

The Escape of Fenian Prisoners from Fremantle in 1876

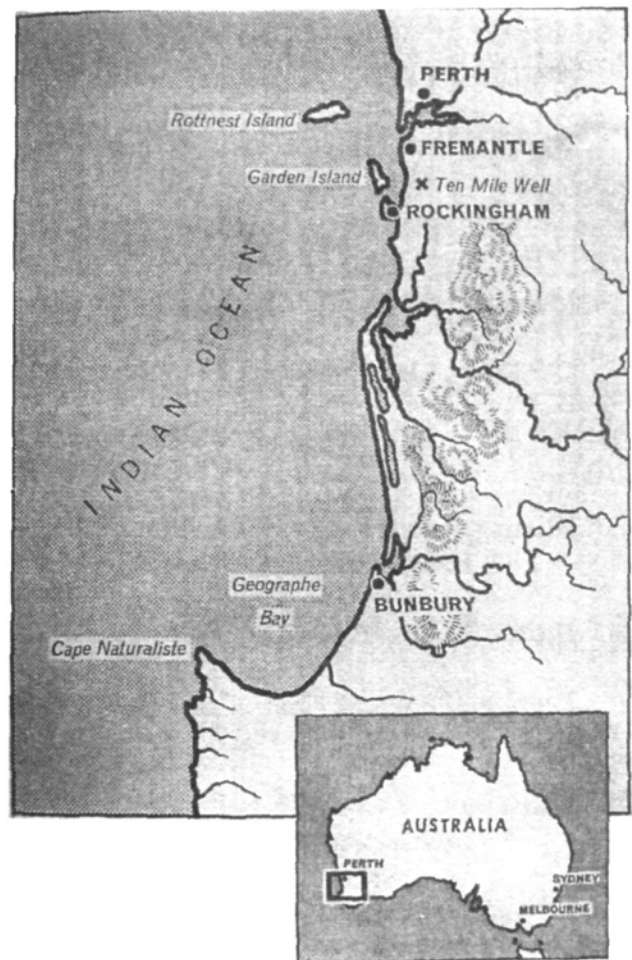
by John Teahan

The Fenian movement, formally titled the Irish Revolutionary or Republican Brotherhood, IRB in short, was founded in Dublin on St. Patrick's Day, 1858. Its founders were nationalists who had taken part in an earlier rising in 1848.¹ Headed by James Stephens, the IRB was a secret, non-sectarian organization with the objective of making Ireland a free and democratic republic. It counted on support from America to achieve this end, and the movement expanded steadily on both sides of the Atlantic. In America it was named the Fenian Brotherhood, recalling Ireland's pre-Christian warriors, the Fianna. Those involved, whether in Ireland or America, are generally now known as Fenians.²

It was expected that a Fenian rising would take place in 1865. If it had, it would have presented the British authorities with a formidable problem. At the end of the American Civil War there were probably about 200,000 Irish among the disbanded soldiers,³ many of whom were most anxious to oppose British rule in whatever way possible. There were 15,000 sworn Fenians in the British army and a further 80,000 civilian Fenians in Ireland and Great Britain.⁴ Furthermore there was widespread support in Ireland for the Fenian objective of national independence. However, the rising was postponed and when it did finally happen in 1867, it proved an abortive effort. By then several hundred Fenians, including the leaders, had been arrested but only 105 were convicted and sentenced on conspiracy charges.⁵ Sixty-two were included in a final shipment of convicts to Western Australia in 1867. Among the 62 were seventeen who had been British soldiers. Seven of these were deserters from the army and for permanent identification each had the capital letter "D" carved on the left side of the chest and rendered indelible with Indian ink.⁶ Aboard the convict ship, *Hougoumont*, the soldier Fenians were classed as and confined with the ordinary criminals whereas the civilian

Fenians were given some recognition as political prisoners in that they were provided with separate quarters.

The Fenians were often portrayed in the popular press in England as brutal ruffians of low caliber. They themselves were deeply convinced that they were not criminals but were being punished for the pursuit of a noble ideal. As if in evidence of the fact that they were no ordinary convicts they produced a manuscript journal during the voyage. They titled it *The Wild Goose*, a term derived from "The Wild Geese" by which the emigrant Irish soldiers, who served with distinction in many European armies during the 18th century, are generally known. John Flood was editor and John Boyle O'Reilly,



It is with great sadness that we note the passing of John Teahan, Keeper of the Art and Industrial Division of the National Museum of Ireland. Mr. Teahan gave an enormously successful lecture this past February on the subject of the Catalpa rescue, jointly sponsored by NYIHR and Ireland House. At the bottom of a handwritten letter from John Teahan to this publication, dated October 23, 1995, enclosing the illustrations for this article, was a scribbled note in a different handwriting: "John Teahan died suddenly only hours after writing this note to you . . . R.I.P."

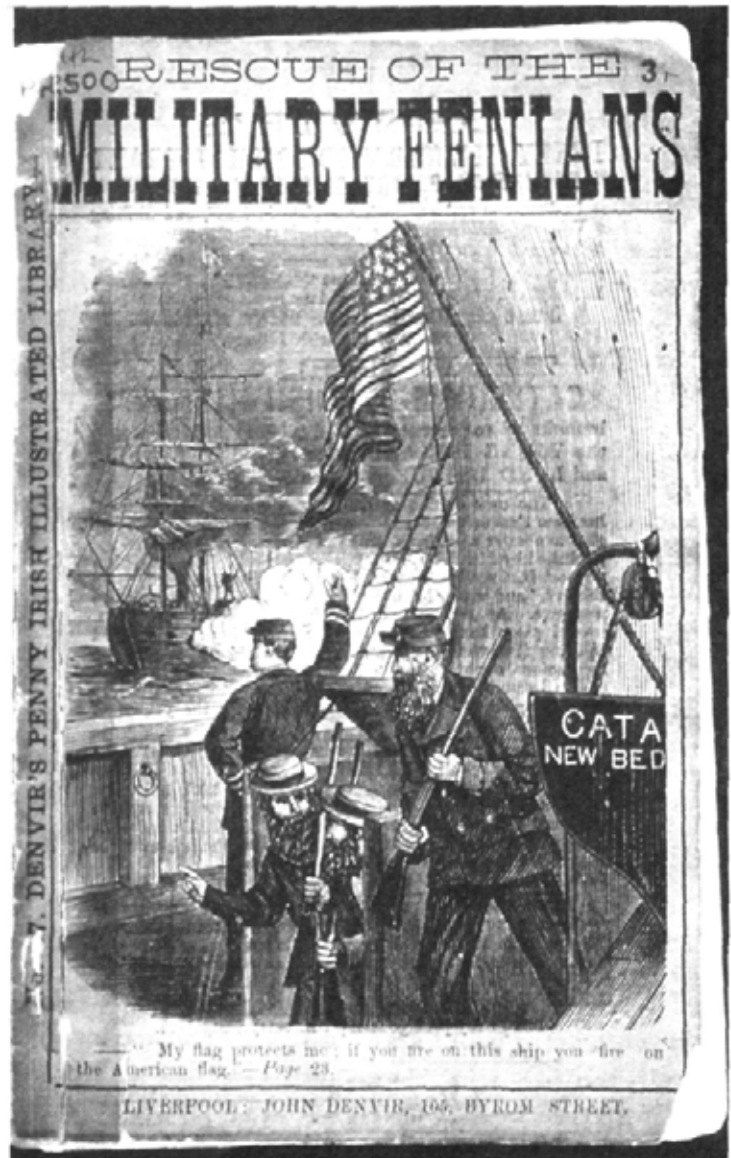
who later became editor of the *Boston Pilot*, was sub-editor. Denis Cashman provided an ornate title script set out in panels of scrolling sprays, generally of shamrock. There were seven weekly issues of the journal, which was published on Saturdays when the editor or sub-editor would read it aloud to their comrades. The last, which was the Christmas number, was double-sized. This particular issue so impressed the

ship's captain, Cozens and his mates that they requested and were given copies. As a result the journal staff were given certain concessions and O'Reilly was allowed to move from the convict quarters to join his civilian Fenian colleagues. After a three month voyage, the *Hougoumont* finally arrived in Fremantle and on 10 January 1868 the Fenians were transferred to the prison, known generally as "The Establishment."

During 1869-70 there were particularly forceful campaigns for amnesty of Fenian prisoners. As a result all Fenians who had been jailed following the events of 1865-67, with the exception of those who had been British soldiers, were released on the condition that they live outside the United Kingdom for the remainder of their sentences. The civilian Fenian prisoners in Fremantle, accordingly, were set free. But all pleas for concessions to the soldier Fenians proved futile. There was a hope, however, even an understanding, that those released would effect the rescue of their comrades in jail. That hope seemed groundless as time passed with no evidence of a rescue effort.

In 1871 the released Fenian prisoners were warmly received in New York at a public reception organised by Clan na Gael ("The Irish Race"), an organization founded to unite two rival wings of the Fenian Brotherhood.⁷ Some time later a newspaper which gave a report of the event was smuggled into Fremantle Prison. In it, one prisoner, Martin Hogan, saw a reference to his old comrade Peter Curran and decided to write to him at once. He first introduced himself and then described his "servitude in one of the darkest corners of the earth." Hardest to bear, he said, was the thought of being forgotten and neglected by his more fortunate companions. Finally, he asked for help and requested that any response be directed to Fr. McCabe, Fremantle.⁸ Curran received the letter in due course and gave it to John Devoy, who was one of the friends to whom Hogan sent his regards. Devoy felt he was under a special obligation towards the prisoners and that he was honor-bound to help them because he had been mainly responsible for recruitment in the British Army. He responded encouragingly to Hogan saying he would work on behalf of the men in Fremantle. He considered however that little could then be done except through the agency of Clan na Gael. And Clan na Gael members for the most part believed that the task of releasing the prisoners was impossible.

The Fenians in Fremantle waited and hoped impatiently for a message from America. They did not know that Devoy had brought their plight to the attention of the heads of Clan na Gael but to no effect. In September 1873 another prisoner, James Wilson, wrote a long letter to Devoy. Among other matters, he suggested a possible means of escape. "There are some good ports," he said, "where whalers are in the habit of calling . . . it would not be much risk to any vessel, whaler or otherwise, to run in on some pretence or other. And if we had the means of purchasing horses [we] could make it through the bush to the coast where the vessel might be and so clear out."⁹



Cover page: *The Rescue of the Military Fenians*
Liverpool: *Denver's Illustrated Irish Press*, No. 7

In July 1874 the Annual Convention of Clan na Gael was again held. There were 61 delegates present, representing the organization's 86 branches and a membership of 6,317 - a number which grew to over 7,000 during the following twelve months. Devoy set the question of the freeing of the Australian prisoners once again before them. This time he was successful. A committee of ten, with Devoy as chairman, was appointed to plan the rescue and raise the necessary finances. In practice the weight of the work fell on John Devoy, James Reynolds from Connecticut, Patrick Mahon and John Goff from New York, John Talbot from San Francisco, and Dr. William Carroll from Philadelphia.¹⁰

The first objective of the committee was the collection of funds and no effort was spared in this regard. Public lectures and other functions were organised. Circulars were sent to all Clan na Gael branches and, to stimulate contributions, copies of letters from Martin Hogan and James Wilson were also enclosed. One of these was a letter Wilson wrote to Devoy in June 1874 making one more heart-rending appeal for help:

Dear Friend,

It is now over 12 months since I wrote to you before, and ever since I have been waiting and watching every mail expecting and hoping that you would answer my letter . . . the finest man amongst us named Patrick Keating, is dead . . . what a death is staring us in the face. . . . A little money judiciously expended would have sufficed to release every man. . . . This could be readily done thro' a whaler . . . she would call here for water and provisions, and we could know the name of the captain and also of the ship, we could be ready to start as soon as she was ready for sea . . . in the hour of trial we flinched not . . . we expect to be assisted out of our difficulty. . . . We expect great aid from you yourself who know us perhaps better than any other men in the organisation. . . . Now dear Friend, remember this is a voice from the tomb . . . our faith in you is unbounded. We think that if you forsake us then we are friendless indeed.¹¹

The substance of that letter would have softened the most obstinate Irish heart into supporting the rescue venture.

In early 1875 the plan for the actual rescue from Fremantle began to take shape, influenced by the advice of former Australian prisoners then living in America. John Boyle O'Reilly, who had himself made a remarkable escape from Fremantle, was particularly helpful and his guidance was invaluable. He introduced Devoy to Henry Hathaway, a man with wide experience in whaling, who was familiar with the Western Australian coast and with the Indian Ocean. Equally significant in the context was the fact that he had helped and befriended O'Reilly in his escape aboard the whaler, *Gazelle*, so he was obviously in sympathy with the cause. He had since retired from the sea and was at this time captain of the New Bedford night-police. On hearing from Devoy what was being contemplated, he entered warmly into the project. He recommended that a ship be bought, fitted out as a whaler and sent on its mission under a trustworthy captain. While he estimated the cost of purchase and preparation of the ship to be at least \$12,000, he was convinced that, if the whaling season were good, the enterprise could be self-financing or even profitable.

Finally, after various efforts to acquire a suitable ship, the vessel *Catalpa*, was bought in April 1875 for \$5,250 through the agency of John Richardson, a reliable whaling agent who was recommended by Hathaway. The *Catalpa*, then lying at Boston, was originally a whaler but had been converted for merchant purposes. It weighed 202 tons net and was 90 feet long. When the winter ice thawed it was taken to New Bedford. There, it was reverted to a whaler once again and fully equipped for a whaling expedition under the watchful and experienced eye of Hathaway. By this time the cost had

mounted to \$19,000, far in excess of the original estimate of \$12,000. The matter of funding had indeed been a continuing problem. When it became clear that voluntary subscriptions would not be adequate, the various Clan na Gael branches were invited, on Devoy's recommendation, to make loans available from funds they had set aside to support revolution in Ireland. The task proved difficult and tedious but the branches eventually voted the money and made it available to the Rescue Committee in due course.

Hathaway also recommended a captain for the *Catalpa*. He was Richardson's son-in-law, George Anthony, aged 29, who had experience in whaling since boyhood. The recommendation was accepted and Anthony was informed about the Fenian movement and its aims and about the plight of the men in Fremantle jail. He was also told of the rescue plan and when asked if he would take over the captaincy of the ship. He readily accepted. It is interesting that Hathaway, Richardson and Anthony, who played crucial roles at different stages of the project, were neither Fenians nor Irish. Their involvement was sparked by their sympathy for the ideals of Irish Independence and Freedom.

On the announcement that the ship was ready for the voyage, the question arose as to which Fenians or Clan na Gael men should travel. The captain favored having one person only and he had to be a useful crew member. Finally, after much debate, Denis Duggan, a Dublin-born Fenian of undoubted courage, was installed.¹² He would be the ship's carpenter, a position for which he was ideally suited since he was a coach-builder by trade. Another Dublin-born Fenian, Thomas Brennan, disappointed that he also was not selected, was sent to the Azores where he could make contact with the



Catalpa on its arrival there six months later and Captain Anthony could take him on then if he required him. The selection of the remainder of the twenty-four man crew was a simple affair for they were whalers. The first mate was Samuel Smith, an American of Scots descent. Most of the others were from Malaya, Sandwich Island, the Azores, and Cape Verde Islands, a normal blend for a whaling voyage.

The *Catalpa* set sail on Thursday 29 April 1875. Captain Anthony had been instructed to spend six months whaling in the North Atlantic, to put into Fayal in the Azores, and to time the remainder of the voyage, so as to arrive in Bunbury, Western Australia, in early Spring. There he would be contacted by Fenian agents who would inform him of the plans for the actual jail-break.

The next task for the Rescue Committee was to select a man who would organise the Fremantle stage of the mission. On Devoy's proposal, they appointed John Breslin, who had taken the main part in the rescue of the Fenian leader, James Stephens, from Richmond Prison in Dublin.¹³ Breslin was well-educated and an avowed nationalist and was familiar with the British prison system. In addition he had all the personal qualities which fitted him for the role he was to play - a distinguished appearance, good manners, a natural reserve and courtesy, keen intellect, cool courage, and decisiveness.

Thomas Desmond from California was nominated to accompany Breslin. The plan of rescue, however, was left to Breslin's own discretion and judgement. In San Francisco Breslin obtained papers from another Fenian, Judge M. Cooney, to identify him as James Collins, a wealthy landowner with extensive mining interests in Nevada and other parts of America. Similarly, Desmond became Thomas Johnson.

Breslin then changed his dollar bills into gold and on 13 September both men set sail for Australia, arriving in Sydney on 15 October 1875. There they met an ex-prisoner from Fremantle, John Edward Kelly, and two other Fenians, John King and James McInerney, and were given the surprising news that a separate plan of escape was under consideration locally and money was set aside for that purpose. However, all agreed that Breslin's plan was best and the funds were put at his disposal.

Breslin and Desmond arrived in Fremantle on 16 November, having travelled the last stage of the journey aboard the *Georgette*, a steamer which they would again encounter. Desmond went to Perth where he worked as a carriage builder. He became known as "The Yankee." Breslin, as James Collins, took up residence in the Emerald Isle Hotel,

the best in town, under the guise of a wealthy speculator. He left the documents which Judge Cooney had provided him in his room, carelessly concealed so as not to escape the attention of an inquisitive person. Before long he was being acknowledged as an American millionaire. He was so accepted socially that in early December he was permitted to tour the prison under the guidance of the Assistant Superintendent,

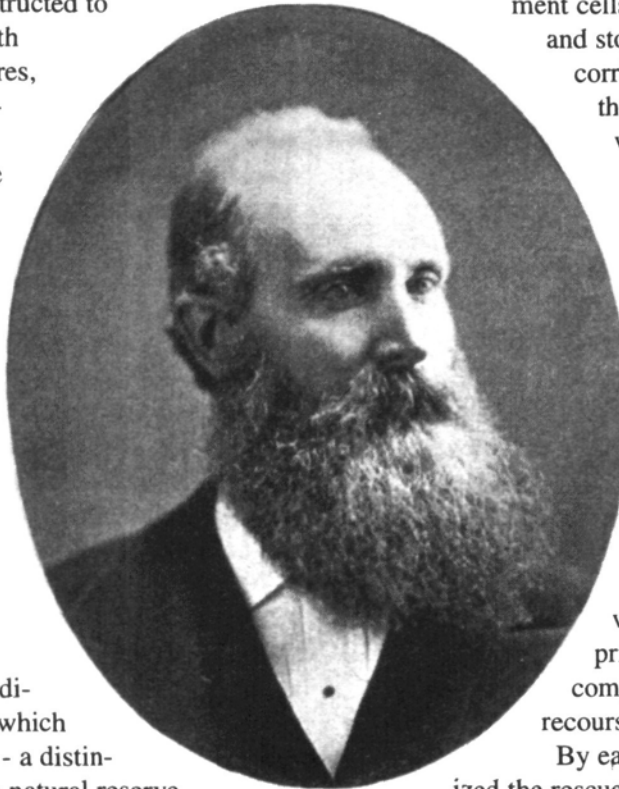
Joseph Doonan. He inspected the chapels, punishment cells, hospital, cook-house, workshops and store-room as well as all the linking corridors. He came to the conclusion that the Establishment was secure and well guarded.¹⁴

Breslin was in Fremantle for but a short while when he discovered that the prisoner, William Foley, described as "one of our best and most faithful Fenian men in the English Army," was on ticket-of-leave on grounds of ill-health.¹⁵ Foley now served as a courier between Breslin and the prisoners, primarily James Wilson. With the connivance of an Irish warder, Michael McMahon, Breslin managed to have several secret meetings with Wilson, the venue being the prison stables, which were outside the compound and to which Wilson had recourse during his work.

By early January 1876, Breslin had finalized the rescue plan, although he did not expect the *Catalpa* before the end of the month. But January and February passed and still the ship had not arrived. Inquiries from another American whaler, *The Canton*, brought no news. Breslin was uneasy and anxious and he knew that the prisoners would be worried and impatient. To make matters worse, they had been shifted around, making communication with them more difficult. Furthermore, he was aware that his long stay in Fremantle, without obvious reason, might arouse suspicion. In order to distract attention and to occupy his time he visited various towns and villages in Western Australia — Perth, Guilford, York, Northam, and Newcastle.

On 5 March John King arrived in Fremantle, bringing £384 in gold from New Zealand, and stayed to assist in the rescue. Breslin, still awaiting the *Catalpa*, grew more apprehensive. He paid a short visit to Bunbury and returned to Fremantle, all the more concerned regarding how his lengthy sojourn would be interpreted. Consequently, he feigned interests in gold prospecting, in timber production, in sheep farming and the wool trade. Finally, on 28 March 1876,¹⁶ the *Catalpa* arrived at Bunbury, its progress having been hampered by bad weather.

Coincidentally, around the time of the arrival of the *Catalpa*, two other Fenian agents arrived in Fremantle, intent on another quite separate rescue effort. They were Denis



John Breslin

Florence McCarthy and John Stephen Walsh, emissaries from the IRB in Ireland and England. Breslin was at first suspicious of their motives, fearing that they might be spies sent from England. However, after King had established their *bona fides*, Breslin accepted their offer of assistance. What Breslin did not know was that the British Government had become aware of the IRB mission and that, only a month before the event, a warning had been sent to the colony to the effect that an escape attempt was imminent. Various precautionary steps were taken by the police and prison authorities and a discreet watch was kept on a number of suspects, including the visitors to Fremantle but nothing unusual was observed. Police remarked, for instance, that Breslin seemed to mix only with the best in society.

Following the arrival of the *Catalpa*, Breslin made no delay in going to Bunbury. There he met Captain Anthony who reported on the voyage and on the problems with the crew, who had grown restive because not enough whaling was done. Breslin gave an outline of his plans. The prisoners would be brought to Rockingham Beach, about twenty miles south of Fremantle. From there they would be taken by whaleboat to the *Catalpa* which would wait ten or twelve miles out to sea. Breslin invited Anthony to accompany him aboard the *Georgette* to inspect the coast around Rockingham. To their surprise, one of the *Georgette*'s passengers was none other than Thomas Brennan. He had gone to the Azores to wait for the *Catalpa*, but, not having been taken on by Captain Anthony, he made his way independently to Australia. Since he arrived in time for the rescue bid, Breslin felt obliged to give him some role, even though at that stage security interests would best be served by fewer participants. All three then travelled on the *Georgette* to Fremantle. From the deck Anthony noted all the crucial landmarks, including Rottnest Lighthouse and Garden Island. In Fremantle harbor a most unwelcome sight awaited them. Anchored there was the fast-sailing British gunboat, the *Conflict*, well equipped with arms and fully manned. They learned later that the gunboat was on an annual visit and would remain in port for another eight or nine days, when it would sail for Adelaide or Sydney. Breslin decided to postpone the rescue attempt until the *Conflict* had proceeded on its tour.

At this point they both drove along the planned escape route to Rockingham Beach, in rehearsal for the main event. They identified precisely the spot where the whaleboat was to land to collect the prisoners and they estimated

the time required for the different stages of the trip. The first ten miles were relatively good, the following six were very poor and the final four miles were no more than a rough track through the bush. The journey took two hours and twenty minutes. They agreed on a coded system of communication and Anthony returned to Bunbury on Breslin's instructions. There, he undertook the painting, overhauling and general maintenance of the *Catalpa* simply as a stalling procedure while awaiting the departure of the *Conflict*.¹⁷ Finally, on Tuesday, 11 April the gunboat sailed from Fremantle and Breslin telegraphed Anthony as previously agreed. When Anthony responded he specified his intended sailing arrangements. Breslin realized that the schedule would involve the rescue of the prisoners on Good Friday. The task would be impossible for that day was a government holiday when the prison routine would be changed and the prisoners would not be at their usual work-places. He telegraphed Anthony and got a postponement until Saturday morning. He also succeeded in getting a letter to Wilson in prison informing him and his colleagues accordingly and ending as follows: "We have money, arms and clothes; let no man's heart fail him, for this chance may never occur again."¹⁸

On Friday evening, Breslin and Thomas Desmond hired two pairs of good horses and traps and tested them to ensure that each pair pulled well together. When they returned to their hotel a telegram from Anthony awaited them with the information that the *Catalpa* had dragged both its anchors as "it has blown heavy" and could not sail as planned.¹⁹ By a stroke of luck, Breslin was able to get a message to Wilson and his comrades through the prisoner Robert Cranston, cancelling all arrangements for the Saturday. That very morning however, to his great relief, Breslin received a final message with the news that the rescue could take place on Monday 17 April, i.e. Easter Monday and he conveyed the information to Wilson. Both Breslin and Desmond arranged to have horses and traps ready as before. John King got a particularly fast mount. His duty was to remain in Fremantle for some reason-



The jail in Fremantle where the Fenians were confined.

able time after the jail-break, then catch up on the rescue party, for he was on horseback, and let them know if the alarm had been raised. There was a difficulty in getting good horses on that particular day for, among other things, some had been engaged in connection with the Perth regatta which was held on Easter Monday. The regatta, nonetheless, was a fortunate coincidence as it was a source of distraction for everybody including officials, many of whom would attend it.

By midday on Easter Sunday the *Catalpa* was in its appointed position southwest of Rottneest Lighthouse. Captain Anthony, put his first mate, Samuel Smith, in full charge and with five hand-picked crewmen, provisioned a whaleboat and set off for Rockingham Beach. When they came ashore that evening, Anthony located some stakes that he and Breslin had driven into the sand to mark the embarkation point and all settled down by the beach that night. On that night also, the IRB man, Denis McCarthy, and a local schoolmaster, Frank O'Callaghan, cut the telegraph wires linking Perth and Fremantle with King George's Sound in order to delay any early effort to send the gunboat *Conflict* in pursuit of the *Catalpa*.

On Easter Monday morning, 17 April, Breslin was up about 5:00 a.m. He had already set out in precise detail the duties of everybody involved. Taking arms and luggage, Brennan set out in a trap to Rockingham Beach where his assignment was to contact Captain Anthony and tell him to expect the prisoners. Breslin and Desmond took their horses and traps by different routes to Rockingham Road, meeting about five minutes run from the prison. They had brought ammunition, hidden in the traps, as well as coats and hats for the prisoners. As planned, they were in their position at 7:45 a.m. and would wait until 9:00 a.m. if necessary.

At the appointed time the prisoners, six in all, attracting neither suspicion nor even attention, slipped away from their various tasks in different locations.²⁰ They were all in the traps by about 8:00 a.m. and then the fast and furious drive began. In two hours they arrived at Rockingham Beach, their horses exhausted and lathered in sweat. The six escapees jumped from the traps and accompanied by Breslin, Desmond, King, and Brennan, scrambled into the whaleboat which Anthony had moored at the ready. The oarsmen pulled unevenly and badly at first for they knew nothing about the strange events in which they were involved and the sight of heavily-armed men around them was disconcerting, even terrifying. Gradually, under the calm encouragement of the steersman, they steadied in their stroke and soon were rowing in strength.²¹

The prisoners were not missed for about an hour and a half. A thorough search followed and the escape was definitely confirmed. The prison officers were in panic and notified the police. Then there ensued scenes of wild chaotic excitement and confusion in and around Fremantle. Officials and policemen were dashing here and there and dispatches were being sent in all directions. Police patrols, assisted by local trackers, searched the bush. Nobody knew where the prisoners had gone until a man named Bell arrived from Rockingham. He had been at Rockingham Beach where he



The Catalpa

witnessed the arrival of the rescue party and the escapees and had shown a noticeable inquisitiveness. On the departure of the whaleboat he noticed some ammunition as well as convicts' hats in the traps which had of course been abandoned on the beach. Deciding immediately to raise the alarm, he jumped on King's horse and galloped him at speed to Fremantle where, on arrival, "he looked every inch a madman," as one onlooker put it.²² The search was then widened to Rockingham Beach but by then the fleeing party was well out to sea.

The authorities came to the conclusion that the escapees were attempting to board the *Catalpa*, to which they believed the whaleboat belonged, and all available police boats or cutters were directed to intercept them. The steamer, *Georgette*, was secured for official use but by the time it was manned and made ready for pursuit it was already 8:30 p.m.

All the time the men in the whaleboat rowed vigorously but after many hours there was still no trace of the *Catalpa*. At about 5:30 p.m. they at last sighted it about fifteen miles away. They hoisted a sail to speed their progress and in the hope of attracting the mother-ship's attention. The weather had by then turned bad. In the late evening a severe squall broke the mast.²³ Darkness fell and the men hove to for the night, wet, weary and tired. At 7:00 a.m. on Tuesday they again sighted the *Catalpa* some thirty miles southwest of Rottneest Lighthouse. They directed their course towards it, using an oar in place of the broken mast to support a sail. Then another vessel came into view, which they quickly recognised as the *Georgette*, as it pressed ahead towards the *Catalpa* under full sail and steam. The whaleboat lowered its own sail and all aboard lay low to avoid detection. The *Georgette* passed on and drew alongside the *Catalpa*. John F. Stone, Superintendent of the water police and now in command of the *Georgette*, asked for permission to board. Samuel Smith, the first mate, refused and Stone decided not to attempt to board forcibly because he considered they were outside territorial waters. Then, almost simultaneously, both vessels detected a small boat on the shoreward side and assuming it to be the whaleboat carrying the escapees, they headed towards it. When it became clear that the boat was in fact a police cutter, the *Catalpa* turned and sailed towards the open sea.²⁴ Some time later the *Georgette* had to put back to Fremantle, being low in coal and other necessary provisions.



The Fenian prisoners making their escape to the *Catalpa*
Illustrations courtesy: The National Museum of Ireland

As soon as the crew of the whaleboat considered that the *Georgette* had moved far away enough for safety they set up their sail again and rowed determinedly towards the *Catalpa*. At about 2:00 p.m. they concluded she had seen them as she altered course and was coming towards them. Just then they noticed another boat, which they shortly identified as the police cutter, intent on moving across their course. A vital race was now on as the prisoners struggled to reach the approaching *Catalpa* and the cutter made haste to intercept them. In a superb manoeuvre, Samuel Smith brought the *Catalpa* between the converging vessels and picked up the whaleboat from which Breslin and his companions gladly jumped on to the deck, having been twenty eight hours cramped in an open boat. Smith immediately called Breslin by his assumed name, "What shall I do now, Mr. Collins?." "Hoist the flag and stand out to sea," was the

reply.²⁵ The flag was the American Stars and Stripes, then representing thirty six states. The police cutter had then drawn alongside and its captain, accepting defeat, wished the *Catalpa* goodbye.

The *Georgette* reached port about 4:00 p.m. and there was great excitement among the throngs of people waiting. That the majority hoped the Fenian bid for freedom would succeed is borne out by a police report where it is stated that the escapees enjoyed "great sympathy amongst a considerable portion of the community in Western Australia." The attitude and mood of the authorities, however, was quite different. The *Georgette* was again provisioned and sent to sea at 11:00

o'clock that Tuesday night. Following a night-long watch, the *Catalpa* was sighted. By 7:45 a.m. the *Georgette* had come so close that Breslin could see she was equipped with guns including artillery, that there were water police on board and that a whaleboat, to be used in boarding, hung at the davits. He was certain the police were eager and determined to capture all involved in the escape. In matching defiance, Breslin



The rescued Fenian prisoners
The Irish World, Sept. 2, 1876

and his comrades decided they would hold out to the last. At 8:00 a.m. the *Georgette* fired a shot across the bows of the *Catalpa*. For over an hour, Captain Anthony, under the prompting of Breslin, who was crouched beside him but out of sight, held firm against a barrage of menacing questions and threats from Superintendent Stone of the *Georgette*. In a final intimidatory effort, Stone gave Anthony fifteen minutes to consider his position, warning "if you don't heave to I'll blow the masts out of you."²⁶ Anthony, pointing to his flag, shouted in reply "that's the American flag; I am on the high seas; my flag protects me; if you fire on this ship you fire on the American flag."²⁷ The *Georgette* did not fire. The cool courage of Breslin and Anthony had proved superior and the *Catalpa* kept on her course to America, arriving in New York on 19th August, 1876 to a tumultuous welcome.

¹ Dorothy McArdle, *The Irish Republic*, Irish Press Ltd. Dublin 1951 (p. 48).

² *ibid*

³ Seán O Lúing, *The Catalpa Rescue*, Anvil Books Ltd., Tralee, 1965 (p. 12).

⁴ John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel*, Chas. D. Young Company, New York, 1929 (p. 130).

⁵ Keith Amos, *The Fenians in Australia 1865-1880*, New South Wales University Press, 1988 (p. 78).

⁶ Keith Amos, *ibid* (p. 85).

⁷ John Devoy, *op. cit.* (p. 252).

⁸ John Devoy, *op. cit.* (p. 252)

⁹ *Devoy's Post Bag II* edited by William O'Brien and Desmond Ryan, C.J. Fallon Ltd., Dublin, 1948 (p. 562).

¹⁰ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 253).

¹¹ *Devoy's Post Bag II*, *op. cit.* (p. 566-8).

¹² John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 255).

¹³ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 255).

¹⁴ Keith Amos, *op. cit.* (p. 220).

¹⁵ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 157).

¹⁶ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 256).

¹⁷ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 256).

¹⁸ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 256).

¹⁹ Seán O Lúing, *op. cit.* (p. 112).

²⁰ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 257).

²¹ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 257).

²² Keith Amos, *op. cit.* (p. 234).

²³ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 258).

²⁴ Keith Amos, *op. cit.* (p. 237).

²⁵ John Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 258).

²⁶ Keith Amos, *op. cit.* (p. 240).

²⁷ Devoy, *Recollections*, *op. cit.* (p. 259).

NYIHR member Richard F. Teevan sends us this song published in The Wearing of the Green: The Lore, Literature, Legend, and Balladry of the Irish in Australia, edited by Bill Wannan. Melbourne, Australia: Lansdowne Press, 1965.

**She was a Yankee whale ship and commander
Called the Catalpa by name,
Came out to Western Australia
And stole six of our convicts away.**

**Chorus: So come all you screw warders and jailers,
Remember Perth regatta day;
Take care of the rest of your Fenians
Or the Yankees will take them away!**

**For seven long years have they served you,
And seven or more would have stayed
For defending their country, Ould Ireland,
'Twas for that they were banished away.**

**You kept them in Western Australia
Till their hair began to turn grey,
When a Yank from the States of America
Came out here and stole them away.**

**Now all the Perth boats were a-racing,
And making short tack for the spot;
But the Yankee she tacked into Fremantle
And took the best prize of the lot.**

**The Georgette, well manned with bold warriors,
Went after this Yank to arrest,
But then she hoisted the star-spangled banner,
Saying, "You'd better not board me, I guess!"**

**Now remember these six Fenians colonial,
And sing o'er these few verses with skill,
And remember the Yankee that stole them
And the home that they left on the hill.**

**For they're now in the States of America,
Where all will be able to cry,
"We will hoist the green flag with the shamrock!
Hurrah for Ould Ireland we'll die!"**