Henniker

In search of the feisty ghost of Ocean Born Mary

Legend is said to haunt estate

By VICTORIA SHOULDIS
For the Monitor

They 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
I GHOST STORY

Continued from Page B-1

ried treasure in the house and
d and was later stabbed to death
a former pirate-acquaintance.
What they don't say is that Mary
ever lived — may never have had
foot in — the house on Bear Hill.
ad that she is said to haunt.
but they don't say is that it is
likely that Mary ever met up
with her Pirate again and that it is
likely that she lived together in
the house.

And what they don't say is that
the remarkable story of
Mary's birth is apparently true.
Legend of her ghost-walking is
sensitive and requires the
time that it was even
until an enterprising and cre-
ve gentleman named Louis
Roy moved into the Bear
II Road house in the 1930s.

Mary is born

This much seems to be true. On
by 128, 1790, the
caring Irish and Scotch immigrants,
inclusion of a young pregnant
man and his wife was a
arrival in its destination in New
England.

As Wolf neared the Boston har-
bor, the ship was overtaken by
eventual New Hampshire and
island. As the ship moved on
the vessel, Elizabeth Wilson
was below deck, giving birth to
a baby.

As the story goes, the pirate
took over the ship by the innocent
and made a deal with those
who defended their territory. If
Elizabeth and her husband would agree to
have a child, called
Mary," the pirate would give
them the ship and let Wilsons con-
tinue their journey.

The couple agreed, and the
language of the sailors was not

Instead of being a pirate,
stationary, and an old man who would
rarely be seen out of his

Warren, Massachusetts, and
1743 Mary, by

a tall, auburn-haired beauty,
it was known as a "sally tongue,"
arrived James Wallace. For the
remaining, Mary wore the silk
clothes and garments of the

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
record book compiled by the Henniker
Historical Society, William charged
his siblings equal shares of the
estimated $2 a week it cost him
to house and care for his mother.
Although son Robert also lived in
Henniker, Mary never lived with
him, according to William's expense
takings.

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 was buried in the old cemetery
behind Henniker's Town Hall.

The ghost

The amazing story of Ocean
Born Mary's origin was actually
legend in New Hampshire and
throughout the state by the early
1900s. Many in the community
Lunsford published the book Ocean
Born Mary, a fictional account of
Mary's birth and life.

According to the Lunsford
William's house in Henniker was abandoned,
and in 1920 it burned to the ground.
The Henniker Historical Society
has some of the pictures of the house,
in 1918 when it was run-down
and obviously not cared for.

However, Robert Wallace's Hen-
niker 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.

Local reports began to surface
that the Roy family was not alone.

There were stories of chairs rock-
ing 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 appar-
tions 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 draw-

ings from the New York Times, and
the Boston Post, among others,
writing about the haunting of Hen-
niker. Noted ghost hunter Hans
Holzer devoted many pages to
Ocean Born Mary, and other ghost
writers have followed suit.

Hillsboro's Fuller Public Library
has a 21-page, unpublished manu-
script written by Roy in about the
1940s, fleshing out the legend
and turning the Ocean Born Mary into
a great sweeping melodrama, com-
plete with lost loves, treachery and
family betrayals, in the end, contentment,
as the still-vivacious Mary comes to Henniker to live
and care for her son.

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

In 1959 the picture changed.
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
concerns damage to windows as youth
visited in front of the house and
threw small rocks at the house, trying
to get the attention of the
specters.

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

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

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

"When the wind blows there are
lots of creaks and cracksles. But there are
any ghosts — that I am aware
of," he said.

But still, on certain overcast
afternoons, with the clouds brie-
fly white in that chilled autumn winter, one gets a sense of something
in the air.

"I believe there may be ghosts
here," 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
about the many others who
that a certain ghost, long
and striving to maintain the legacy
he created, might patrol the house
for a while longer.

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

(The Historical Society at 6 Ac-
emy Ave. in Henniker is cur-
rently displaying an exhibit of Ocean B
Mary memorabilia. Henniker's Tu-
er Free Library also has a piece
of silk said to be from Mary's wedding
dress.)