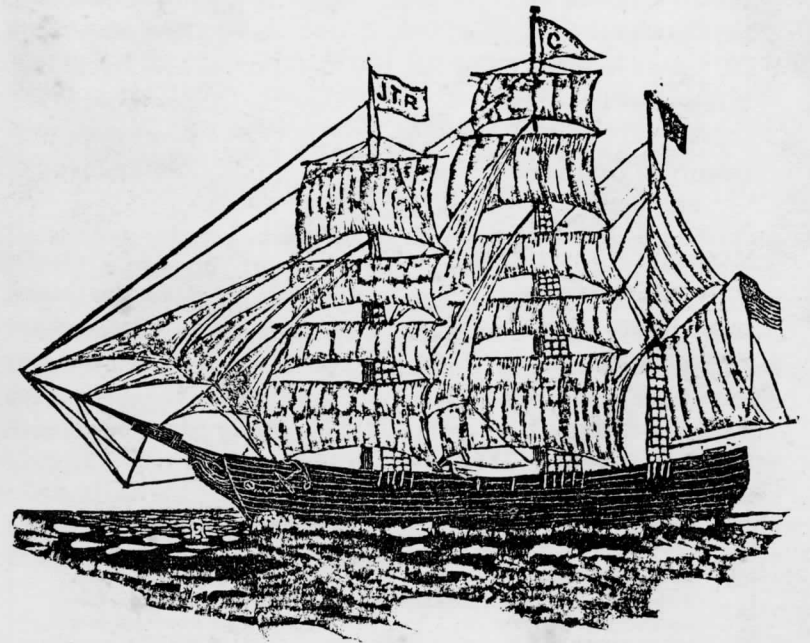


# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

Published by  
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EDGARTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS



## The Voyage Of The Catalpa

by  
BESSIE LEE NORTON

Vineyard Haven  
some old postcards and photographs - - - -

Accessions - July to November 1969

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July: 1795 document "Mr. Leonard's Funeral Sermon", John Kebler; Tiffany glass goblet formerly owned by Mme. Lillian Nordica, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Wagenaar; Tiffany marked, silver banded piece of first Atlantic cable, Carl Austrian, Jr.

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August: Cyr's Fourth Reader, pub. 1899, by Ellen M. Cyr, Oak Bluffs summer resident, Ruel S. Smith; U. S. Hydrographic chart of whaling grounds, Mrs. David Rappaport; 4 letters to Joseph Tilton, early 1800's, tax receipt 1816, cypher book, 1815, Sum book, 1729, Mrs. Alma Farson; wooden sleigh owned by Capt. David B. Adams, 1889; Mr. and Mrs. Phillip A. Bruno.

\*\*\*\*\*

September: Jigsaw panel by E. H. Mathews, Oak Bluffs camp ground contractor, 1880's, Elijah B. Vincent's powder horn and shot pouch, two small baskets made by Alaskan Indians, 1871, small wooden piggen from Bark Wanderer; 27 scrap books of West Tisbury news items from 1929 to 1953, compiled by Mrs. Charles Turner, then Standard-Times reporter; collection of articles from the Daniel Worth family in 1800's, from Mrs. Daniel Worth; New York Marine Society certificate for Capt. F. M. Lambert, dated 1846, Mrs. Grace Lambert D. Rader; collection of correspondence to Capt. Peter Cromwell and Capt. Wm. Cleveland's whale oil tally of 1848, Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Waggaman.

\*\*\*\*\*

October: Book by Edna and Frank Bradlow, "Here Comes The Alabama", whales tooth with scrimshaw design in Portuguese, two Fiji weapons, also several small articles of the Victorian period Mrs. George Reid; 25 duck decoys, formerly on loan, Mr. and Mrs. S. Prescott Fay; Book by Monroe Schere, "The Story of Maps".

\*\*\*\*\*

November: Pressed glass platter in full rigged ship design, also a glass net float, the Misses Virginia F. and Ellen I. Murray; skiff

anchor made by late Orin Norton, Edgartown blacksmith, John Black; Vineyard woven blue and white wool counterpane, dated 1775, Mrs. John Black; "American Bird Decoys" by W. F. Mackey, Jr., S. Prescott Fay.

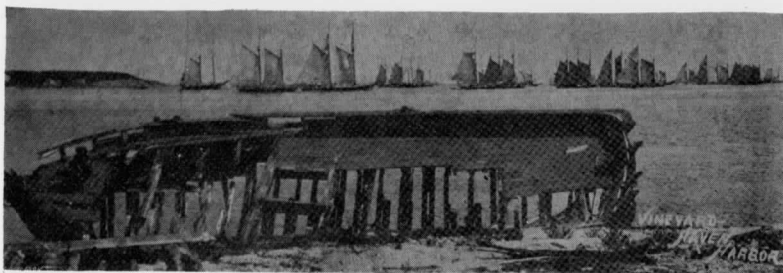
Dorothy Scoville  
Curator



The Norton and Bradley livery stable on Main Street.



Cromwell's blacksmith shop on the Beach Road. The antique car on the left casts a shadow on what was about to befall all blacksmith shops.



A good sized fleet of schooners anchored in the outer harbor and waiting for a fair wind. The wreck in the foreground is probably of an old cargo sloop.

O'Reilly had cherished his friendship with Henry Hathaway of New Bedford, the third mate of the *Gazelle* when it had rescued him from Freemantle. So now he wrote to Hathaway and said that a friend of his named John Devoy was coming to New Bedford to see him and to ask if he would help in a serious and dangerous undertaking.

Devoy was a persuasive talker and enlisted the sympathy of Mr. Hathaway. Hathaway told Devoy that the man he should have for captain was George Anthony the son-in-law of J. T. Richardson who was a whaling agent. The undertaking was broached to Mr. Richardson and he agreed to arrange for a meeting between Anthony and the Clan-na-Gael committee.

Mr. Richardson was certainly impressed with the daring plan or he never would have agreed to a meeting with Devoy and John Boyle O'Reilly. He had thoroughly approved of Captain Anthony's his son-in-laws promise never to go to sea again after he had married his daughter. Now he was suggesting that his son-in-law break this promise never to go to sea again after he had married his daughter. Now he was suggesting that his son-in-law break this promise and leave Emmie and the new baby for a two year voyage that would be fraught with more than ordinary danger. And he a personal interest in the men whose patriotism had placed them in this terrible position. Captain Anthony said he would go.

Now things started humming. John Breslin was informed of the progress that had been made and started his plans for the land end of the rescue. Richardson and Captain Anthony began the search for a proper vessel. The proper ship did not turn up in New Bedford but an excited call from O'Reilly took them to Boston. There he had discovered an old whaler, the *Catalpa*, which had been converted into a merchantman. The price was \$5,500. Richardson advanced \$3,000- the committee approved-and the purchase was made. The bark was brought to New Bedford and the refitting was begun under Captain Anthony's direction. In a month she was ready to sail.

The conspirators made but one request. They wished to have one of their own company aboard the vessel. So Dennis Duggan shipped as carpenter. To avoid suspicion they wanted no other Irishman aboard. It was left to the Captain to pick the rest of his

crew. It was a difficult task requiring discretion and knowledge of men. No one must suspect that this was other than an ordinary whaling voyage. Captain Anthony picked mostly Malays Kanakas and Africans because he felt they would be less suspicious, and better adapted to endure the climate in the southern seas.

The most important man for him to chose was his first mate. He made a wise and fortunate choice when he persuaded Samuel P. Smith of Edgartown to take that important post.

Devoy, who at this time was night editor of the *New York Herald* went to New Bedford to give Captain Anthony his final instructions. Here they are - "You will cruise until Fall, about six months, in the North Atlantic, then you are to put in at Fayal, ship home any oil you may have taken, and sail at once for Australia, where we expect you to arrive early in the spring of 1876. You are to go to the town of Bunbury on the West coast. There communications will be opened to you from our Australian agent."

As was the custom in whaling days when a vessel was outward bound, a few friends stayed on board until Cuttyhunk was reached.

Among these was the clergyman who had officiated at the wedding of Captain Anthony just a year ago that day. The Rev. Mr. Roberts was curious to see a chronometer, and after the vessel was under way examined it, and asked about its winding. This is how Captain Anthony found he was bound to sea without a chronometer key.

Fortunately another visitor was a mechanic who was able to take an old clock key, file it to fit, and thus wind the chronometer. But the hammering and pounding the instrument had undergone while being fitted to the makeshift key had disturbed its working. After they were three days at sea the chronometer indicated that they should be somewhere in the middle of New York State. The Captain and Mate Sam Smith were able to correct the instrument temporarily but it was never really reliable after that pounding. And so for all the voyage Captain Anthony was never entirely certain of his position.

That was only a small indication of troubles ahead. All the troubles whaleships were heir to visited them-bad weather, winds and squalls and whales sighted and lost. And when a whale finally

was secured it was a small one and then a full month passed before they were able to harpoon another. I am sure this particular audience knows most of the gory details of whaling. But the following experience proved to Captain Anthony he had picked a real man for his first mate. When this second whale was sighted Mr. Smith was in charge of one of the boats. The boatsteerer had thrown the iron and Mr. Smith had taken his position at the head of the boat with the lance for the final stroke when he was knocked overboard by the whale and severely cut about the head. He was pulled in by the crew, and crawled on his hands and knees to the head of the boat once more, where he killed the whale and fell back in a faint. The next morning news of the "cutting in" filtered down to Mr. Smith's bunk and despite his bodily aches and weakness from loss of blood, he insisted on finishing his job and directing the work.

This display of loyalty, bravery and determination heartened Capt. Anthony. The supreme test was still ahead. He felt he had at least one man upon whom he could rely to the uttermost. The *Catalpa* sailed on killing a few more whales and made for Fayal. The ship now had 210 bbls. of sperm oil and the crew was occupied for several days breaking out the cargo and landing it to be shipped home. The casks of bread and flour were recoopered and the watches were given shore liberty. The Captain's spirits were lifted when he found letters from his family awaiting him and a photograph of his little daughter.

Still the secret, the burden of which he carried alone, kept gnawing at him. He made up his mind that now was the time to tell Mr. Smith. He could not help but worry though, as to how his fine mate would react to the news that he was not going on a straight whaling voyage. They planned to go into Teneriffe for fresh water as the water there was much better than at Fayal. There he asked Mr. Smith to come into his cabin and shut the door behind him.

Captain Anthony came quickly to the point and told the truth. "Now Sam," he said, "You've got a right to be mad as hell with me for deceiving you. You can leave us here and easily get a berth on a homeward bound ship. You'll get your fair lay of what oil we've taken just as if you had stayed with the ship. But I hope you'll



stick by me and go with me. I picked you because I figured you would. I need you as a friend and as the most trustworthy first officer a captain ever had."

Sam sat silent quite a while, his face showing the parade of emotions passing through his mind. He was upset by the surprise, the knowledge of great danger involved. But then his mind eased. If as fine a man as Captain George Anthony believed this was the job to do then George Anthony was right. He put out his hand and made a classic reply, "George", he said, "I'm with you. I'll stick by you in this ship if she goes straight to hell and burns off her Jibboom!"

Now the vessel was bound for Australia. Weeks and months passed. The crew was near mutiny. Terrible storms buffeted the *Catalpa*. Then came a day clear and sunny and the sight of another bark near enough to be hailed. Captain Anthony didn't really want to hail another ship but the rebellious crew was eager. So speak her he did. At any other time he would have been delighted to learn that she was the *Platina* from New Bedford captained by his good friend Capt. Walter Howland.

He lowered a boat and boarded her and a good gam was had, the joy of it somewhat diminished by the necessity of making guarded replies to a slightly suspicious Capt. Howland. The crews of the two ships mingled and the men of the *Catalpa* learned for the first time that their ship was not off the coast of Patagonia bound for the river Platte but off the Cape of Good Hope bound into the Indian Ocean.

When I read that the vessel that gammed was the *Platina* I had an added surge of interest, for that was the same ship on which our good friend Amos Smalley made two voyages with Captain Thomas MacKenzie. On the second voyage in 1901 Amos harpooned the white whale, old Moby Dick. Wooden ships and iron men!

The next ship sighted was a large bark, the *Ocean Beauty*, seventy days out of Liverpool and bound for New Zealand. Capt. Anthony decided to board her and see if he could obtain a detailed chart of the Australian coast, which he was rapidly approaching. He spent a pleasant hour in the Englishman's cabin. Finally he asked him if he had made many voyages in this direction. The

genial Englishman said he had made many. In fact, he had captained the *Hougoumont* when she carried a load of prisoners to Australia in 1868. Captain Anthony was startled because Devoy had told him this was the name of the convict ship which had carried out the very men whom he was now bound to rescue. Fortunately the self-centered Englishman did not notice Capt. Anthony's startled look and rambled on telling him in detail about the escape of John Boyle O'Reilly.

Then Capt. Anthony took advantage of the loquacious gentleman and asked some innocent questions about the possibilities of the place for refitting or taking on fresh provisions. He even asked if he had a sheet chart of the coast he could spare him. "Help yourself," the English captain said, so he selected a chart of the western coast of Australia showing the exact route the *Hougoumont* had taken to land those Fenians! Lady Luck was with him now!

I think my paper is already too long so I will merely tell you that the land part of the conspiracy headed by Breslin and Father McCabe surmounted great difficulties and succeeded in getting the men to the shore. Perhaps the most harrowing part was in boarding the boat and getting the exhausted men to the *Catalpa* that was waiting for them just outside the three mile limit. The escape was discovered and a police boat tried to overtake them. But the *Catalpa's* loyal first mate cracked all sails and beat the police to the whaleboat and snatched it aboard. Now the British steamer, the *Georgette*, filled with the local militia, came out and hailed the *Catalpa*, demanding that she heave to and turn back her prisoners.

Captain Anthony dared the British to fire on an American ship in international waters. They didn't dare. So the six Fenian prisoners slipped quietly away from Australia to lead respectable lives in America their new homeland.

After all these years I learned from an article in the *New Bedford Standard Times* dated September 21 of this year that interest in the *Catalpa* has been renewed and that a group of Irish Americans will mark the grave of John Breslin in New York with a stone bearing a basrelief of the *Catalpa* on its side.



This fine lithograph shows the rescue of the Fenians by the *Catalpa*. The police boat is on the left, and the British warship *Georgette* is coming up on the right. The artist, E. N. Russell, was Miss Priscilla Hancock's uncle, and the picture reproduced here hangs on the wall of Miss Hancock's West Tisbury home.

The ballad that follows also tells the story of the rescue of the Fenians. In an earlier day all important or startling events were commemorated with ballads of this sort. This particular one sings to the tune of the "Tarpaulin Jacket."

### The Noble Ship Catalpa

A noble whaleship and commander,  
It was called the Catalpa they say  
Came out to Western Australia  
And took six poor Fenians away.

#### Chorus

So come all you screw warders and gaolers  
Remember Perth Regatta Day.  
Take care of the rest of your Fenians  
Or the Yankees will steal them away.

Seven long years they had served there  
And seven long more had to stay

For defending their country old Ireland.  
For that they were banished away.

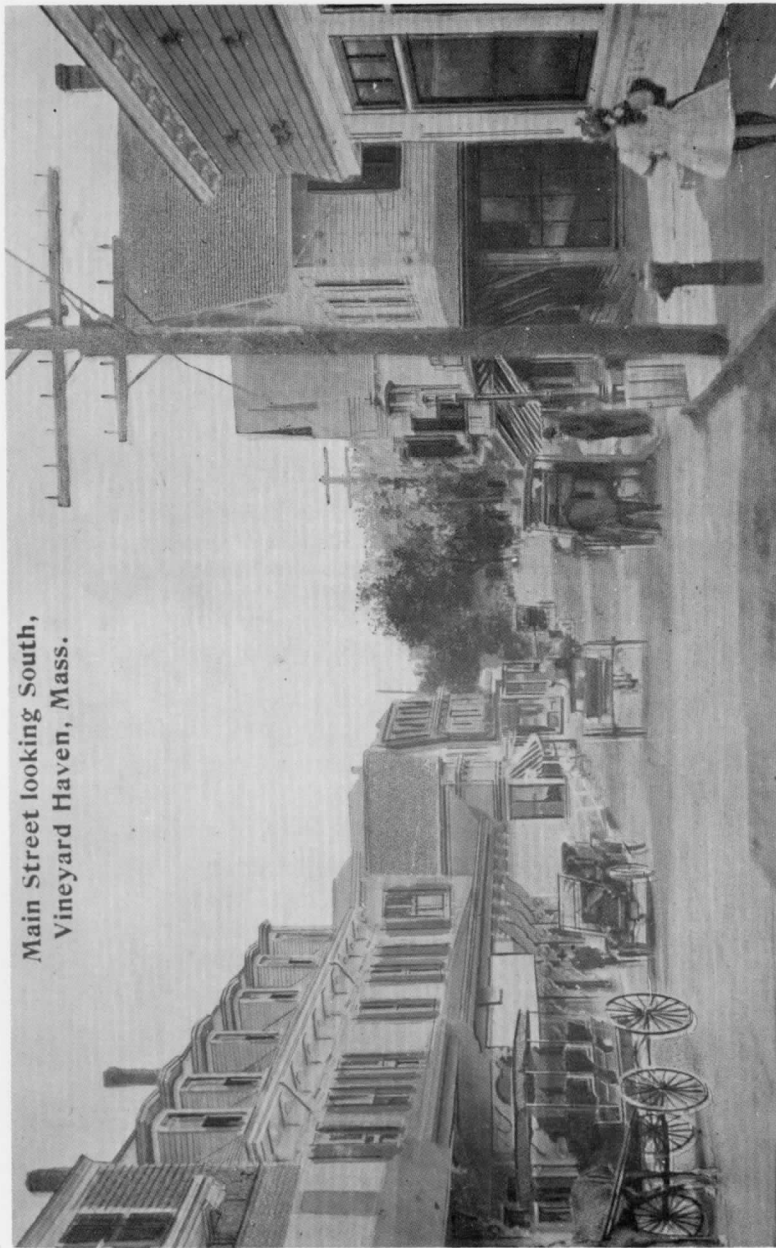
They kept them in Western Australia  
Till their hair it began to get gray,  
When a Yank from the States of America  
Came out here and stole them away.

Now all the Perth boats were a-racing  
And making short tacks for the spot.  
But the Yankee tacked into Freemantle  
And took the best prize of the lot.

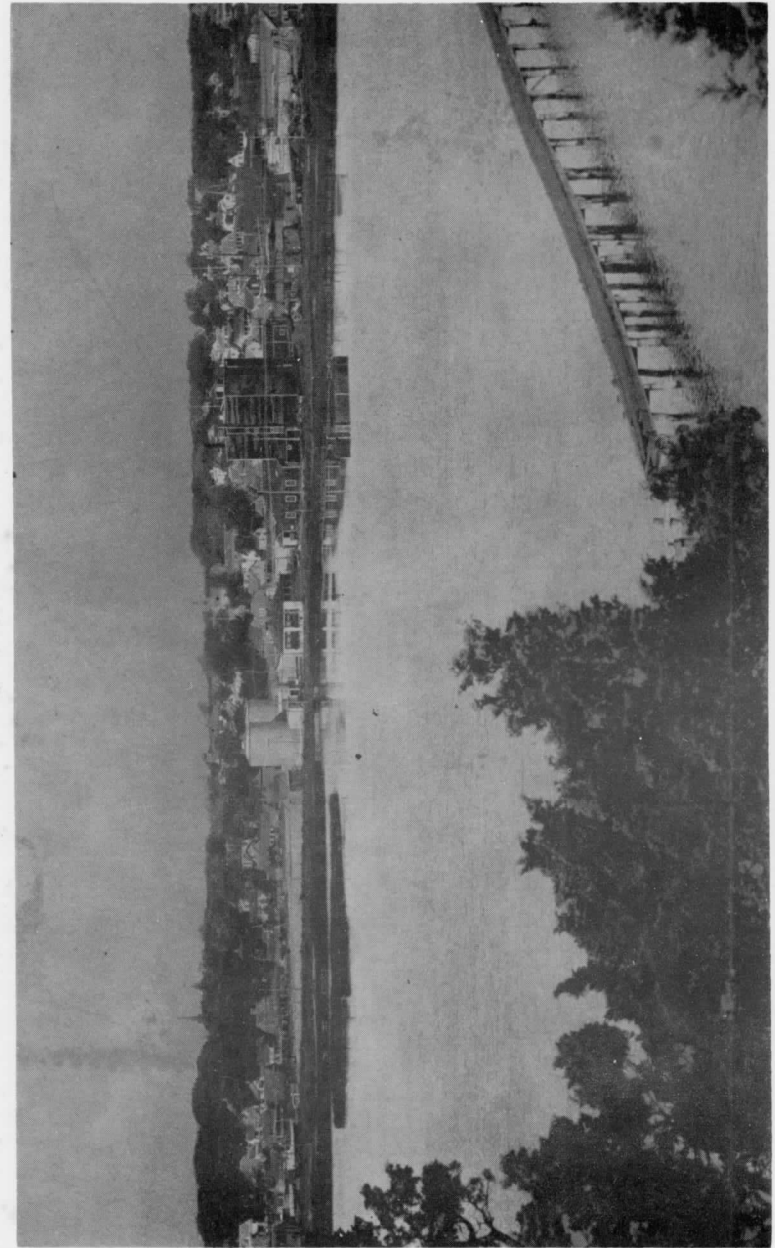
The corvette all armed with bold warriors,  
Went out the poor Yank to arrest.  
But she hoisted her star-spangled banner,  
And says you'll not board me I guess.

So remember those six Fenian prisoners,  
And sing up this song with a will,  
And remember the Yankees who stole them  
From that little brown house on the hill.

Now they're all landed safe in America,  
And there they'll be able to cry,  
Hurrah for the green flag and shamrock!  
We'll fight for our land till we die.

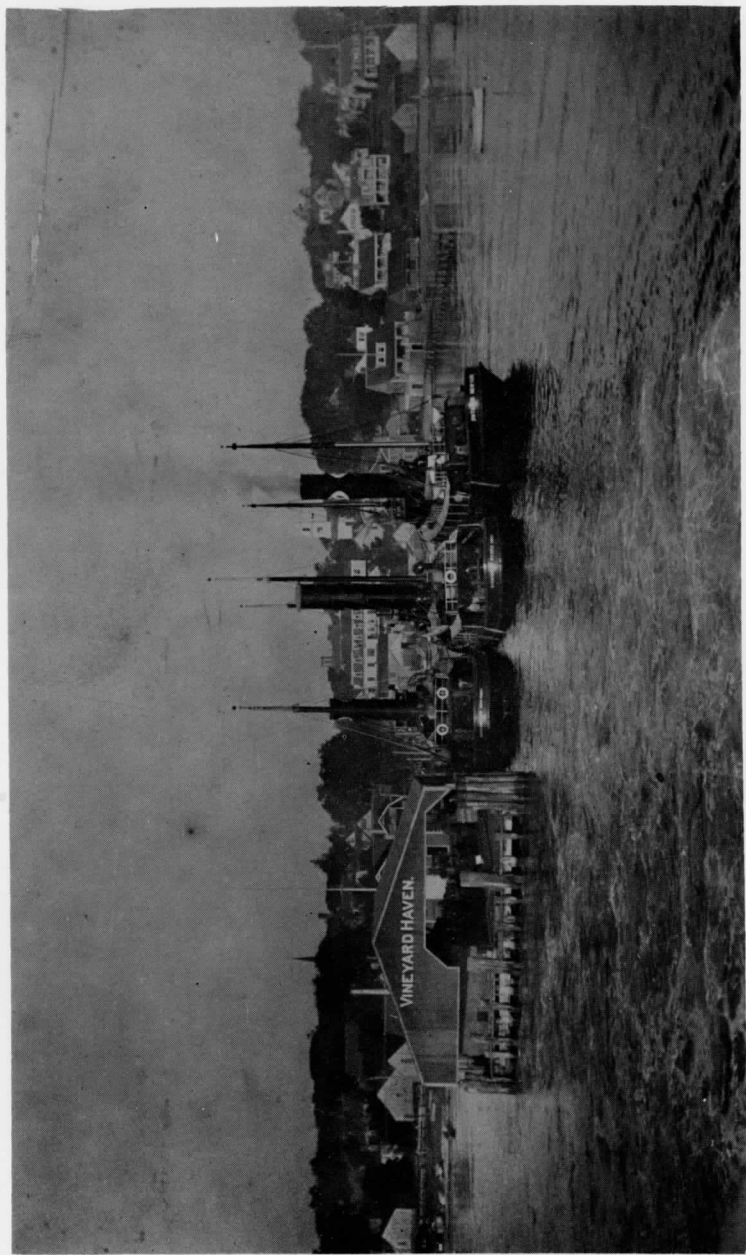


When there were more horses than cars on Main Street.

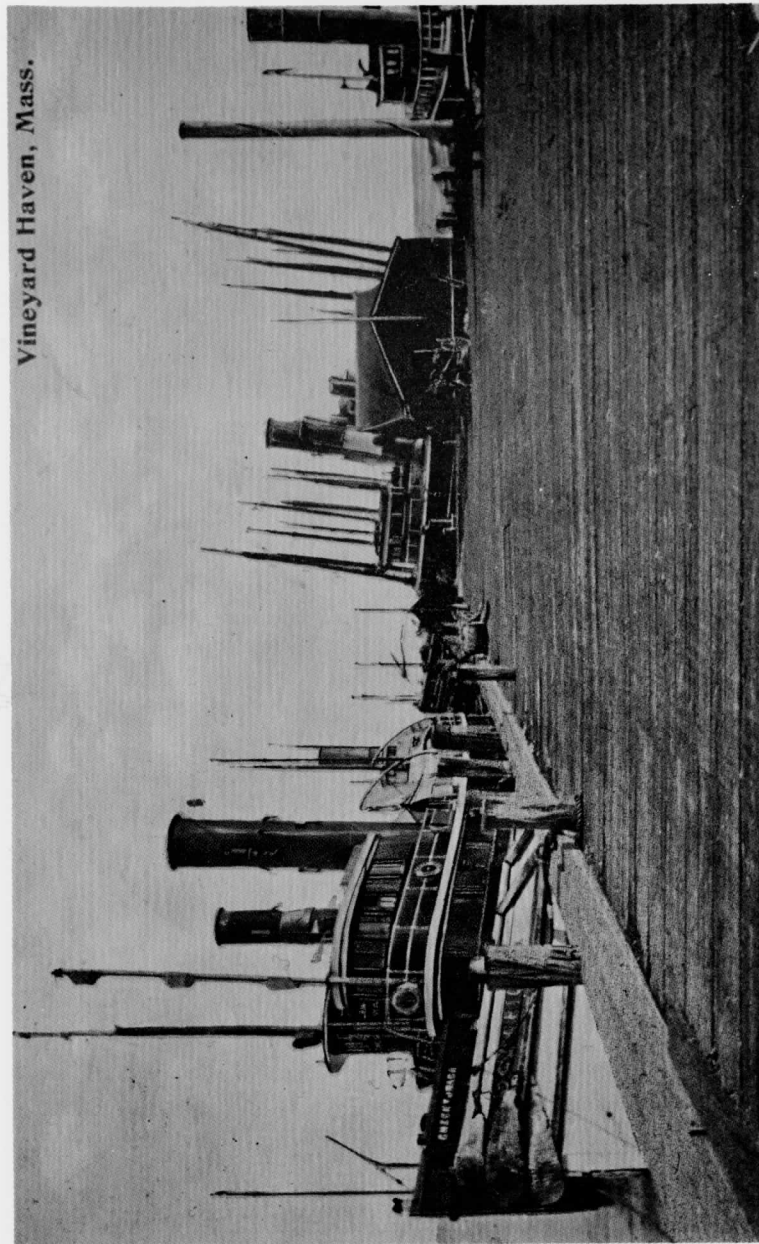


A view of Vineyard Haven across "The Gunk Hole" showing the foot bridge that once connected Hines Point and the Beach Road.

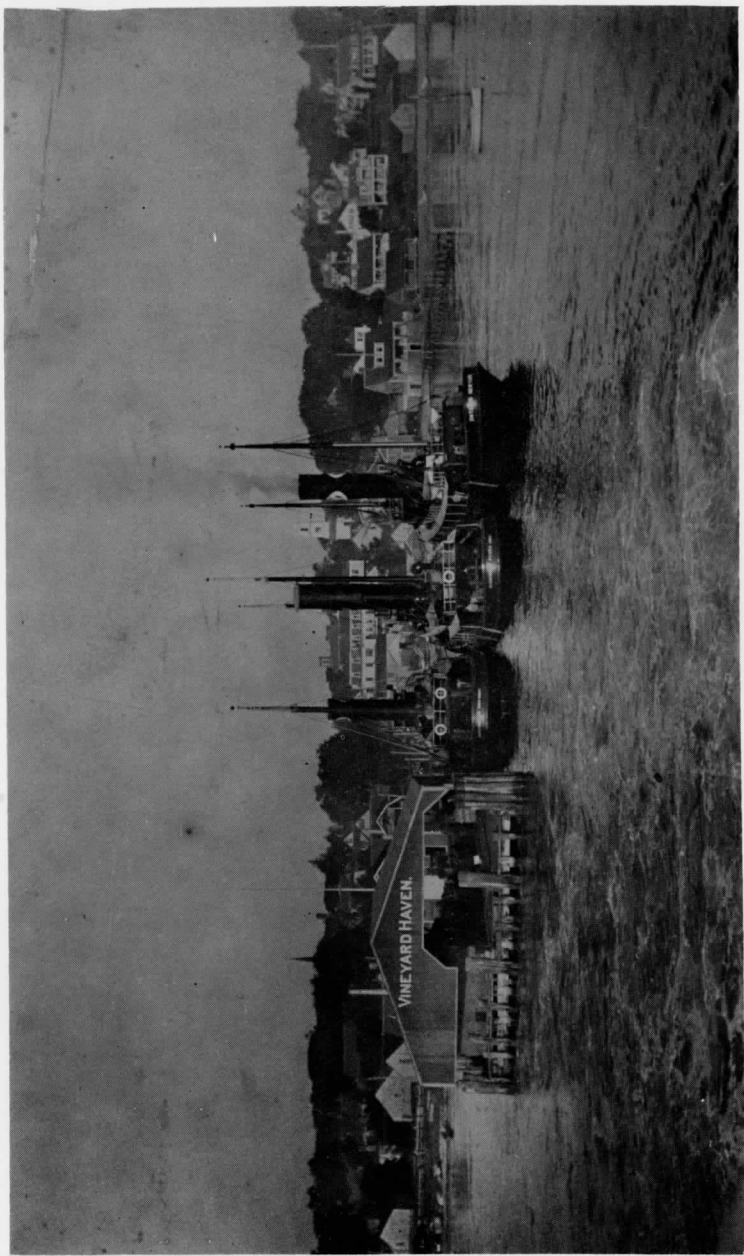




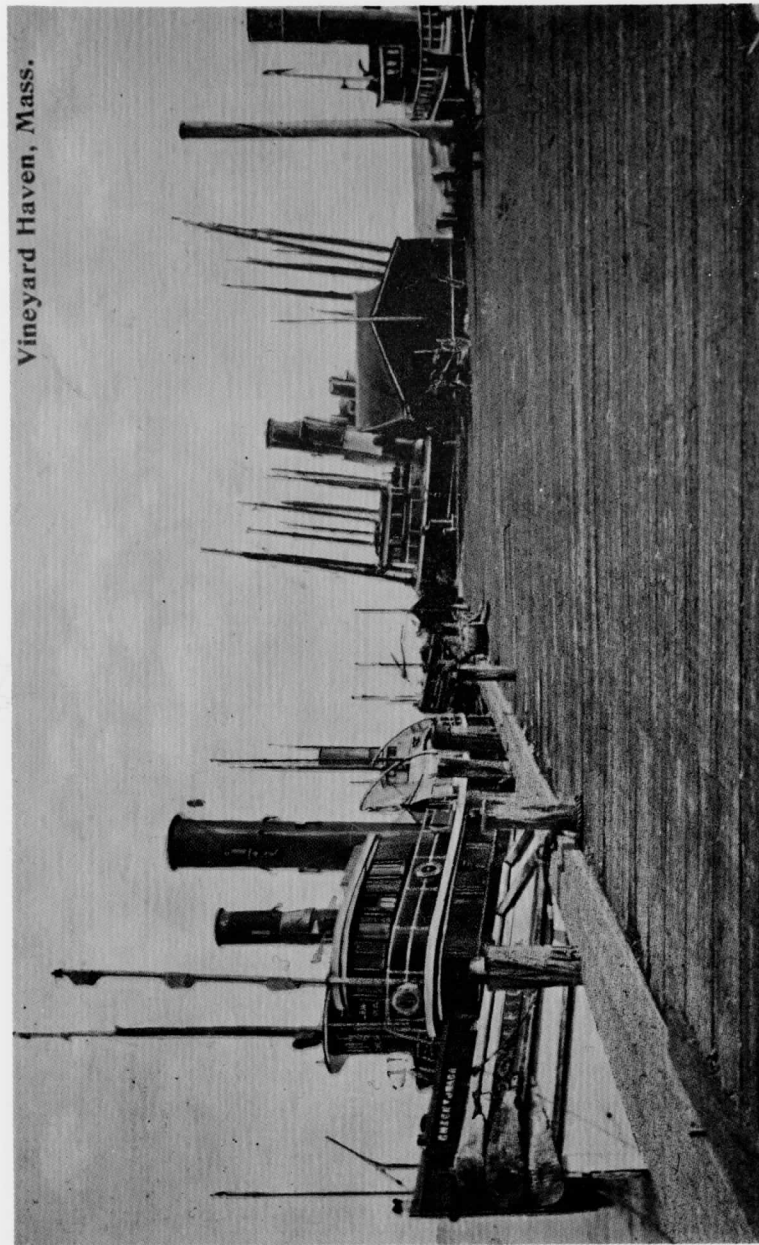
Three tugs at the Vineyard Haven Wharf. The wide band of roiled water must be from the wake of a paddle wheel steamer.



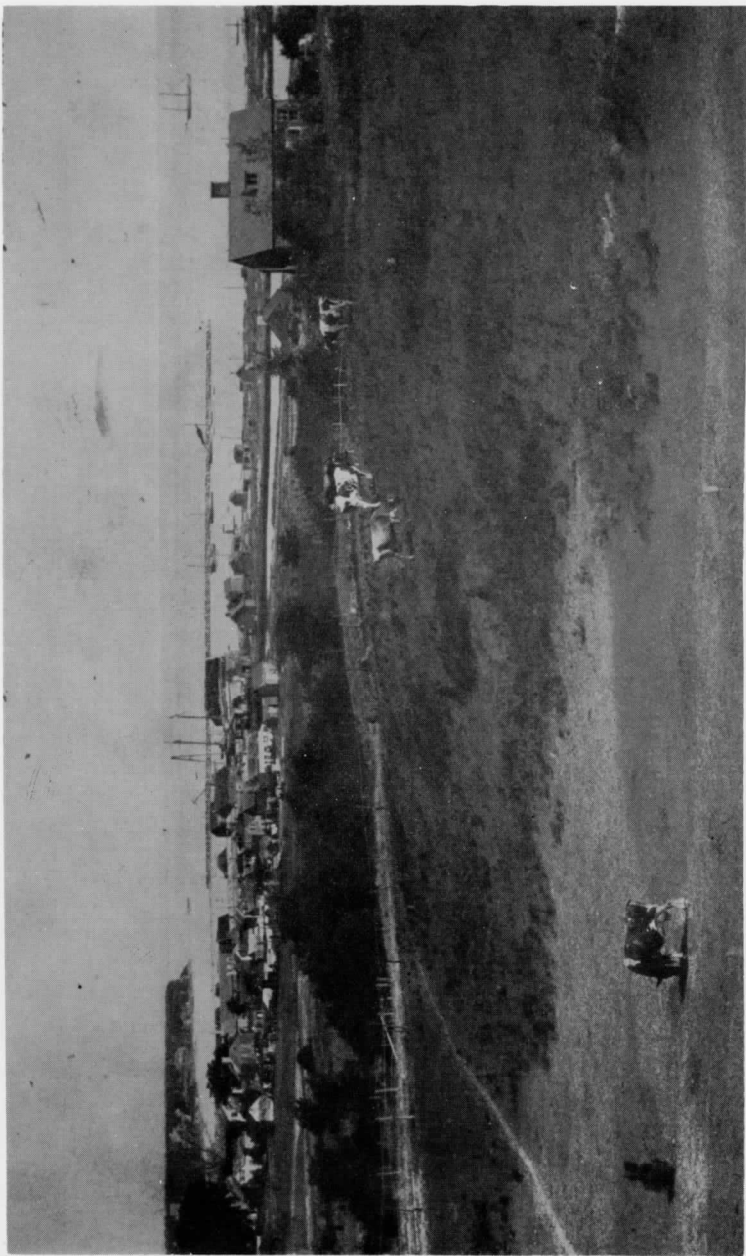
More tugs lying at the Vineyard Haven Wharf waiting for fair weather to pick up their tows that were anchored out in the harbor. This was before the shed was built over the outer end of the wharf.



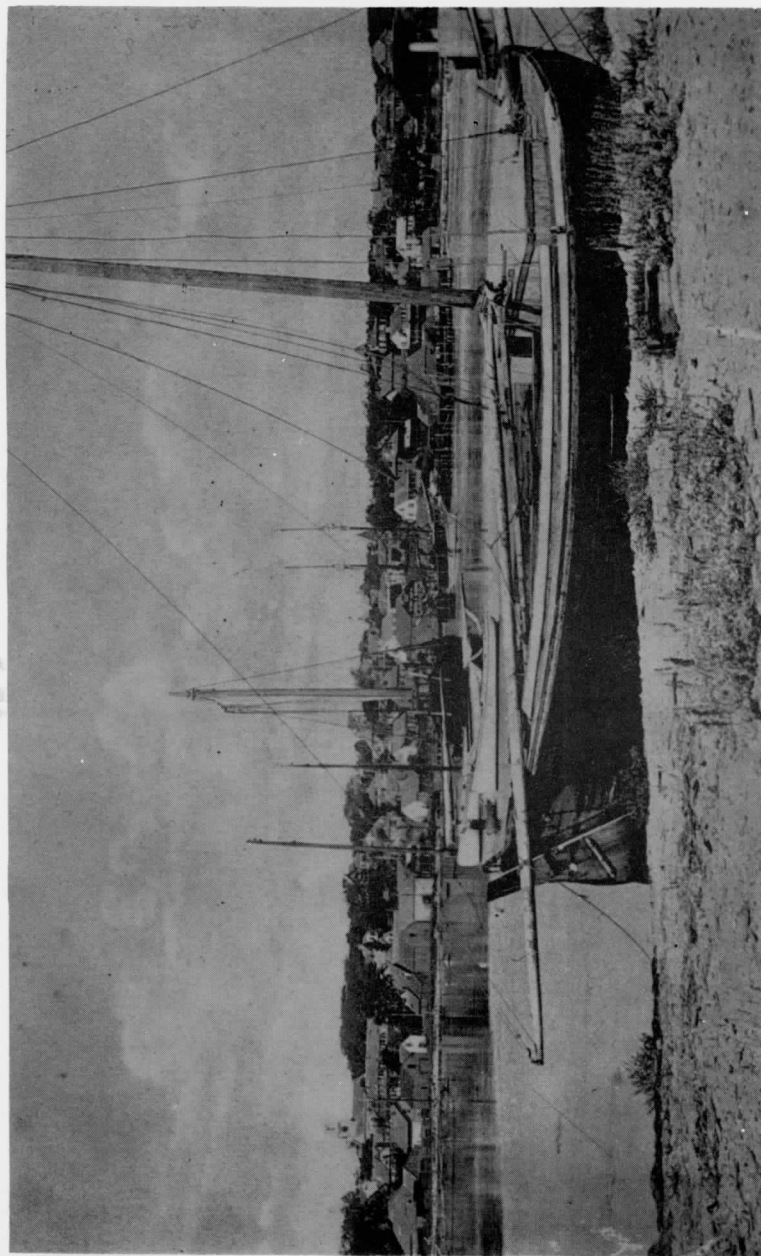
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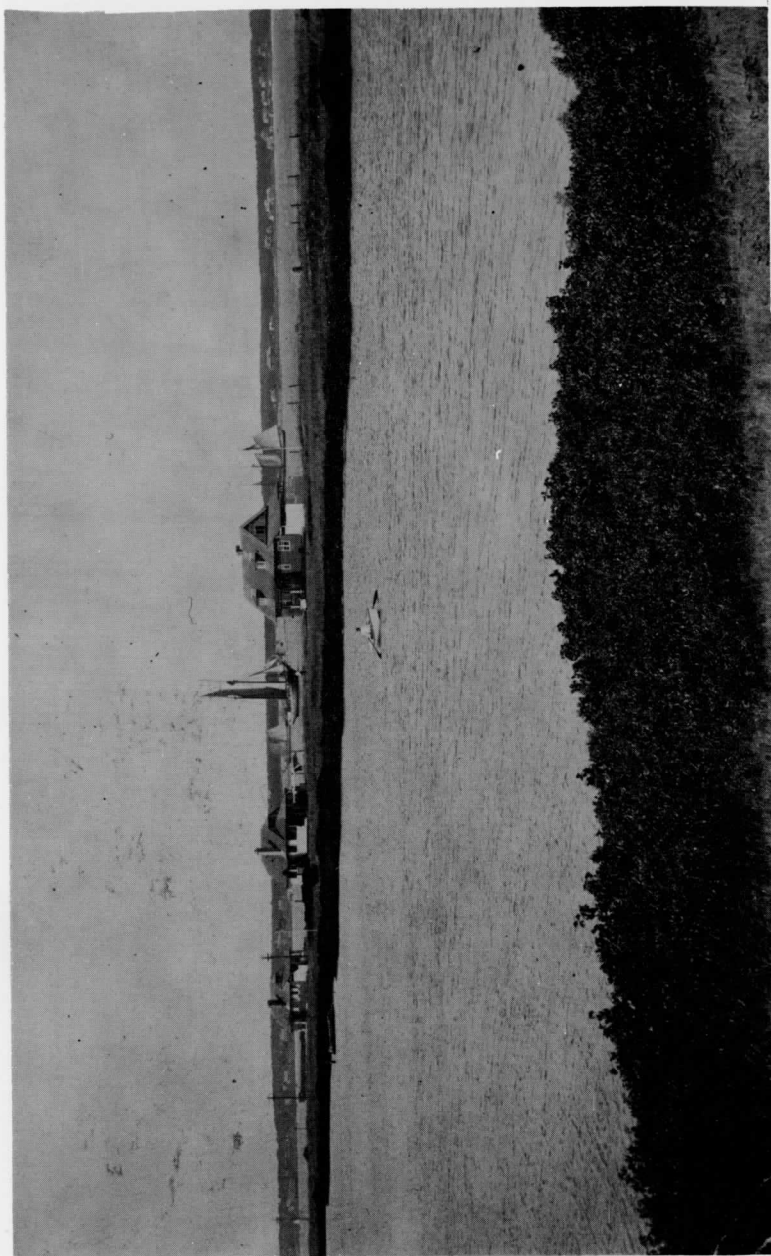


And looking at this picture it is hard to see how Vineyard Haven could change so much in so few short years.

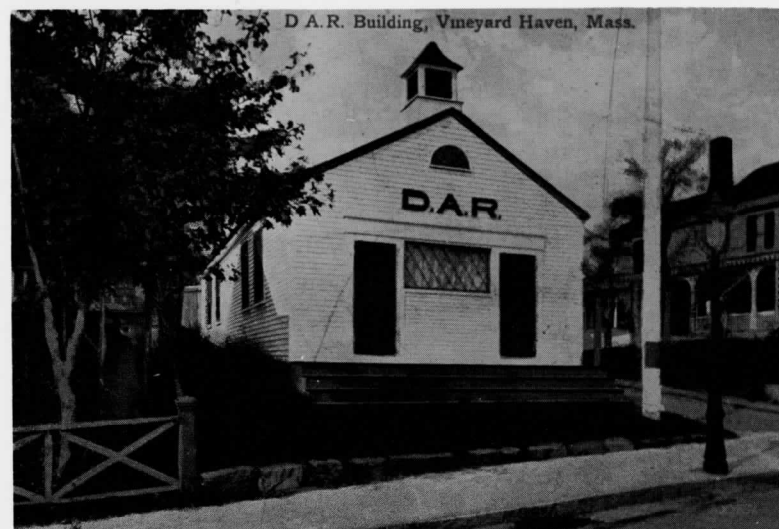


Looking toward the town across the head of the harbor with a relic of the days of sail in the foreground.





Looking across Crystal Lake and the barrier beach to the harbor in 1914.



The D. A. R. building at the corner of Main Street and Colonial Lane, and one of Vineyard Haven's oil burning street lights,



The Little launch with the flag flying is the *Madison Edwards* - the Bethel boat. It was the Bethel boat that visited all the schooners and barges anchored in the harbor to bring the men ashore to the "Sailors' Free Reading Room."



The bathing beach north of the steamboat wharf before the extension of the Breakwater was built and when the water was a lot cleaner than it is today.



Fischer Bros. store on Union Street near the wharf, dealers in marine hardware, and also Boat Brand Boneless Codfish, which was a local product.

new secret revolutionary organization the ancient name Fenian. Now was time for another Rising.

It is strange to note that our own Civil War gave hope to the Fenians. They noted the strained relations between England and the United States. They thought there might be a war between the two nations and that that would surely be the time for a great Rising. The war had created the Irish-American soldier who now might consecrate his energies to a new purpose in behalf of his native land. The movement grew in strength and flourished in America where a provisional Irish government was formed. It had its ramifications all over Great Britain. Well, this Rising failed, too, as had so many others. It looked as if it was congenitally impossible for a group of Irishmen to keep a secret, and to agree among themselves.

However the presence of John Devoy on that New Bedford wharf proved that they could do both. The ship that he watched sail away that bright April day was much more than just another whaler and, although its captain did plan to get some whales, a great secret intrusted to him by Devoy occupied his heart and mind. The *Catalpa* was going to Australia to rescue a group of Irish political prisoners serving life sentences in a British penal colony.

From time to time appeals had been sent from the prisoners in Australia to their friends in America. One prisoner wrote to John Devoy in New York, sketching a plan of action. His appeal stirred the devoted Irishman to a final gigantic effort. Devoy sent back the cheering response that steps were being taken to carry out the plan.

The man who masterminded the plot was John Breslin—a brilliant Irish patriot who had managed to release another Irish leader from an English prison. Now he was determined to release these six Fenians from Freemantle prison, another impregnable fortress in Britain's penal colony in western Australia. These prisoners were Irish soldiers who had been stationed in Ireland with the British army. They were Fenians who had taken an oath to seize British barracks and armories and to take over the government of Ireland. Too many people were in on the secret and informers gave away the plot and a number of the conspirators were sentenced to exile



in the Australian prison.

One of these men was John Boyle O'Reilly, the poet, who with the aid of a sympathetic priest, managed to escape from the terrible prison. The escape took a long time and was beset with hardship and misadventure. When he at last made it to the *Gazelle*, one of many whalers cruising off Australian shores, O'Reilly became a good friend of the third mate, Henry Hathaway.

It didn't take long for the Irish poet's talent to be rewarded, and he was offered a high post on the well known Irish American newspaper, *The Pilot*. His own good fortune, however, did not ease his concern for his fellow Fenians. When he learned that the Irish Americans were seeking his aid he eagerly cooperated. It was he who suggested a whaleship for the rescue.

So John Breslin, although there was a price on his head, went to Australia posing as an investor-business man in and around Bunbury and Freemantle. How did he dare go near Freemantle?

The six Fenians were allowed a good deal of freedom and were often out on working details, so Breslin was able to contact them now and then and apprise them of the details of the rescue plan. These men were intelligent, and kept quiet and were ready to follow instructions. This time there was real secrecy - Irish in America and in Ireland and in all the secret Clans in Great Britain were asked for money to finance a rescue about which they were told no details.

The money started coming in until there was enough to buy and refit an old whaler-and to pay a crew. Even after the *Catalpa* was at sea the money kept coming in in dribbles. It came in pennies from the poor and in dollars from the more fortunate. Breslin was working in Ireland and O'Reilly in Boston. John Devoy, another Irish patriot-exiled from Britain-was working in New York on the *New York Herald*. All were now bending every effort to make to conspiracy a success.

The most important thing at this stage was to find a captain. He would have to be a man who could keep a secret even under torture. That meant he would have to be a nondrinking man because liquor loosens the tongue. He would have to be a man of proved ability and honesty. He should be neither Catholic nor Irish. He must be brave and intelligent.

## The Voyage Of The Catalpa

by  
BESSIE LEE NORTON

### Editorial Note:

Mrs. Norton read this paper to the Want-To-Know Club on October 10, 1969, which explains her introduction.

For the benefit of our guests I should tell you that the subject for this year's program is Unusual Facts Which Have Influenced History. When I looked over the list of suggestions that the Program Committee had presented to us I picked one with which I had been familiar since childhood-The Voyage of the *Catalpa*. True, it was a childhood memory, very vague, and I felt that this was an opportunity to sharpen it.

My search in Island libraries was fruitless. I was reminded of the time when my husband was having lunch with some business associates and the caloric value of olives was questioned. My husband said he didn't know what the caloric value of olives was but would be glad to look it up if anyone was seriously interested. Whereupon one old coot said, "Charlie, I don't think nothing was never wrote onto that." I began to think nothing was ever "wrote onto" The Voyage of the *Catalpa*, but then good luck and good friends came to my rescue, and into my hands were placed the only two books ever written with fullness on this saga of the sea. Other books have only mentioned the voyage briefly.

One of those two books is *The Catalpa Expedition* by Zephaniah Pease, for many years the editor of the *New Bedford Mercury*. This is a factual account of a thrilling but dangerous voyage written with the approval of the man who was master of the vessel, for Captain Anthony loaned his log book and personal records to Mr. Pease.

The other book is a novelized version, *The Emerald Whaler* by Wm. J. Laubenstein. This book is easier reading, even if common sense tells you that the conversations of the men aboard a convict

ship and on the rescue ship would hardly have survived from the year 1875 to 1960 when Mr. Laubenstein wrote his book. Mr. Pease's book was written in 1897 and any conversation in that book might well have been remembered by Capt. Anthony.

When I was a very small child in New Bedford I noticed in several homes the same picture, and I could spell out *The Bark Catalpa*. I asked why so many people had the same picture prominently displayed. I was put off with vague answers. When I was a teenager I was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. George A. Hough Sr. at their Indian Hill home called Fishhook. On the wall of their fascinating library hung the same picture. This time when I asked questions I was given simple direct answers.

On an April morning in 1875 the whaleship *Catalpa* lay at anchor in New Bedford harbor. Although the whaling industry was waning then, there were still over a hundred whaleships sailing out of the port, so the *Catalpa's* departure seemed to call for no unusual notice. It was however a momentous occasion. It was the beginning of one of the most boldly conceived and audacious expeditions against the English government which was ever planned, -and the only important Fenian conspiracy which was ever entirely successful.

To quote from Mr. Pease's book: "Standing upon one of the wharves on the waterfront, a man in a dark ulster watched the incidents of the morning with absorbed interest. His eyes said a fond farewell to the captain as he rowed out to his vessel. He did not risk an appearance in the group which had assembled about the captain for a handshake. He was John Devoy-one of the few men who knew that greater perils than those which usually await the men who go down to the sea in ships must be met by this captain if he was true to a great trust, and that the vessel was going out in response to the cry of men who were outcast and in chains because they loved their country."

Ireland has a long history of seeking independence from England. The Fenians were the ancient Irish militia organized in the third century. From the time when England conquered and partly colonized Ireland there were many revolutionary organizations among the Irish fomenting what were called "Risings." They all failed for one reason or another. In the 1850's the Irish gave their

## Some Publications

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AT ISLAND BOOK STORES AND IN THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY.

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*Whaling Wives* by Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle Hough. A new edition. 294 p., illustrated. Cloth \$4.50.

*Capawack Alias Martha's Vineyard* by Warner F. Gookin. 58 p. Cloth \$1.00.

*Martha's Vineyard A Short History and Guide*. Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, Editor. New edition with added index. Maps and illustrations. 191 p. Paper \$2.50.

*Our Enchanted Island* by Marshall Shepard. An attempt to prove that Martha's Vineyard is the Island of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Paper, 50¢.

*The Heath Hen's Journey to Extinction* by Henry Beetle Hough. 31 p., illustrations. Paper 50¢.

*The Fishes of Martha's Vineyard* by Joseph B. Elvin. With 36 illustrations of fishes by Will Huntington. Paper, 50¢.

*The History of Martha's Vineyard* by Charles Edward Banks. A new edition. Indices, illustrations, three volumes. Cloth \$25.00.

*Tales and Trails of Martha's Vineyard* by Joseph C. Allen. 234 p. Illustrated. Paper \$3.95. When ordering by mail please add 25¢ to cover postage and handling.

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