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# Folklore

by [Virginia Marin](#) ✉ 🏠

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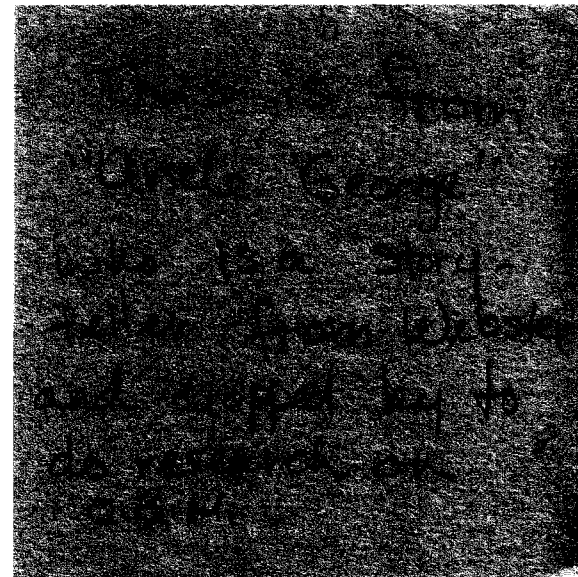
## Ocean-Born Mary Fulton--A Family Folktale

The Babb family from which my immigrant ancestor comes, lived in the southern part of England. As the tale goes, he was the son of one Phillip Babb, who plied the oceans, accumulating great wealth--for you see, Phillip was a pirate! And this is the tale of Phillip, alias "Pedro the Pirate" and *Ocean-Born Mary Fulton*.

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This tale did not originate with me, nor was it penned by anyone in particular. It apparently began around 1652, with the humanitarian deeds of Phillip to the fishermen and their families in Bristol, England, and has since been handed down by word of mouth for generations and continuing in this country with the Babb family in Maine. My father, the last male in an unbroken line from Phillip, until I the first female was born, told me this tale often. It was a favorite of his. He told it with much animation, and was always able to end it with a big BOO, which I must admit, I have never been able to do--I think, because I have been unable to remember his unique ending.



The christening of Mary at sea by the pirate is authentic, as recorded by Col. Cogswell in his *History of Henniker*. Several members of the Wallace family--direct descendants of Ocean-Born Mary herself and Kirk Pierce, the nephew of President Franklin Pierce--contributed information from their family histories.

The tale begins on a ship at sea. It was in the 1720 that a group of emigrants sailed on the *Wolf* from Londonderry,

Ireland, for America to make new homes in Londonderry, New Hampshire. While becalmed off the Massachusetts coast, they saw a long, low, sinister-looking craft approaching. The stranger displayed no colors, and suddenly its crew fired a gun across the bow of the unarmed emigrant vessel.

"Pirates!" The warning cry passed from mouth to mouth as a boat put out for the *Wolf* from the rakish frigate. A blanket of fear settled over the doomed ship. Men stood hellessly silent; women prayed and sobbed hysterically.

In moments sun-bronzed men, cutlasses and pistols gleaming, clambered over the rail. The pirate leader, a fierce, dark man with bits of burning tallow stuck in his ears and whiskers, grimly told his captives to prepare for their death. But as he spoke, the faint cry of a baby came up from below deck. He turned and tramped down the companionway to a cabin in which young Elizabeth Fulton had just brought new life into the world.

The tiny helplessness of the infant touched the heart of the pirate chief. His rugged face broke into a smile as he said to the terrified mother, "Give me leave to christen this baby and promise to keep the name I give her, and I will not harm this ship or its passengers".

Elizabeth promised. A few moments later a strange crowd was assembled on deck: wide-eyed emigrants, bewildered crew hands, and rough sailors.

Holding the new-born girl in his arms, the pirate intoned, "I christen you Mary for my mother. And as you were born on the sea, your name shall be Ocean-Born Mary. May you always have a happy life".

Regretfully he surrendered the infant to her father standing beside him, then led his men over the rail and back to their boat. Then, just as the emigrant ship's passengers were rejoicing at their escape, panic again seized them. The pirates were returning!

"A present for Ocean-Born Mary!" With this, the pirate tossed a bolt of greenish-grey tapestry silk, embroidered in a flower design, onto the deck. "Goods for her wedding dress. Maybe someday I'll be seeing her again!"

The wind freshened and the two vessels parted company. Soon after the emigrants laded in Boston harbor, Ocean-Born Mary's father died. The mother married again and brought the baby to Londonderry, named after their old home in Ireland.

Ocean-Born Mary grew into a tall, lovely Irish lass with red hair, very white skin and green eyes. In 1743, she married Thomas J. Wallace, in a gown made from the embroidered silk that was the pirate's gift. A piece of the cloth is still preserved in the Henniker, New Hampshire Public Library. Widely known for her beauty and her skill with the spinning wheel, she became the mother of four boys, all unusually tall. But like her mother before her, she was suddenly left a widow at a comparatively young age.

Now, at about this same time the old pirate captain remembered the girl he had named. Aged, tired of pillaging, and seeking peace, he gave up the sea. His ship's carpenters and his slaves came with him to build a fine house on an isolated mountain side near Henniker. It was a huge house painted the old iron oxide red, which was dug in the vicinity. It had white trim and green doors. After the house was completed, a wood shed, and three large barns were added giving him a huge estate. At this time, he sent for Mary, his mother's name sake to come and live in the house, take care of him in his declining years, and raise her sons to manhood.

Although still young and attractive enough to take her choice of husbands, Ocean-Born Mary accepted Captain Pedro's offer. The old pirate presented the mistress of his mansion with a coach-and-four in which she often rode with her boys over the mountain road to the village.

According to one account, Pedro was actually Phillip Babb, a buccaneer of the New England coast who had sailed under Captain William Kidd, the privateer. When Kidd, falsely accused of piracy and murder, was hanged in 1701, Babb turned to high sea robbery.

At his home near Henniker, life flowed smoothly for several years, till one day Captain Pedro returned from a trip with a huge wooden chest. Late that evening, with the help of one of his old crew members, he carried the chest out of the side door, into the yard. The sound of shovels broke through the quiet night. Then came the sudden groan of a man in agony, followed by silence.

The Captain returned to the house--alone!

About a year later Ocean-Born Mary came home to find the place empty. In the orchard she found the body of old Phillip, alias, Pedro the Pirate. That night in the light of flickering candles, Ocean-Born Mary carried out the captain's written wishes for his burial. With the help of others she raised a

heavy eight by three foot slab of stone that rested in front of the huge kitchen hearth, and the body of Pedro was buried beneath it. Then the heavy hearthstone, with a hold drilled in the center, was lowered back into place where it remains to this day.

This is the story of Pedro the Pirate, said to have been my ancestor, Phillip Babb. And Mary's sons? They grew into manhood and all four fought in the American Revolution. Mary died on February 13, 1814 at ninety-four years of age, and is buried at Henniker, New Hampshire. She lived in the old pirate's home until her death, and legend has it that she still haunts the house which has been restored by Mr. and Mrs. L.M.A. Roy.

And the mysterious night digging? Well, according to the legend, Phillip buried a fortune in jewels, coins and gold on the estate. Perhaps that is why Ocean-Born Mary haunts--she is still looking for the treasure trunk!

Until next time, Slitzwitz, from Dubh Sidhe and all of the little people.

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