



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

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Two Perry brothers, born in Newport of an Irish mother, became famous naval heroes of 19th Century America. Each is honored with a handsome statue in the city. Commodore Matthew Perry's statue stands in Touro Park, and Oliver Hazard Perry's statue can be found in Washington Square. The Commodore, whose beautiful statue faces the Newport Art Museum, is credited with opening Japan to trade with the West in the 1850s and Newport continues to honor this with its Sister City, Shimoda, Japan. Oliver Hazard Perry is remembered as the naval hero of the Battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812. The Museum's *Tour of Irish Newport* passes Commodore Matthew Perry's statue and his Irish roots are noted.

Here, it's appropriate to relate the fascinating history of how the Perry family, originally Quakers from England, produced these famous hero brothers. Edward Perry emigrated from England to Sandwich, Massachusetts in 1639, but because the family was harassed for their Quaker faith, they soon moved to the Narragansett area, having learned of Rhode Island's religious tolerance. Here, in Matunuck, they established a thriving farm.

A son, Freeman, was born in 1733 and the first of the 'fighting Perrys', Christopher, was born to Freeman in 1761. He became involved in the Revolution, joining the militia and supporting the Yankee cause. He went to Bristol, RI, where he joined a privateer and fought with Sullivan's Army, the Continental Navy, and finally re-joined a privateer to harass the British.

In 1777, his privateer was captured off Ireland and he was interned in Newry, Co. Down. It seems that his life in jail was not that difficult and, in fact, he was given a parole which allowed him freedom of the area where he befriended local Irishmen

who supported the American cause.

He met and fell in love with Sarah Alexander, a sister of one of the locals, declaring that he would return to marry her. Christopher walked out of jail and went to Cork where he signed on with a British ship bound for St. Thomas. From there he made his way to Charlestown and eventually Philadelphia.

Shortly thereafter he sailed back to Ireland, found Sarah, and they both sailed back to Philadelphia where they married in 1784.

Christopher brought Sarah back to Newport, RI, (not South County), where Oliver Hazard was born in 1785. Matthew was born in the new family home on the Point in 1794. The old Perry home still stands at the corner of Walnut and 2nd Streets.

As there is not space here to relate the full story of the famous Perrys, the reader is urged to refer to the references shown below:

*The Japan Expedition 1852-1854:
The Personal Journal of
Commodore Matthew C. Perry,*
Smithsonian Press, 1968

He Opened the Door Of Japan
by Carl Crow, 1939

Shimoda Story
by Oliver Statler,
Random House, 1969,
the fascinating story of Townsend
Harris's 16 months in Shimoda as
U.S. Consul General and his efforts
to negotiate a trade agreement.
Perry had unlocked the door to
Japan, but Harris opened it.

*'Old Bruin' Commodore
Matthew Calbraith Perry*
by Samuel Eliot Morrison,
Little Brown & Co., 1967

The Black Ship Scrolls, at the
Newport Naval War College
Museum.

THE FAMOUS PERRYS, IRELAND AND NEWPORT



Matthew Perry's handsome statue in Touro Park looks out on Bellevue Avenue.

THE NEWPORT MERCURY.

**NEWPORT,
SATURDAY, March 14, 1835.**

Close of the Session.

In our preceding columns, we have given a condensed summary of the proceedings of Congress, on the last day of the session.—It will be seen, that among many other important bills that were lost by the want of time, or the disagreement of the two Houses, was the bill making Appropriations for Fortifications. The loss of this bill will be attended with very serious inconvenience to many of our citizens, as it contained an appropriation of One Hundred Thousand Dollars for the works at Fort Adams; the expenditures on this work has, for the last ten years, furnished employment for a great number of our mechanics and others, and also for several hundred Irish laborers, who will now be compelled to seek elsewhere for employment.

The loss of the Fortification Bill appears to have led to mutual recrimination between the two Houses, each charging the loss of the bill to the other.

There appears to be but one sentiment throughout the country, in regard to the adjournment of Congress without passing the Appropriation Bill for Fortifications, and it is a sentiment of unmingled dissatisfaction.—On Monday last, all the laborers, &c. at Fort Adams, were dismissed by Col. Totten, and this important work, which has cost already nearly a Million of Dollars, is for the present year abandoned, and without having a single gun mounted.

EARLY
FORT ADAMS
CONSTRUCTION
AND THE
IRISH

Through some diligent research by Father Robert Hayman, Providence Diocesan Historian, this newsletter has reproduced several articles that appeared in the Newport Mercury in 1826, 1829, 1833 and 1835. Father Hayman's research also covered articles from the *Herald of The Times*, Newport, and from Bishop Fenwick's memoranda. (Bishop Fenwick of Boston was this area's leader during the Fort's construction.) The newsletter will publish other items from Father's work in later issues.

The Newport Mercury

Established
A. D. 1726.

NEWPORT, SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 1833.

AUGUST 10, 1833

Riot.—On Sunday afternoon last, about 30 or 40 Irishmen, laborers on the fortifications in our harbour, commenced a Riot near their residence on the Long-Wharf, proceeding no doubt from intemperance.—By the prompt exertions of that vigilant officer, Mr. TAGGART, the Town-Sergeant, aided by several of our active citizens, the disturbance was soon quelled, and the principal rioters committed to prison.

SEPTEMBER 16, 1826

FORT ADAMS.—The completion of this important work, is now progressing with great rapidity. Upwards of 400 laborers are now daily employed, and the monthly payments for the labor alone, exceeds the sum of twelve thousand dollars.

DECEMBER 26, 1829

HIGHWAY ROBBERY.—On Sunday night last, an Irish labourer, named Patrick Mitchell, who resides in the vicinity of Fort Adams, was waylaid in the road leading to Brenton's Neck, by a man who knocked him down, and robbed him of \$200 in bank bills.—A person who had been employed as a mason at Fort Adams, and who has a wife and family in this town, has been accused by Mitchell as the robber;—it appears that they had been together at an oyster cellar, at a very late hour in the night, and had parted company a short time before the robbery was committed. The accused has been arrested; and an examination has been going on for several days, in which a great number of witnesses have been examined.

The Museum's recent speaker programs have brought Eamon De Valera's name to the fore in discussing the Irish Civil War and the Irish involvement in the 1930s Spanish Civil War. De Valera, 'The man who was Ireland'¹, had a vital involvement in both epics. These lectures have generated significant interest among the membership in exploring De Valera's connections to Newport.

EAMON DE VALERA: NEWPORT TIES OF "THE MAN WHO WAS IRELAND"



Eamon De Valera arrives in Newport Harbor aboard the yacht *Editha*
September 13, 1919

At age 37, 'Dev' visited Newport on September 13 and 14, 1919, to raise funds for the fledgling Irish Republic. He had come down from Boston via Providence. From Providence he sailed to Newport on Mrs. John H. Hanan's yacht, *Editha*². De Valera was accompanied by his secretary, Harry Boland, and they were enthusiastically greeted by thousands of Newporters, including Mayor Mahoney, the Board of Aldermen, and one of his staunchest supporters, Cornelius Moore. DeValera's motorcade stopped at City Hall for a formal reception, where thousands gathered at the Hill Top Inn at 9 Bellevue Avenue, now the Viking Hotel site^{2,7}, for a luncheon party. They then adjourned to Freebody Park for a mass meeting which 4,000 attended. Later there was a public banquet at the Newport Beach dining room. Sunday morning the party attended Mass at St. Mary's after which they left for Providence on the yacht *Editha*. There is an excellent account of DeValera's time in Newport reported in the *Newport Daily News* of Monday, September 15, referenced here. Those interested should read the list of notables and other locals who participated, including Jerome Kirby, John Horgan, Frank Sullivan, Frank Conheeny, and Tim Dwyer among others.

With all of the interest that the recent talks have generated about De Valera, numerous museum members have brought up the subject of DeValera's reported visits to Newport during his early childhood. Stories have been told about his summers in Newport or, perhaps, just a visit. Several stories mention his visit to 36 Hammond Street and another to Roseneath Avenue. We thought that it would be interesting to confirm these stories and have begun an investigation to determine if such visits could be verified.

George De Valera (his name was changed to Eamon, Irish for Edward, in 1916) was born in 1882 in New York City. His mother, Catherine Coll, was born in Bruree, County Limerick, Ireland, in 1861 and came to America in 1879, marrying Juan DeValera in 1881³. George's father was sickly and went to Denver for his health where he died in 1884, probably of tuberculosis. In April 1885, Kate DeValera sent young Dev (George) off to the family farm in Bruree with her brother Ned (Edward). They sailed on the SS *City of Chicago* to Queenstown (Cobh) arriving in April 1885 when Dev was 3½ years

old. His mother visited her son and her family for a few weeks in 1887, then returned to New York to marry Charles Wheelwright, a groom from Rochester, New York. DeValera was raised by the Coll family on the Bruree farm and Catherine would not see her son again until 1919 or 1920 when he visited the U.S. Because De Valera was born in October 1882 and was sent to Ireland in April 1885, any time he might have spent in Newport would have been between those dates.

An inspection of the Newport City maps for the period 1883 to 1890 reveals that Hammond Street did not exist until 1890. Also, Roseneath Avenue was not completed until 1897 or 1898, when Wilbur Street was extended to Harrison Avenue and renamed Roseneath Avenue⁴. Based on these facts, one might conclude that the stories of young De Valera visiting here to either Hammond Street or Roseneath Avenue are somewhat dubious. Perhaps some other streets or persons were involved?

In response to our inquiries, board member and Museum Historian Pat Murphy has arrived at a possible explanation for these stories, which have been around for many years. Pat found an article in the March 1957 *Newport Daily News* about Honora Hickey, who was named to lead the St. Patrick's Day parade that year. Mrs. Hickey was the owner of 36 Hammond Street, purchased with her husband in 1890. In the article, Honora relates that Dev's mother Kate and her new husband Charles Wheelwright were guests at her home on Hammond Street during three different summers. Incidentally, Honora Hickey was born in Ireland, came to Newport in 1881, and was married at St. Mary's in 1887. She passed away at Age 101 in 1961^{5,6}.

We think this is an interesting story and would like any readers to pass along any further information that might help solve the riddle of De Valera's possible visits to Newport in his early years. Letters to the editor on this subject would be appreciated.

References for this article:

1. *Eamon De Valera The Man Who Was Ireland* by Tim Pat Coogan, Harper Collins, 1990
2. *Newport Daily News*, September 15, 1919
3. *Eamon DeValera: A Biography* by The Earl Of Longford & Thomas O'Neill, Dublin & London, 1970
4. Various Newport City Land Evidence Records and Maps, including: the 1883 Hopkins Map at the Newport Historical Society; Land Evidence records Vol 75, page 281, (Roseneath Ave,1897); The Stacy Burdick 1881 Newport City Map; Hammond Street; Sewer plat 1889: Plat 35 Lot 175, 1889; John Hickey, book 63, page 16, 1890, 36 Hammond Street
5. Voter registration card 9 Feb 1920
6. *Newport Daily News*, March 14, 1957
7. *Eamon DeValera's American Ties*, Talk by Professor John F. Quinn, Salve Regina University, at the Museum of Newport Irish History



Eamon De Valera
at age 4½ in Bruree, CO
Limerick, Ireland

Charming Lass Of 97 Will Lead
Newport's St. Patrick's Day Parade



Mrs. Honora Hickey

PROFESSOR O'MALLEY SPEAKS ABOUT IRELAND'S ROLE IN SPANISH CIVIL WAR



President Arnold presents speaker O'Malley with an honorarium and a museum video:
A Brief History of Irish Newport

Dr. Paul O'Malley, Ph.D, of Providence College spoke at the second Michael F. Crowley Lecture series on December 1 at La Forge Casino Restaurant. About 40 museum members and guests were in attendance. Professor O'Malley, who is Director of the Graduate Program in History at Providence College, spoke about the Irish involvement in the 1930s Spanish Civil War. Dr. O'Malley discussed the challenges President De Valera faced from both the rebel and republican factions in Ireland. He talked about characters such as Eoin O'Duffy, who rose to prominence as Chief of Staff of the IRA, commander of the Monaghan brigade, and later the leader of a 100,000 strong Blueshirts movement that echoed Hitler's SA with marches, flags and salutes.

NOVEMBER FUNDRAISER PROVIDES FUN AND FUNDS

The November 16 fundraiser cocktail party at Vincent's on the Pier was a great success. The party raised about \$1,000 for the Museum's general fund and was a great social event with about 50 in attendance. Jack Maytum showed a new video being developed for the museum and partygoers danced to Barry Russo's elegant music. Thanks to all who contributed, especially to Vincent's for its superb hospitality and fine hors d'oeuvres, and to Barry Russo for providing the music.



Partygoers dance to Barry Russo's music



Bridget Keefe celebrates her birthday with husband Leo

NEXT CROWLEY LECTURE FEBRUARY 9—SAVE THE DATE

Our speaker for the next Michael F. Crowley Lecture will be
J. Steven Grimes, Director of Records Management
for the Rhode Island Supreme Court.

Steven's talk is titled *From Bricklayer to Bricklayer:
The Rhode Island Roots of Congressman John E. Fogarty's
Irish-American Nationalism.*

The talk will be on Thursday, February 9, at 6pm
at the La Forge Restaurant. Watch for the flyer soon.

IN MEMORIAM

Life member Michael J. Ahearn
passed away in December. He was a very supportive Museum member
and his wife, Margaret, was Museum Secretary until recently
when she moved on to the Board.

Our sincere condolences to Margaret and the Ahearn family.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Museum welcomes recent new members

From Newport:

James Byrne Callahan (Life Member)

Joan M. Lynch (Life Member)

Patricia Montagnino

WELCOME TO ALL AND THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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