Contents

Foreword from the Mayor of Wexford – Councillor Jim Allen
Preface by Liam Gaul
Acknowledgements / Photographs
Bibliography / Sources

1  Commodore John Barry – Father of the American Navy
9  The United States Naval Air Station, Ferrybank, Wexford
27  The Return of the Commodore
47  A Wet, Windy, Welcome to Wexford
58  When a President Came to Wexford
75  Poems and Ballads
81  Conclusion by the Mayor of Wexford
84  Picture Credits
This year we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of President Kennedy’s visit to Wexford in 1963. We in Wexford have decided to mark this event by publishing this book which will let a new generation of Wexford people see the unique and special bond that Wexford has with the United States of America.

Every Wexfordian has heard the story of Commodore John Barry “Father of the American Navy”. His statue at Crescent Quay which was donated by the United States proudly proclaims Wexford’s Maritime history and the importance of the sea to the people of Wexford. My great grandfather was killed during the First World War, his ship sunk by a German submarine. For many hundreds of Wexford families whose loved ones died at sea and have no grave to visit, this monument to John Barry has become somewhere they can visit and remember.

Two American presidents have visited the Commodore John Barry statue - President J. F. Kennedy in 1963 and President Eisenhower in 1962. These are not just two American Presidents; they are two of the most widely admired Presidents, much loved by the American people.
It is now almost a century since Wexford town forged its links with the United States of America. During World War I a naval base was established at Ferrybank on the outskirts of the town. From this veritable ‘small town’ many missions were flown by the sea-planes housed in the four large hangars on the site.

During the years prior to and following World War II many efforts were made to have Wexford born Commodore John Barry commemorated in his native county. Finally, it was President Dwight D. Eisenhower who brought the request for this recognition to fruition with the arrival of the wonderful bronze statue in 1956 which stands on Crescent Quay in Wexford town.

In the space of two years, two Leaders of the Free World paid tribute to the Father of the American Navy by the visits of former American President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952 and President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1963. Since the unveiling of the memorial statue on Sunday 16 September 1956 by President Seán T. O’Kelly many tributes have been paid to Commodore John Barry, annually, by the Mayor and Councillors of the Borough of Wexford accompanied by visiting dignitaries in the presence of naval personnel and the citizens of Wexford. Within this series of articles memories of those events in the history of our town are recreated and illustrated by some wonderful photographs.

The American connection is still vibrant today from our association with our Sister City of Annapolis, Maryland which is the home of the United States Naval Academy founded in 1845 on the site of Fort Severn, and now occupies an area of land reclaimed from the Severn River next to the Chesapeake Bay. Annapolis has been visited by several of Wexford’s Mayors over the years including Edward O’Connor, Paddy Nolan, Dominic Kiernan and George Lawlor in 2008 where he unveiled a commemorative plaque in Commodore Barry Park, near the Naval Academy. In 2007 the Mayor of Annapolis, Ellen Moyer, visited Wexford where she met with Mayor Lawlor and members of Wexford Borough Council. Senator Gerald W. Weingrad, speaker of the Maryland House of Representatives also visited Wexford in June 1989. Mayor Jim Allen has just returned from Annapolis in 2013.

Liam Gaul, Author

(Note on the Author)

Liam Gaul is a graduate of Limerick, Maynooth and the Open Universities. He is an experienced author, lecturer and broadcaster and his publications include Masters of Irish Music; Glory O!, Glory O!, The Life of P.J. McCall and A Window on the Past.
Commodore John Barry – Father of the American Navy

Commodore John Barry (1745-1803)

Commodore John Barry lived an exciting life as sailor and soldier during the American Revolution and in the formative years of the United States of America which afforded him some signal honours in its naval service. John Frost (1800-1859) in his American Naval Biography comprising Lives of the Commodores writes of John Barry: ‘The career of this distinguished officer commences with the infancy of our navy, and is marked by many brilliant services. His name occurs in connection with not a few of the more remarkable events in the history of the revolutionary war, and always with credit to himself, and honour to the flag under which he sailed. Few commanders in the navy were employed in a greater variety of service, or met the enemy under greater disadvantages. Yet, in no one of the numerous actions in which he was engaged, did Commodore Barry ever fail to acquit himself of his duty in a manner becoming a skilful seaman and an able warrior’.

Many eminent naval historians may be cited showing the very high esteem in which Commodore John Barry was held in the services of his adopted country in a bid for her freedom. John Barry was born in 1745 at Ballysampson in the Parish of Tacumshin. His father, a tenant farmer, was evicted by his English landlord forcing the family to relocate to the village of Rosslare. It was here that young Barry got his love of the sea from his father’s brother, Nicholas Barry, captain of a fishing skiff.
With the entry of the United States of America into the First World War in 1917, Europe saw the arrival of US forces in a bid to aid the Allied cause. The German U-Boat’s were causing havoc in the English Channel and in an effort to counteract those losses to shipping the British Admiralty requested the United States to establish Naval Air Stations in Ireland and Britain. The United States naval operations were carried out by seven naval air stations with five located in Ireland and two in England during WWI.

The five Irish stations were at Aghada (Queenstown) on the eastern side of Cork Harbour, Lough Foyle, Whiddy Island and at Ferrybank, Wexford all of which were flying boat stations. The fifth station was a kite balloon station at Berehaven in West Cork. The largest base was at Aghada and served as the headquarters for Ireland. It was also the assembly premises for planes and training station for pilots on the ‘Ireland station’. The Irish unit was organised as USNAS Ireland and was under Commander F. McCrary at the Aghada headquarters. Construction of all the stations commenced in March 1918 under the supervision of US Navy civil engineers.

The base at Ferrybank was built by British, Irish and US naval forces and civilians. On 25 February 1918 Radio Officer Charles A. Rogers and eight men arrived in Wexford from the US Forces and took over the building of the US Naval Air Station which had been started by the British Admiralty in early 1918. The commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Victor Daniel Herbster, arrived on the site on 28 March that year.

Over the coming weeks small drafts of men were transferred from Aghada bringing the number at the site to 232 men and 13 officers by 1 July and by 1 August there were 18 officers and 298 men. Those numbers finalised with 20 officers and 406 men on the station by the end of October.

Prior to the arrival of the US Forces, some work had been carried out by the British Admiralty. Part of the concrete hangar foundations was in progress and the roads on the site were marked out and excavated awaiting the hard-core filling for surfacing. The field which eventually would be the location of the aircraft hangars was drained but this initial work certainly did not give the appearance of an Air Station ever being completed at Ferrybank. The men spent their first week in a general cleaning up, renovating Ely House and Bann Aboo House and their surrounding grounds. These two houses were later occupied by the officers.

A shortage of men to build and equip the station required longer working hours by the work force to complete such an extensive plan. A shortage of supplies hampered the work as the men had insufficient protective clothing, rubber boots and outer coats. Incessant rain turned the site into a field of mud. Work commenced at 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily with all personnel taking night security watches. Living and sleeping conditions were extremely difficult with makeshift beds laid on cold and damp wooden floors, yet, despite great odds the men carried on in this effort to complete the station.
“Now John Barry symbolically has returned to his native land, brought there by a vessel of that Navy which he served so well. While his mortal remains lie in St. Mary’s Churchyard, Philadelphia, this bronze statue, a gift of his grateful countrymen to the people of the land from which he sprung, will, we all hope, remain forever symbolic not only of the intermingling of our heritage but also of our common aspirations for liberty and justice for all of mankind”

A quotation from a message from President Eisenhower read by Commander Edward L. Beach U.S.N. Naval Aide to the President at the unveiling of the Commodore John Barry statue at Crescent Quay, Wexford on Sunday 16 September 1956.

In a Special Message to the Senate and House of Representatives by President Theodore Roosevelt on 13 February 1905 he suggested the erection of appropriate monuments to honour naval commanders in the American War of Independence one of them being John Barry. At that time there was no thought of the United States Government presenting a statue of Barry to Ireland. Prior to that Presidential Special Message, Mr. Martin I.J. Griffin, Historian of the Irish-American Society came to Wexford a few years earlier with the project of a public memorial to Commodore John Barry. As part of his visit to Wexford Mr. Griffin was gathering material for a life of Barry which he was writing and which was subsequently published in book form and serialised in Wexford’s Free Press. In consultation with Mr. Simon McGuire, the then Editor of the Free Press it was tentatively agreed that the memorial would take the form of a very large granite boulder mounted on a cut-stone base, one face of it to be polished and engraved with a suitable inscription.

At a Wexford Corporation meeting in 1915 the idea to honour one of Wexford’s sons in a suitable manner was discussed. It’s quite a possibility the name of Commodore John Barry would have been on the list of candidates. However, the events of WWI put this idea into abeyance. In 1939, a discussion to remember John Barry took place in New York. It was Michael Mitton, of Enniscurthy and President of Wexfordmen’s Association in that city and Taghmon native, Brother Aidan Whelan, O.S.F. conceived the idea of requesting the United States Government to present a statue of the Commodore to Ireland. With Br. Aidan as secretary written contact was made through the Irish Government representative in America with Senators and Congressman in this respect. Approaches were made and resolutions passed to appropriate moneys for this purpose. WWI intervened and the construction of the statue was delayed. Following the end of the war the offer of a statue of Commodore Barry was made to Ireland and was gratefully accepted. President Truman sent a letter to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives stating:

“Public Law 109, 1941 Seventy-seventh Congress, approved June 10 1941, authorised and directed the President of the United States to present to Eire a statue of Commodore John Barry in honour of the bicentenary of his birth in 1945. The act authorised an appropriation not to exceed $20,000 and provided for the selection of a sculptor by a committee of three members appointed by the President. Before action could be taken, the United States was at war. Because of the shortage of bronze it became necessary to defer the project until after the end of the war. During the past year alternative plans for carrying out Public Law 109 have been investigated, and it has been ascertained by the Commission of Fine Arts that a sum of not less than $30,000 now will be needed to procure a suitable statue of John Barry.

In view of this fact, it seems to me proper that the entire matter should be presented to the Congress for consideration as to the desirability
Wexford welcome by Dr. James Ryan Minister for Finance representing the Irish Government with the Mayor of Wexford Alderman John Cullimore
Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969)

Dwight Eisenhower, the son of a small farmer, was born in Denison, Texas. He attended West Point Military Academy where he was a star on the football field graduating at the top of his class in 1915 and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant. On his wedding day to Mamie Geneva Doud he was promoted to First Lieutenant in 1916. During World War I he was appointed to run a tank training centre in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Throughout the war and afterwards, Eisenhower continued to rise through the ranks and in 1920 was promoted to major. In 1924 he enrolled in the Army's graduate school, the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth graduating, first in his class, in 1926.

Appointed chief military aide under General Douglas McArthur and served under McArthur as assistant military advisor to the Philippines from 1935 to 1939. A promotion to major general in 1942 led to his position as commander-in-chief of the Allied Forces and led Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa. By D-Day, Eisenhower was promoted to the rank of five-star general and on his return home to Abilene he received a hero's welcome. He was appointed U.S Army chief-of-staff, later assuming an appointment as first Supreme Allied Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In 1952 Eisenhower retired from active service and following a landslide victory was elected 34th President of the United States of America and re-elected for a second term of office in 1956. During his administration he had many accomplishments including the creation of the U.S. Information Agency and establishing Alaska and Hawaii as states. In 1957 he signed the Civil Rights Act and set up a permanent Civil Rights commission. Eisenhower was responsible for signing the bill for the foundation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Following his presidency, he retired to Gettysburg with his wife, Mamie where he lived up to his death on 28 March 1969.

Following many discussions at Local, National and American levels the former President of the United States of America, General Dwight Eisenhower landed at Wexford GAA Park on Thursday morning 27 August 1962 at a few minutes past 10 a.m. on a very wet and windy morning. Prior to his short visit to Wexford for a wreath laying ceremony at the Commodore John Barry statue it was discovered by the Mayor and Wexford Corporation that due to a very heavy schedule of engagements during his four day Irish visit General Eisenhower would only be available to travel to Wexford on the Thursday morning. At first, following several high level meetings by Wexford Corporation the consensus was that a weekday morning visit would be totally unsuitable due to possible unavailability of uniformed organisations, marching bands and the general public to come out to give an appropriate welcome to the distinguished visitor. This dilemma was eventually resolved and the following news item appeared in the 17 August issue of The Free Press:

EISENHOWER COMING TO WEXFORD - ARRIVING NEXT THURSDAY TO LAY BARRY WREATH AT 10 A.M.

The newspaper report goes on to say - A visit to Wexford by General Eisenhower, former President of America has finally been arranged for Thursday 23 August. This great news for Wexford came exactly a week after the disappointing news that the General could not come owing to the absence of air-craft landing facilities. This problem has now been overcome by the decision that he will travel in a helicopter made available by the United States Defence Department.
General Eisenhower accompanied to Wexford by his grand-children Dwight Eisenhower II and Barbara Ann Eisenhower with the Mayor of Wexford Alderman John Cullimore at Commodore John Barry statue Thursday 23 August 1962.
When a President Came to Wexford
John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917—1963)

Born on 29 May 1917 at Brookline, Massachusetts. Elected 35th President of the United States of America in November, 1960. He was the youngest President at 43 years of age and the first Catholic to hold this office. His great-grandfather, Patrick Kennedy from Dunganstown, sailed from the quayside at New Ross, County Wexford for Boston in 1848. Following a heroic naval career in the Second World War, John F. Kennedy entered the political arena contesting the Presidential race as a Democrat and was duly elected in November 1960. He took his oath of office as President of the United States of America on Friday 20th January, 1961 on the Fitzgerald family bible which contained a hand-written chronicle of his family from 1857. A fragment of a pennant flown by Commodore John Barry on his ship, ‘Raleigh’, was displayed in the Oval Office at the White House during Kennedy’s all too brief term of office. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated on 22nd November, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy arrived in Wexford town on Thursday 27 June 1963 at 1.20 pm, twenty minutes behind his expected schedule, when his helicopter touched down at Wexford GAA Park. He was welcomed by newly elected Mayor of Wexford, Alderman Thomas F. Byrne, members of Wexford Corporation, County Manager and Town Clerk.

Flag waving crowds lined the route of the Presidential one mile journey through the streets to Crescent Quay. A smiling President Kennedy stood in his open topped car and acknowledged the cheering populace who had come out to greet him on this historic day in Wexford town. This long awaited visit of the American President captured the imaginations of every man, woman and child in the town and on the day of his visit brought massive numbers onto the streets in the hope of getting a glimpse of President Kennedy. For several weeks before the visit headlines had been made in the world’s press, television and radio. Hundreds of newsmen converged on New Ross and Wexford giving worldwide coverage to the event. The visit of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy has gone down in history as one of the most memorable events ever to take place in Wexford. Great men, leaders of Church and State, have been welcomed in the past but none as eminent as the Leader of the Free World. During the all-too-short visit the people demonstrated to the world their pride in the fact that John F. Kennedy was their kinsman.
On his arrival at the Commodore Barry statue the President was met by the Officer Commanding a naval guard of honour. Accompanied by the Mayor and American Ambassador Matthew H. McCluskey President Kennedy placed a decorative wreath of golden cypress at the base of the statue. A military band then played the American National Anthem. The guard of honour rendered compliments to the President. In the photograph are Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Frank Aiken; Naval Aide to the President; Tazewell T. Shepard; President Kennedy; Ambassador McCluskey (back to camera), Mayor Thomas F. Byrne and Mr. Tony Crosbie, staff member, Wexford Corporation.
CONCLUSION BY THE MAYOR OF WEXFORD

On Sunday, 23 June 2013, I will have the great honour of hosting the annual wreath laying ceremony in commemoration of Commodore John Barry at Crescent Quay, Wexford and remembering the 50th Anniversary of President Kennedy’s visit to Wexford town. This ceremony has been ongoing since the wonderful bronze statue by the American sculptor, Wheeler Williams, of Commodore Barry was presented to the people of Ireland by the people of America and unveiled in September 1956 by the President of Ireland Seán T. O’Kelly.

This ceremony is attended by the Mayor and Councillors of Wexford Borough Council and Naval personnel from the Irish Naval Service and on occasions by officers of the United States Navy. A Guard of Honour is on duty to honour the colours of both nations as the Irish and American Anthems are rendered by one of Wexford’s marching bands. An inspection of the Guard of Honour is carried out. Over the years, many visiting dignitaries have had the honour of laying the laurel wreath including American and Irish Presidents, Taoisigh, USN Admirals and all American Ambassadors serving in Ireland.

The links forged between Wexford and the United States began with the young cabin boy who sailed from these shores bound for the New World in the middle years of the 18th Century later rising in the ranks of the American Naval Service to the most senior post, that of Commodore. John Barry from nearby Ballysampson, following an illustrious and heroic career in both the naval and military services of his newly adopted country, bore the title - Father of the American Navy and hero of the American Revolution.
An illustrated record of links forged between Wexford and the United States of America which goes back to Commodore John Barry in the eighteenth century. In 1918 the US Navy set up an Air Station at Ferrybank to combat enemy submarines off the Wexford coast in the final year of World War I. The President of Ireland, Sean T. O’Kelly unveiled the magnificent bronze statue of Commodore Barry at Crescent Quay, a present from the people of America to the people of Ireland in 1956. Two Presidents of the United States paid tribute to the Father of the American Navy by the visits of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1962 and President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1963 now 50 years ago. The American Connection is still vibrant today through our association with Wexford town’s sister city of Annapolis.