in with his widowed mother.

Roy made minor restorations for livability, filled the house with antiques, and spun all those elaborate tales about Ocean-Born Mary and the pirate who spared the ship because of a baby. Unimpeded by the historical record, he asserted that Mary had lived in his home, that the furnishings were hers, that her spirit was still in residence, and that the pirate in old age had buried a large treasure in the backyard.

Like P. T. Barnum, Roy vigorously marketed his story through the press and did a thriving business. He charged admission for ghost tours plus an additional fifty cents for shovel rentals to dig for treasure. His eccentric mother added to the atmosphere, padding about in 18th-Century attire as she undertook colonial tasks like candle making and weaving

on the original loom that is still in the attic of the house.

Despite the best efforts of historically minded individuals to set the record straight after Roy's demise, by the 1950s the Ocean-Born Mary house had become one of the most well-known "ghost houses" in the country.

A half-century later, people still stop by occasionally to ask if the owners conduct tours of the house, Terry noted.

UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Later owners found that the home had a true curse in its notoriety. David and Corinne Russell, who purchased the property in 1961, were besieged as a result of Roy's tales. The writer of a *Keene Sentinel* article in October 1968 reported, "Curiosity seekers, ghost hunters, and threatening vandals rarely allowed the Russells a good night's sleep. The

Russells said one of them needed to be home at all times to guard against break-ins and vandals."

During their ownership, the Russells made few changes. A Historical American Buildings Survey team reported in 1964, "Mr. Russell has installed a quasi-modern kitchen in the northwest corner, ground floor room [now the living room]. House is not generally altered from period of construction, but it is in poor condition."

The next owners showered the old mansion with kindness and renovation. Bob and Mary Gregg bought it in 1973 after seeing it in *Yankee* magazine's July 1972 regular feature column "House for Sale," lived in it twenty-seven years, and raised four children there. Judson Hale, who was then editor-in-chief of *Yankee*, later noted, "The new owners were hoping the old legends would go away, but legends in New England

never fade away."

The Greggs removed dormers that had been added to the roof, repaired floors, hardware, and finishing, and returned walls to original colors. To accommodate the needs of their large family, they altered the through-hallway to enlarge the northwest (living) room. As part of that alteration, they replaced the rear hallway door with a window and removed the rear stairs.

The Greggs also rebuilt the fireplace in the living room, likely damaged when the Russells installed a quasi-kitchen, and added central heat. They also added an upstairs hallway behind the northwest chamber, which leads to the ell.

When the house was again featured in *Yankee's* "House for Sale" column in 1996, the writer noted, "All in all, there's not a single square foot that 'needs work.' It's all absolutely gorgeous."

A meticulously disguised state-of-the-art kitchen in the ell reflects "lessons" the Stamps learned from a 2004 *Early American Life* article, "Creating an Early Kitchen." They drew on local talent for the project, hiring neighbor Brian J. Barrett as general contractor. Bob and Terry found the sign on the wall in the attic. It dates to the early 20th Century, when Gussie Roy opened the house seasonally for "Ocean Born Mary" ghost tours. In front of the window is a Tennessee marble-top biscuit table, a regional furniture form. A 19th-Century apothecary box sits on the counter.



PERSONAL TOUCHES

The Stamps count themselves fortunate to have had such caring predecessors in their home. They've needed to make few improvements. Bob could only list a few.

"We removed one small wall into the mourning or birthing room (east portion of the northwest chamber) to create a master bathroom complete with a footed tub. We removed wallpaper in several rooms, though old paper still hangs in the dining room and upstairs guest room," he noted.

Most of their focus has been on matching interior décor to the historic home. Said Terry, "We hired a wonderful decorative artist, Lorraine Casinghino, who added period stenciling to the central halls on both floors and in two small upstairs rooms as well as a Rufus Porter-style monochromatic mural in the upstairs ell hallway."

The Stamps also completely renovated the ell, and they are most proud of the kitchen there.

"Our goal," Terry explained, "was to design a kitchen that was aligned with the original colonial style of our home as well as create a comfortable and functional gathering spot. We did extensive research and found very few examples of kitchens redone with a similar vision. The February 2004 *Early American Life* article 'Creating an Early Kitchen' became our favorite comprehensive guide. Highlights include retrieving and installing 18th-Century ripple glass panes in custom window frames; adding hand-hewn beams to the ceiling and a corner fireplace for a wood stove; and hiding or downplaying appliances."

Jeremy D'Entremont, author of a 2011 book on the Ocean-Born Mary house, wrote approvingly, "The present owners, Bob and Terry Stamps . . . are active in Henniker town affairs, and they have lovingly continued the never-ending restoration of the Robert Wallace mansion."

As their involvement suggests, the Stamps are quite fond of and engaged in their adopted New Hampshire community. Both serve on numerous boards and committees. Terry described Henniker as "a pretty town, full of historic struc-



In the master bedroom, the case of drawers to the left of the window dates to the late 18th Century, from New England. The cradle and a fruitwood case of drawers made on the Atlantic Coast are both early-19th-Century pieces, as is the child's highchair by the window. The rope bed with canopy is c. 1820.

Artist Lorraine Casinghino designed and painted the Rufus Porter-style monochromatic mural in the upstairs ell hallway.



tures, and there's New England College (founded 1946) and Pat's Peak Ski Area (founded 1963)."

The population hovers below 5,000, down from its heyday when the water-powered mills were operating. After the Flood Control Project forced closure in 1959, the economic base shifted to tourism, resort industries, and the college. This abandonment by industry preserves Henniker's pictur-

esque beauty, while the presence of a college and proximity to the state capital of Concord assures that there are plenty of cultural opportunities.

"All in all," Terry concluded, the Ocean-Born Mary house has proven "a perfect place to retire." ★

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