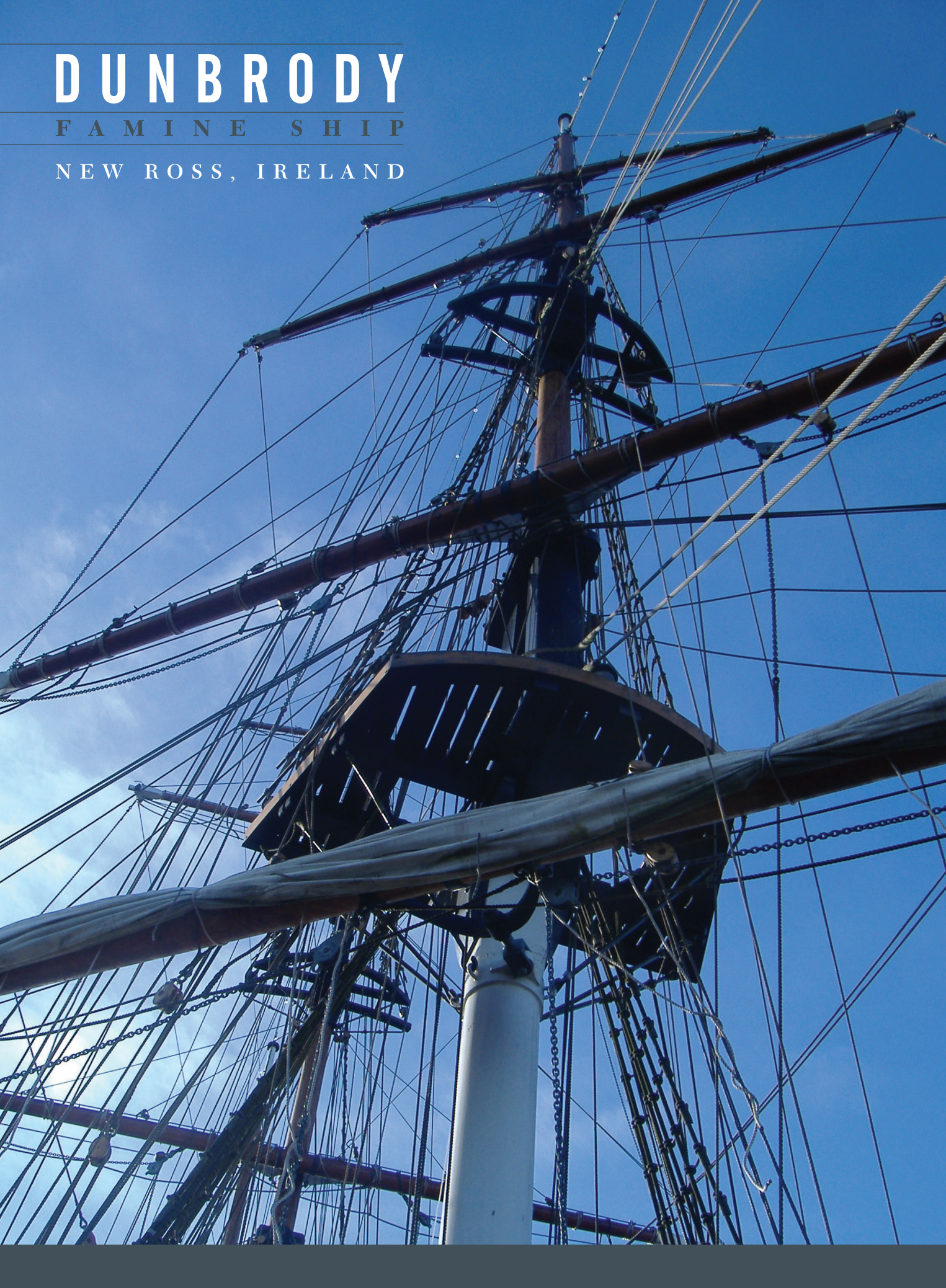


DUNBRODY

FAMINE SHIP

NEW ROSS, IRELAND



The Irish Emigration History Centre at the Dunbrody Famine Ship

Ten years is a long time in the life of a famine ship. Over the last decade 750,000 people from all around the world have trodden the deck of the *Dunbrody*, a replica of a ship that transported thousands of emigrants from Ireland to North America in the 1800s. These visitors experienced authentic accounts of emigrants' experiences, but they had an insatiable appetite for more information.

We decided to meet this real desire for knowledge and understanding with a more contextualised story of emigration in the 19th century. The resulting USD \$3.4m (€2.5m) Irish Emigration History Centre at the *Dunbrody* Famine Ship in New Ross, Ireland, opening in June 2011, will include an exhibition centre with displays based on new research, a complete fit-out of the ship itself, a Hall of Fame and a well-equipped study area. The Centre will appeal to people who want to trace the footsteps of their ancestors, those curious about where great Irish Americans started their journey and people who want to understand more about an important part of both Ireland's and America's history.

On the River Barrow in New Ross, Ireland's only inland port, the *Dunbrody* is moored to a riverbank that has seen a wealth of history. It was from this point that US President John F. Kennedy's ancestors embarked on their journey for America. Over a century later in the 1960s, President Kennedy visited the town and gave an inspirational speech on the quayside, close to where the *Dunbrody* is now docked. This quayside is an example of the cyclical nature of our economies and our lives. In fact, as Irish people continue to turn to other countries to pursue careers, emigration is still a live topic.

Through emigration, Ireland and America remain inextricably linked and there will be new generations of Irish Americans. When our emigrants return we'd like to see them bringing visitors with them to Dunbrody's Irish Emigration History Centre and the accompanying Irish America Hall of Fame.

American playwright Eugene O'Neill was descended from James O'Neill who left Ireland on the *Dunbrody* in 1852 and settled in New London, Connecticut, home to the Coast Guard Academy. In 2011 the US Coast Guard's Tall Ship Eagle will visit the Waterford Estuary, and sail along the same waters as the *Dunbrody*. Members of the crew are to pay a visit to the O'Neill ancestral home in nearby south County Kilkenny.

Positive experiences like these may be woven into the tradition of Irish American philanthropists and influencers who have supported initiatives in Ireland. The cycle doesn't stop. Take for example Donald Keough, whose ancestor came from County Wexford. In 2009 this ancestral link was evident when Mr Keough, former President and Director of Coca-Cola announced a USD \$300 million investment and the creation of more than 100 jobs in a plant outside Wexford town.

Ireland will continue to recognise the good work of these people. Irish Americans have done a lot for Ireland, and these people, such as Jean Kennedy Smith, former US Ambassador to Ireland, who performed the launching ceremony of the *Dunbrody*, will be permanently recognised in the Irish American Hall of Fame at the Dunbrody Famine Ship.

As this recognition continues along with our aim to improve the visitor experience and understanding of an important period in history, so does our need to continue the good work through fundraising and getting the word out. We would love to hear from you.



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The Dunbrody Project

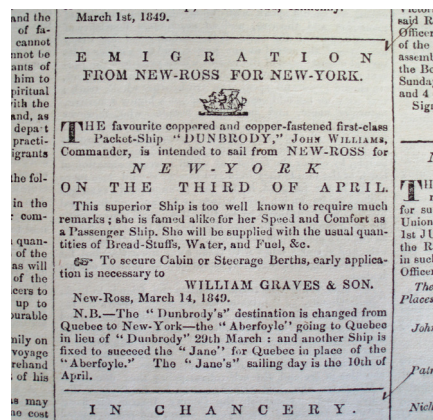
In 2001 the JFK Trust launched its replica 19th-century three-masted ship – the *Dunbrody*. Since then visitors have enjoyed first-hand encounters with a real ship, learnt from engagement with live interpreters and connected with the passenger experience. So when the time came for a major refurbishment of the *Dunbrody* and visitor centre – to re-open this year – the decision to enrich the existing approach by emphasising the unique story of the *Dunbrody* was an easy one. But could it really be done?

Too often has the difficult and emotive subject of emigration from Ireland been painted using only the broad brush-strokes of secondary sources. Original sources for the *Dunbrody* were known to exist, but their historical depth and context had been only partially explored. Would a case study focusing on a single vessel – even a single journey – hold enough interest or add to our understanding of these difficult issues?

The interpretation team began with a detailed review of all available *Dunbrody*-related sources, striving to reveal the experiences of those who travelled or worked on the *Dunbrody*. As you read this article we hope that something of the wider value and ambition of the project may become apparent.

Back to the source

The principle behind the exhibition is that every element of the visitor experience is grounded in research. Every character the visitors encounter, hear or read about is based on a real person of the period; every story is rooted in a genuine source from the past. And as far as possible, these sources originate with the *Dunbrody*.



An advertisement for the *Dunbrody*, *Wexford Independent*, March 1849 (Wexford County Council Public Library Service Collection)

‘I shall be there with my chests’

At the heart of the research is the archive of Graves & Sons, the New Ross shipping firm which built the original *Dunbrody*. The six metal boxes of documents dating from the 1840s sat forgotten in a warehouse for almost a century until they were handed to the Trust in the 1990s. Today the archive is held by the National Archives of Ireland in Dublin, a time capsule of an incredibly significant period in Ireland’s history and a goldmine of information, stories and period detail. Roughly sorted into bundles according to ship and date by an unknown clerk

working for Graves & Sons, the archives contain letters written by the ships’ captains to Graves, letters from prospective passengers seeking travel information, negotiations with agents, copies of crew agreements, receipts for supplies – in short, all the ‘behind the scenes’ backroom administration necessary for the smooth running of a successful shipping business.

There are many letters from Captain John Williams. Just 27 when he took over the *Dunbrody* in 1848, he was to be her captain for the next 20 years. He wrote hundreds of letters from the ship to his employer, reporting on the weather: ‘*very wild*’; the crew: ‘*all well and hearty*’; fishing for cod and sharks: ‘*useful for fresh messes*’ and the state of the cargo: ‘*a little damaged on top*’. Williams seems genuinely to have cared about his passengers. Arriving in Quebec after a stormy passage he wrote: ‘*The poor passengers were greatly frightened. They thought they should never see the land again.*’ In 1847 on another Graves ship, the *Aberfoyle*, when passengers fell ill he nursed them himself, reorganising the ship to create a hospital area and improve ventilation. This is a far cry from the brutal captains that we thought we knew. We start seeing the *Dunbrody* as less of a ‘coffin ship’, and more a ‘cradle of opportunity’.

Passage April 7/49

Gentlemen

I need you note this day as I am still here with the wind at S.W. and no prospect as yet of a chance. The Man Lawrence Mackery paid me two pound being all he was worth, the other ten shilling to be paid in New York by his friends before he gets his clothes. It seems that they did a tully rag that Pat Keough, who has robbed them of it, as they seem quite innocent, since with the above they have borrowed 40 shillings from a passenger.

Letter from Captain Williams, April 1849 (Graves Archive)

Letters from prospective passengers reveal the multitude of reasons for emigration. Many were professional people, such as engineer James Little, who wished to 'try his fortune' in America. Others were 'poor but respectable', sponsored by wealthier patrons. About other passengers we know tantalisingly little. 'Send me the day. I shall be in New Ross with my chests', wrote Nick White. Who was he? Where was he off to with his chests and why? Did he ever get there?

Letter from Nick White, March 1849 (Graves Archive)

Gentlemen March 27/49

For Sir

on my promise against on the other passenger I took a Boat I send you half a shilling and I wait you any and I am

you are servant

Nick White

Send me the Day I shall be in New Ross with my chests

W. S. S.

'They all expressed their gratitude'

Material held in other archives helped us to flesh out the story of emigration further. The record books of the Gorey workhouse hold the story of 'female paupers' who travelled on the **Dunbrody** in 1855. We traced their story. On 5th April, the names of 35 women are listed who have been 'selected' to be sent to North America from the workhouse, most aged between 17 and 20. Sadly, we hear nothing from the emigrants themselves – whether this was regarded as an opportunity or a great blow. Then follows a series of updates on various issues: clothing for the emigrants, the costs of travel to the port and ultimately for their passage across the Atlantic. We learn that they are to be provided with supplies for the journey, including '30lbs of salt meat or fish, vegetables consisting of Potatoes, Parsnips, Carrots or Turnips, Bedding, Saucepans, Drinking Vessel, Knife, Fork, Plate, Spoon'. Finally, on 21 July we hear about the women's arrival in New Ross:

[the Master] left the workhouse with the assistant schoolmistress, 43 adult women and 9 children Emigrants to see them on Board the 'Dunbrody' vessel bound to Quebec. He gave each of them on leaving 2lbs of white bread. On their arrival in Ross Mr Higginbotham (clerk) and Mr Thomas Harvey Emigrant agent in Gorey had all their beds ready in the Ship where they slept those nights. He had to give them their breakfast of bread and tea next morning as the cooking apparatus was not ready. They all expressed their Gratitude in tears to the guardians for their kindness. Their conduct and appearance was the admiration of every person that saw them.

What happened to these women on their arrival? Here the trail goes cold. And this leads us to one of the big challenges of the project: to trace the story of the **Dunbrody's** emigrants once they stepped off that gangplank into their new lives.

'I had myself a pleasant voyage'

A few letters from emigrants can be found in the Graves archive. W. O'Connor writes to Graves from New York in 1849, calling for his wife and six children to join him, and commenting on his 'pleasant voyage last spring in your good ship the **Dunbrody**'. He gives no details of his new life, nor how he is making a living; these remain a mystery.

Mrs Thomas O'Connor
16th December 1849

Messrs William Graves & Son

I am preparing to send for my Wife and six children, who are in circumstances my family are poor and distressed. I wish to take the nearest port for embarkation. I particularly as I have missed a pleasant voyage and being in your good ship the **Dunbrody** I would make arrangements here with respect to agents, but I prefer as I have a boat to board with you, and I beg of you to advise me on return of the ship, at the lowest figure the amount of Passage Money I will have to remit to you, also the time of sailing during the sailing of your vessels from Ross to this Port. I am Dear Sir your Obedt Servant

W. O'Connor

Letter from W O'Connor, December 1849 (Graves Archive)

An additional mystery is that the only W. O'Connor to appear on the **Dunbrody** passenger list for spring 1849 is aged just 18; rather too young to be father of six ... did someone record his age wrongly? Did he change his name? Like so much of the material, this letter raises more questions than it answers.

In August 2010 Pat Gorman, a third-generation Irish-American living in Dixon, Illinois, contacted us. According to family history, Ann Morrissey, the wife of Pat's great-great-uncle had travelled out on the **Dunbrody** in 1849. Sure enough, Ann is there on the passenger list, together with her younger brother. And, purely coincidentally, Ann is mentioned in a letter in the Graves archive, dated March 1849: 'One passenger Anne Morrissey deposit paid of 20/ (bal. £3.7.0) she will pay you when they find themselves in Ross. They

prefer going to see for themselves'. From this one line we get a picture of Ann as an independent young woman who wants to check out the ship before handing over full payment.

Ann settled in Peoria, Illinois where she married another Irish immigrant and died a wealthy lady, the owner of several properties. Pat was able to supply us with striking pictures of Ann taken in the 1870s – and we have our first Dunbrody emigrant story.



Ann Morrissey, now Mrs Gorman, in the 1870s (Patrick Gorman)

There remain other significant gaps in our knowledge. We have many names of passengers, both steerage and cabin class, but have no first hand accounts of their journey written by any of them. We know the names of many crew-members of the **Dunbrody** but we have no accounts written by them; no diaries, no reports, no letters. Details which bring these men even slightly into focus are therefore very precious; we learn from one of Williams' letters that two crew members 'deserted during the night' – and later we learn, perhaps to our surprise, that one of these men was black.

For the sake of the exhibition, we have turned to other accounts from other sources to fill these gaps, written around the same time and as relevant as possible. But our plans are developing within the **Dunbrody** project for further research. We hope, for instance, to dig deeper into the American side of the stories of the **Dunbrody** passengers, to follow up in American archives the 176 names of that one passenger list of 1849.

What stories, what people, what descendants might emerge? If and when funding becomes available, this would be a worthy research project and legacy of the ship. In the meantime, should any readers have any historical connections with the passengers of the **Dunbrody**, then we urge you to contact us.

Making the most of the sources

The **Dunbrody** project is much more than a research project. The exhibition is above all a visitor centre, and visitors are not noted for reading 'books on the wall'. The true challenge is to turn the rich and varied fruits of our research into engaging and satisfying content for our visitors.

In some cases this can mean simply reproducing archive material as facsimiles, sharing the immediacy of the handwriting from the past. The 1849 passenger list of 176 names, for example, is a uniquely evocative document that needs little interpretation. Visitors feel a direct connection with familiar names, even at a distance of 150 years.

Elsewhere we have taken the content of archive material and redesigned it to make it more accessible to visitors and to increase its impact. From an official list of 24 rules for passengers on board the ship, for example, we are planning to select just a few and paint them up as full sized signs to be hung about the passenger deck – *Rule 22: Swords and other offensive weapons to be placed in the custody of the Master.*

Recording the audio (CMC Associates)



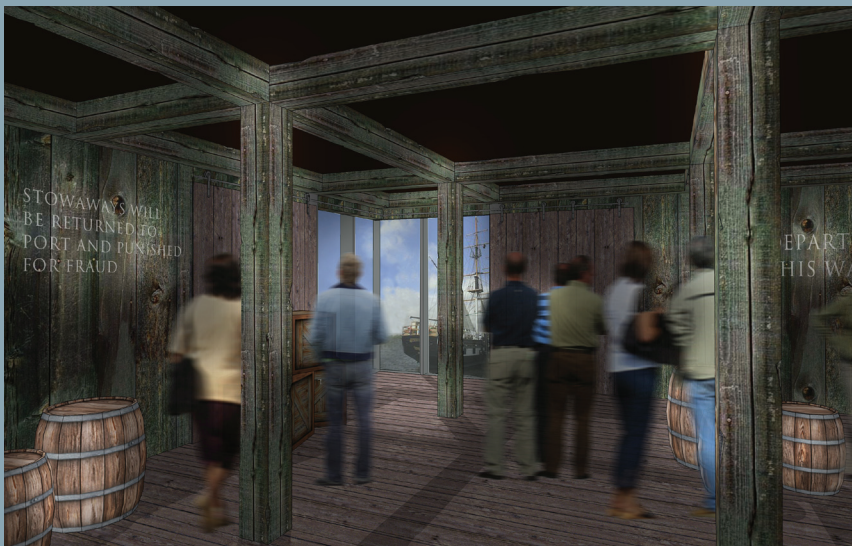
Often we have used personal accounts as the basis of audio dramatisations. Many of the letters or documents speak for themselves and simply need a good voice to breathe life into them. In other cases we have been more creative. We know that a young professional, Willy Mason, wanted to work his passage to Canada, and was offered a place on the **Dunbrody** in 1849. We don't know if he took up the position, but in audio on the ship, we learn about the baffling workings of the ship through his eyes.

We have been fortunate to have worked with a highly skilled band of local actors under local director Milo Walsh; their expertise and knowledge of local accents has contributed hugely to the authenticity of the dramatisations. Local band 'Barrowside' and friends have created the musical soundtrack to the exhibition; alongside studio-quality performances, we have aimed to recreate the atmosphere of informal musicians playing together on the passenger deck.

We hope that this authenticity will shine through, creating a rich and sometimes challenging experience for visitors. So ingrained is the belief that all ship's captains were uncaring, exploitative monsters – and undoubtedly many were – that we are expecting some resistance to our presentation of Captain Williams as a good man – which he undoubtedly was. We hope that looking at the original sources will expand visitors' views of the emigration experience, and by focusing on the **Dunbrody** we aim to add another layer to the story.



Port



Embarkation



Live interpretation

The Dunbrody for visitors

The transition from content research to visitor experience has been a careful and interactive process. Some visitors will bring knowledge; others will bring prejudice. Many will simply be looking to be entertained. All must be engaged and quite literally brought on board.

Key to this process is the gradual immersion of the visitor in the journey. Visitors become 'observers'. On the reconstructed quayside, 'observers' become 'participants'. Then on leaving the ship the new 'emigrants' return to the centre and gain a sense of perspective and scale on this mass-migration. We establish this illusion through creating a theatre of set reconstruction, audio engagement with the voices of the past and a seamless interaction with live re-enactors. As in all the best plays the exhibition is divided into three acts: *Departures, Journey and Arrivals*.

Entering *Departures* visitors are introduced to the story of the historic ship – the original *Dunbrody*. Moving down a corridor lined with wooden beams and sailcloth, visitors discover the range of emigrant motivations. Here we meet Ann Morrissey for the first time, the 25-year-old housekeeper from Glenmore. We discover how the business of Graves & Sons positioned itself to make the most of the demand for high-quality emigrant ships, and gradually built up a reputation for – relative – comfort and safety.

From this broad picture of mass emigration, the exhibition gradually homes in on one ship and one journey: the *Dunbrody's* journey to New York in April 1849, the one journey for which a full passenger list survives. In the lively, bustling Port area, the visitor steps back in time and on to the quayside of New Ross, ready to make a one-way trip to America, making the move from 21st century observer to 19th century participant.

As visitors peer into William Graves' office they overhear Ann Morrissey paying the

balance of her fares. Opening baggage reveals possessions taken on board by emigrants and triggers their stories, their hopes for their new lives. Smells of tar and paint drift over the quay. We witness tearful departure scenes as families are separated – and share in the excitement of the adventure of young travellers.

Exhibition tickets are exchanged for boarding passes and visitors join the throng of emigrants gathering in the Embarkation area. Here visitors are confronted with the emotional tug of departure. An audiovisual presentation reveals farewell rituals and taps into emigrant fears. Into this zone strides the Purser, who takes control and briefs travellers about the journey ahead. He is the first of our ‘live interpreters’: talented actors well-versed in the period and, just as importantly, skilled in interacting with visitors. Hauling back a curtain, he reveals the *Dunbrody* for the first time. Visitors pass a cursory medical check, leave the comfort of the known world, and step aboard.

The next section of the exhibition, *Journey*, takes place entirely on board the ship. On deck we encounter the cook preparing meals for the crew; below, in the gloomy steerage accommodation area we meet

‘passengers’ who engage us in conversation, freely sharing their opinions and experiences of the journey. Other emigrants are overheard discussing plans for the future, and we see how tensions can mount in this overcrowded space. Arguments break out, babies cry, jokes are cracked and over in the corner a musical session seems to be gathering pace.

Close by is the crew’s quarters, the captain’s cabin and the altogether plusher accommodation for the ‘cabin’ passengers. One area is given over to a selection of the cargo which the *Dunbrody* carried on her return journeys from America, the other half of the ship’s story.

Eventually we step ashore into *Arrivals*, the world of mid-19th-century North America. Visitors witness heartrending tales of the tragedy at the quarantine station of Grosse Ile, and see how their fellow emigrants sink or swim in their new environment. Drawing back a little from the past, an audio-visual display emphasises the variety of the Irish-American experience as emigrants set to work finding jobs, making homes and building communities. One final display in this main exhibition area concludes the story of the original *Dunbrody* with her shipwreck in 1875.

The Dunbrody Hall of Fame

Moving upstairs the tone changes. We return to the 21st century to consider the legacy of the *Dunbrody* and the enduring impact of Ireland’s emigrants on American culture. At the heart of this exhibition area is the *Hall of Fame*. Here visitors honour the Irish-Americans who have made significant contributions to our world: the Kennedy dynasty, Henry Ford, Georgia O’Keeffe, Eugene O’Neill, James Watson, Grace Kelly...

Ceremonies are planned to inaugurate new additions to the *Hall of Fame* on a regular basis, to highlight the achievements of significant Irish-Americans of today – business people, scientists, philanthropists and cultural figures. We are already shortlisting for our first new ‘intake’ – and competition is stiff! The *Hall of Fame* emphasises that the links between Ireland and America remain vibrant, and that Irish-Americans continue to enhance all aspects of our world.

Whilst respecting these celebrities, we must not forget the humbler contributions of ordinary Irish men and women who had the courage to leave their homes and the strength to establish new lives overseas.

Arrival



Hall of Fame



Our community exhibition invites local groups to share their own family links with America and Canada, and present their stories in a regularly changing display. In a study area, visitors can access the *Irish America* Database and other genealogy websites to take the first steps to exploring their own family history.

From this first floor, visitors can enjoy elevated views of the *Dunbrody* over the River Barrow from a balcony area. An audio-visual display tells the remarkable story of the construction of the replica ship and of her voyages.

Conclusion

As the team works round the clock to put the finishing touches to the ship and exhibition, we recognise that this is just another chapter in the story of emigration from New Ross. We have big plans for the future: continuing the research into the *Dunbrody*, her sister ships and the stories of her passengers, developing the community history of emigration from the Wexford area, and establishing the Irish Emigration History Centre here in New Ross. There is much to do. We look forward to welcoming you on board.



The Team:

- CMC Associates
- Studio SP
- Paragon
- Zolk C Limited
- New Ross Boat Yard
- Falk Andraschko
- The Dunbrody Staff
- Peter Southern
- Minihan Crane Architects
- Malone O'Regan Consulting Engineers
- Ronan Meally
- Clancy Construction

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- Anne Finn (researcher)
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- Grainne Doran, Archivist (Wexford County Council)
- Patrick Gorman (descendant of Ann Morrissey, emigrant)
- Derek Hill (descendant of Thomas Hamilton Oliver – ship builder)
- Many others too numerous to mention

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