

As residents of Perrysburg, we probably take for granted the statue of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry standing at the foot of Louisiana Avenue. All that some people know about it, or the man, is that our town is named for him and that the old marble statue (now on permanent loan to the Visitors Center at Put-in-Bay) was replaced with a duplicate in bronze metal.

Following his victory over the English fleet in Lake Erie during the War of 1812, Perry was a true national hero, literally adored by America. He was a 28-year-old naval officer with unusual courage. The British ships were better built and better armed (longer-range cannons) than his and their officers were experienced veterans from other wars. Many of his sailors were backwoodsmen, experienced with rifles, but who had never seen a fighting ship.

When the English fleet sailed out from opposite Detroit to challenge Perry and his men not many miles east of here, he didn't hesitate. He steered his flagship right into them and at close quarters disabled their biggest ship and caused the others to surrender. In the process, his own ship was destroyed and with a handful of uninjured men, he rowed to another of his ships on which he again took over. While in the row-boat, the English fired at him and put a ball through the boat. Perry tore off his uniform coat and stuffed it into the hole to keep the boat afloat.

The entire battle took a little over three hours, and 68 sailors and officers

on both sides were killed, and 190 injured. It is hard to imagine the bloody horror that took place as ships just a few yards from one another fired 12- and 24-pound cannon balls, not to mention exploding shells filled with marble-size shot, into one another and across their decks.



Perry transfers from his damaged flagship *Lawrence* to the *Niagara*

When it was all over, Perry sent his famous message to Gen. William Henry Harrison here at Fort Meigs: "We have met the enemy and they are ours: two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop."

The victory gave America control of all of the Great Lakes, and Perry then helped ferry Harrison's army from here to Canada where they defeated the British army and killed their Indian allies' commander, Chief Tecumseh.

And now about the statue.

Of all the big cities in this country, Cleveland was the first to decide to honor Perry with a public statue. This

was in 1860 and Ohio-born William Walcutt of New York was asked to design and carve it. The statue was made from a block of marble that came from Carrara, Italy. It ended up being eight feet, two inches tall and included a young sailor and a midshipman, smaller figures that were placed at the foot of Perry.

At its unveiling on September 10, 1860, the 47th anniversary of the Battle



Original Statue at the Foot of Louisiana Avenue

of Lake Erie, some 30,000 people were present, including Perry's son and a number of surviving veterans of the fight. Perry himself had died of yellow fever in 1819. Many years later, time and weather had taken their toll on the marble statue, so two bronze replicas were made, one given to the state of Rhode Island, Perry's home state, where it stands just outside the capitol building in Providence. The original marble statue then became "surplus property" and in 1929 people here in Perrysburg heard about it and asked for it.

However, we weren't alone in this request. So did the towns of Put-in-Bay, Sandusky and several others. But Perry being our namesake, we got the statue, which was shipped here by freight train. By this time the Great Depression was beginning and Perrysburg didn't have the money to put it up. So it was put in storage and not until 1937 was enough money raised to properly mount it, after which there was a big celebration for the dedication.

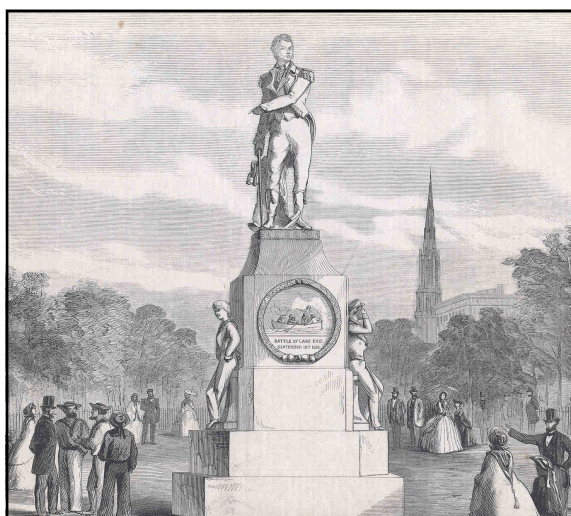


Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry

By 1966 the concrete around the statue was falling apart. It was torn down and the statue of Perry alone placed on a pedestal, with the smaller figures moved to the courtyard of the Municipal Building. Deterioration of the statue figure continued, so in 1996 a

campaign began to get all three figures duplicated in bronze. The original details of the statue were recreated with the help of old pictures.

On Memorial Day 1997, after a year of fund raising, the new statue was put up where it is today. Walcutt's sculpture of Perry now resides in the Visitor's Center at the Put-in-Bay Monument on permanent loan from the City of Perrysburg and the original smaller figures grace the lobby of our Municipal Building.



**Dedication of the Original Commodore Perry Statue in Cleveland, Ohio
September 10, 1860**

Things You Should Know About Perrysburg, Ohio

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COMMODORE PERRY The Man & The Statue



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