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- WHAT'S NEW
- CHAT
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Home : Society and Culture : Paranormal :

# Spirits: Magickal and Mundane

by Eibhlin Macintosh ✉ 🏠

- Welcome
- Articles
- Links
- Discussions



↑ up level

## < Previous Article Ocean-Born Mary

The Ocean-Born Mary story is charming tale set in old New England, with adventure, romance, and--of course-- a classic ghost or two. This is the legend:

Author  
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Mary Wilson was born at sea on July 17th, 1720 (according to the old calendar), soon after her parents set sail from Londonderry, Ireland, aboard the ship, the *Wolf*. As the ship neared Boston harbor, it was boarded by pirates, led by the ruthless--but very young and handsome--Don Pedro.

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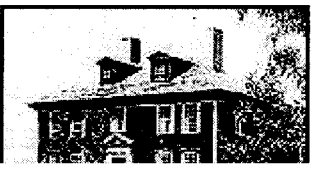
Don Pedro learned that there was a newborn aboard, and offered to let the *Wolf* and its passengers continue their voyage, unharmed, if the Wilsons would name the baby "Mary," after his beloved mother.

The Wilsons eagerly agreed, and Don Pedro honored his promise.

However, before his own ship of ruthless (and now unhappy) pirates sailed away, Don Pedro returned to the *Wolf* with a length of Chinese silk. He told the Wilsons that the fabric should one day be used for Mary's wedding gown.

And so it was, when Mary and Scotsman Thomas Wallace married, in Londonderry, New Hampshire, just before Christmas in 1742. They quickly had four sons and a daughter, but Mary was widowed soon after the birth of her last son.

Word of the tragedy reached Don Pedro, still young but now eager to take his fortune and settle far from the call of the sea. He had his men row up the Contoocook River to the 6,000 acres of land he'd been granted by the King of England. "Don Pedro" was actually an English nobleman, previously the "black sheep" of the family, but his wandering days were over.



Don Pedro had his ship's carpenter build a fine mansion on a hilltop in what is now known as Henniker, New Hampshire. (The house is shown at left.) The beams and detailing in the house are uniquely like a ship.



When the house was completed, Don Pedro went to Londonderry and begged Mary to live with him--as his housekeeper, since she still mourned her late husband--and Don Pedro supported Mary and her children in grand style for many happy years.

However, the fortune that Don Pedro had earned, was also a curse upon him. One night, men came to the Henniker mansion under the pretense of visiting with their old friend, Don Pedro. Mary and her children went to bed, unaware that tragedy would soon strike. Mary heard a curse from outside her window, and then a groan. Recognizing the voice of Don Pedro, she rushed to the garden and found him alone, dying with a pirate's cutlass in his chest.

Before he died, he told Mary where he'd hidden his gold, and he asked her to bury him beneath the hearth in the home they'd shared so happily.

She honored his wishes, and lived a long and comfortable life, never leaving the Henniker home. She barely touched the treasure buried in her garden, because Don Pedro had left such a fortune.

One of Mary's hobbies was painting, and the American eagle and stars she painted over the front door of the home, can still be seen there today. Inside, her landscape murals also decorate many rooms in the home.

After her death in 1814, her spirit remained in the house. In the early 20th century, the home was opened to the public and visitors often saw her rocking chair sway gently as she let them know she welcomed them.

Mary has been sensed near the hearth she tended carefully after it became the final resting spot of Don Pedro. Two state policemen saw her one night, crossing the road in front of her house.

Hans Holzer, the famous ghost expert, has conducted two different and successful seances to contact Mary. As recently as 1963, she put out a blazing fire in the house, while the owners watched in amazement.

On many Halloween nights, Mary rises from her grave in Henniker's Centre Cemetery (twelve rows back from the front gate, and marked with a special plaque), and rides a magnificent horse-drawn coach to her home. (Her grave is shown in the photo, below.)

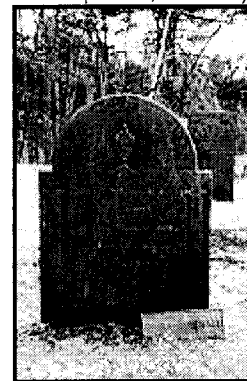
Everyone who has seen Mary's ghost, comments on her red hair, green eyes, and magnificent stature, at about six feet tall. She is, by all accounts, an astonishingly beautiful woman as a ghost, just as she was in life.

Her home is now privately owned and definitely *NOT* open to visitors. However, Ocean-Born Mary remains one of America's most famous and beloved ghosts.

That is the legend, and it is a wonderful story. Unfortunately, it is only half true.

If you enjoyed that tale, thanks for visiting this site. Return regularly for more stories of ghosts, faeries, and magickal legends of the Otherworld.

However, if you want the truth about Ocean-Born Mary, click here for what really happened. It is not *nearly* as romantic as the ghost story.



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**.Welcome**  
**.Articles**  
**.Links**  
**.Discussions**



### Mary Wilson Wallace: the facts

Continuing the Ocean-Born Mary legend, which appears on this page, here is the actual story, according to Henniker records:

Ocean-Born Mary really was born--and the ship, the *Wolf*, spared by Don Pedro--just as the story claims. Her father, Captain James Wilson, died soon after they landed in Boston, and his widow, Elizabeth, took Mary to Londonderry, NH, where she claimed the land Capt. Wilson had been granted.

Elizabeth married a second time, to James Clark (great-great grandfather of Horace Greeley, the man who said, "Go West, young man."). She died about 1732.

1732 was also the year that the Wallace family, originally from Scotland, arrived in Londonderry, NH after living in Burnt Mills, Northern Ireland. (Burnt Mills is not on modern maps, but this is the town mentioned in historical accounts.)

Thomas Wallace married Mary Wilson on December 18th, 1742. She was actually six feet tall, with red hair. And, true to the legend, she wore a gown made from the silk given to her parents by Don Pedro.

The Wallaces did, indeed, have four sons and a daughter: Elizabeth, Thomas, Robert, William, and James. However, Thomas Wallace, Sr., and his wife Mary lived a long and happy life together, until his death on October 30, 1791. He is buried in Hill Graveyard, in Londonderry, NH.

Their daughter Elizabeth married Major (later Deacon) Thomas Patterson of the NH Militia; he was the son of Peter Patterson. They had at least one child, Robert.

Thomas Wallace, Jr., was a distinguished Revolutionary War hero.

Sons Robert, William, and James married sisters, respectively, Jeanette, Hannah, and Anna, all daughters of Robert and Mary Moore of Londonderry.

"Ocean-Born" Mary Wilson Wallace moved to Henniker on July 6, 1798 at age 78, and spent the rest of her life with her son, William, about a quarter-mile from another son, Robert. Robert is the one who built the mansion that, today, is supposedly haunted by Ocean-Born Mary. William's journals and the census records suggest that Mary never lived in that house.

Centre Cemetery.

The romantic tale of Don Pedro cannot be documented after the encounter outside Boston Harbor. He certainly did not have a land grant to 6,000 acres of Henniker; Robert Wallace, who built the mansion, was considered a wealthy landowner with a deed to 300 acres surrounding the home.

The silk wedding gown was very real, and worn by several of Mary's descendants at their own weddings. Pieces of the gown remain, in the D.A.R. Museum in Washington, D.C. and in the public library of Henniker, NH. It is a lovely faded teal green silk, in a brocade style, with small teal flowers and white stripes through it.

The home that Mary actually lived in, was reported to be haunted and--after it was empty for awhile--the town purchased it in 1844 as a poorhouse, and it was known as the "Wallace Poor Farm." In later years, it was destroyed by vandals.

The "Ocean-Born Mary" house, as her son Robert's mansion is known today, was owned by several families before it was bought in 1917 by Louis Maurice Auguste Roy, author of *The Candle Book*. Mr. Roy and his mother purchased the house and restored it, after hearing rumors of a ghost.

Soon after completing work on "the Ocean-Born Mary house," the Roys opened their doors to the public. They charged admission, and Mr. Roy told colorful tales about Mary Wilson Wallace and the ghost which his mother claimed to have seen many times.

The phantom rocking chair was never Mary's, and it rocked because Mr. Roy had placed it over a loose floorboard that he could shift from the other side of the room, to make the chair sway.

Further, Mr. Roy would describe the lost fortune of Don Pedro, still buried somewhere in the garden where the pirate had died. Then Mr. Roy rented shovels to the tourists, for 50-cents each, so they could dig for treasure in the back yard.

The descendants of Mary Wilson Wallace were not amused, but the public's love of adventure, romance, and a good ghost story, made Ocean-Born Mary one of America's best-known ghosts.

Mr. Roy died in 1965, and subsequent owners of the home, while intrigued by the legend, have done everything possible to discourage curiosity-seekers from trespassing and otherwise bothering the home and its residents. They have even moved the road in front of the house, blocking tourists from invading their privacy.

The house last appeared in *Yankee* magazine in September 1996, where it was in the "House for Sale" section, listed at \$875,000.

If the house is haunted--and it may be--it is probably *not* Ocean-Born Mary who walks there.

The first half of the story--in which the pirate spares the life of the crew and passengers, when the baby is named for his mother--is romantic enough to spark legends. The rest of the story appears to be made up by Mr. Roy. (The black-and-white photo on the first page of this article, was taken by Mr. Roy to publicize the house.)

Henniker is a lovely town, with New England College and Pat's Peak skiing area. Henniker's Centre Cemetery is a classic New England graveyard, and perfect for picture-taking, if you like stark and eerie images.

However, the Ocean-Born Mary ghost is clearly drawn from the Green Lady (because she haunts a house, not a family) and the story of appearing on a horse-drawn coach is straight out of Irish legends. Mary Wilson Wallace is probably *not* haunting her son's home.

.....Those in the NH area seeing a 'real' ghost, try:.....

- the famous "Blue Lady," who haunts Vale End Cemetery in Wilton, NH,
- poltergeist "Avery," who haunts *Psaris Bistro* in Manchester, NH, or
- Elizabeth Ford, who haunts *The Country Tavern* in Nashua, NH, about half an hour from downtown Boston, MA.

Their stories will appear in later articles at this site. And, yes, those are genuine ghosts.

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(Special thanks to Colleen D. of Henniker's public library, for her time and assistance in locating materials about Ocean-Born Mary. Also thanks to Mike Wallace, one of Mary's relatives, who provided useful information for my research.)

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