

NEW ENGLAND HERITAGE

OCEAN-BORN MARY

TAKE A TALE OF A BLOODTHIRSTY PIRATE'S KINDLY ACT OF MERCY, MIX IT WITH THE CRY OF A NEWBORN BABY AND ADD IN MURDER, GHOSTS, BURIED TREASURE AND A TINY PIECE OF BEAUTIFUL SILK AND YOU WILL HAVE BOTH THE FACT AND LEGEND OF THE STORY OF OCEAN-BORN MARY.

HELLO, I'M BOB CANNON AND THIS IS NEW ENGLAND HERITAGE.

SEPARATING ROMANCE FROM REALITY IS OFTEN A RESEARCHER'S NIGHTMARE IN RELATING THE LORE OF NEW ENGLAND. THE TALE OF OCEAN-BORN MARY IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE. A BEST ACCOUNTING OF THE FACTS GOES LIKE THIS.

AFTER THE PROTESTANT CITIZENS OF LONDONDERRY, IRELAND HAD SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED THEIR CITY AGAINST ATTACK IN 1690, A NUMBER OF THEM WERE AWARDED GRANTS OF LAND IN THE NEW WORLD BY KING WILLIAM OF ORANGE IN WHAT WOULD APPROPRIATELY BECOME LONDONDERRY, NEW HAMPSHIRE. ONE OF THE GRANTEES WAS JAMES WILSON WHO SAILED WITH HIS WIFE ELIZABETH ABOARD A SHIP NAMED THE WOLF IN 1720 TO CLAIM, ALONG WITH OTHER PASSENGERS, HIS AWARD. WHILE ON BOARD, ON JULY 28, A BABY DAUGHTER WAS BORN TO THE WILSONS. THE HAPPY OCCASION TURNED TO TERROR WHEN THE SHIP, WITHIN SIGHT OF BOSTON, WAS BOARDED BY PIRATES. THE

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PIRATE CAPTAIN, KNOWN IN MOST ACCOUNTS AS DON PEDRO, THREATENED TO KILL EVERYONE ON BOARD AND BEGAN TO LOOT THE WOLF WHEN HE HEARD A BABY'S CRY BELOW DECK. UPON GOING BELOW, HE FOUND THE TERRIFIED MOTHER CUDDLING HER DAUGHTER AND ASKED, "IS IT A BOY OR A GIRL?" UPON HEARING IT WAS A GIRL, THE PIRATE'S HEART WAS APPARENTLY SOFTENED AND HE TOLD MRS. WILSON THAT IF SHE NAMED THE INFANT MARY AFTER HIS MOTHER (OR PERHAPS WIFE - WE REALLY DON'T KNOW), HE WOULD SPARE ALL ON BOARD. THE WILSONS QUICKLY AGREED WHEREUPON, TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF HIS MOTLEY CREW, HE THREW IN A BONUS. RETURNING FROM HIS OWN SHIP IN A FEW MINUTES, HE HANDED MRS. WILSON A BOLT OF BEAUTIFUL BROCADED GREEN AND WHITE SILK AND INSISTED IT BE USED FOR MARY'S WEDDING GOWN.

THE MUCH-RELIEVED PASSENGERS DISEMBARKED AT BOSTON WHERE POOR JAMES WILSON DIED SHORTLY THEREAFTER. ELIZABETH TOOK HER INFANT DAUGHTER TO LONDONDERRY, NEW HAMPSHIRE WITH HER SHIPMATES TO CLAIM HER HUSBAND'S GRANT. YOUNG MARY WAS DUBBED FOREVER AS "OCEAN-BORN MARY" BY THE CITIZENS OF LONDONDERRY AND FOR MANY YEARS THEY CELEBRATED HER BIRTHDAY AS A DAY OF THANKSGIVING FOR THEIR DELIVERANCE ON THE WOLF.

AND 22 YEARS LATER MARY WAS INDEED WEDDED IN A GOWN OF GREEN AND WHITE SILK, THE GIFT OF THE BUCCANEER CAPTAIN TO JAMES WALLACE, IN A MARRIAGE THAT WAS TO PRODUCE FOUR SONS AND A DAUGHTER.

THE SWASHBUCKLING AND, FOR THAT MATTER, ALL THE TRUE DRAMA OF THE STORY ENDS THERE. MARY LED A RATHER UNREMARKABLE LIFE FROM THEN ON EXCEPT THAT IT LASTED 94 YEARS. HER HUSBAND DIED IN 1791 AND AT THE AGE OF 78, MARY WENT TO LIVE WITH HER SON WILLIAM IN HENNIKER, NEW HAMPSHIRE IN 1798. SHE DIED ON FEBRUARY 13, 1814 AND IS BURIED IN THE CEMETERY BEHIND THE HENNIKER TOWN HALL.

THE STORY OF OCEAN-BORN MARY MAY HAVE ALL BUT DIED AWAY ALTOGETHER BUT FOR TWO LATER DEVELOPMENTS. IN 1902, A POEM CALLED "OCEAN-BORN MARY" WRITTEN BY IDA GRAVES OF HENNIKER WAS PUBLISHED IN THE NEW HAMPSHIRE GRANITE MONTHLY. AND IN 1917 A MAN FROM WISCONSIN NAMED LOUIS ROY WHO WOULD HAVE DONE P.T. BARNUM PROUD, CAME TO NEW HAMPSHIRE SEEKING, AS HE PUT IT, AN OLD INTERESTING NEW ENGLAND HOUSE. HE BOUGHT THE HOUSE BUILT BY MARY WALLACE'S SON ROBERT ABOUT 1784 BUT IN WHICH OCEAN-BORN MARY NEVER LIVED. BUT NO SOONER HAD ROY HEARD THE TALE OF OCEAN-BORN MARY WHEN HE ALSO APPARENTLY HEARD THE RUSTLE OF MONEY COMING IN.

ROY RESTORED THE DILAPIDATED HOUSE, TURNED IT INTO A VERITABLE MUSEUM AND BEGAN TO CHARGE FOR TOURS OF THE PLACE. VISITORS HEARD THAT THE PIRATE DON PEDRO HAD KEPT CONTACT WITH MARY ALL HER LIFE AND THAT HE HAD ACTUALLY BUILT THE HOUSE AND BURIED TREASURE IN THE YARD. SUPPOSEDLY HE THEN INVITED A YOUNG WIDOW MARY (REMEMBER, SHE WAS ACTUALLY WIDOWED AT 71) TO LIVE WITH HIM AS HIS HOUSEKEEPER. SHE DID SO, MR. ROY WOULD SAY, UNTIL THAT TERRIBLE DAY WHEN SHE CAME HOME TO FIND DON PEDRO DYING ON THE FLOOR WITH A SWORD THROUGH HIM, ALLEGEDLY DONE IN BY A FORMER SHIPMATE. HE BEGGED MARY TO BURY HIM UNDER THE KITCHEN HEARTHSTONE AND MARY TEARFULLY OBLIGED. ROY CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN STRANGE LIGHTS IN THE HOUSE'S UPSTAIRS WINDOWS AND HIS WIFE SAID SHE HEARD DEATH GROANS FROM THE ORCHARD ON THE PROPERTY AND HAD SEEN THE SHADOWY IMAGE OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN A HORSE-DRAWN COACH DRIVE BY.

THE FAMOUS GHOST HUNTER HANS HOLZER AND RENOWNED PSYCHIC SYBIL LEEK BOTH HAVE REPORTEDLY INVESTIGATED THE HOUSE AND SUPPOSEDLY BOTH HAVE DETECTED WHAT THEY CALL "PRESENCES". WHY MARY WOULD BOTHER TO HAUNT A HOUSE SHE NEVER LIVED IN IS ANYBODY'S GUESS.

CHAIN-RATTLING AND ECTOPLASMIC SIGHTINGS ASIDE, THE TRUE STORY OF OCEAN-BORN MARY IS FASCINATING ENOUGH TO PUT ON THE MAP THE TOWN ITS CITIZENS LOVINGLY CALL "THE ONLY HENNIKER ON EARTH".

THIS HAS BEEN NEW ENGLAND HERITAGE. FOR WUMB-FM BOSTON, I'M
BOB CANNON.

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