A Small Part of a Great Thing

Beginning in the 1800s, American women rallied behind the cause of "woman suffrage," but decades would pass before their right to vote was guaranteed. During the struggle, New Bedford hosted high profile suffragist Margaret Foley, but New Bedford suffragists have largely been buried by history. Here are a few notes from the past, highlighting 1916.

By Peggi Medina

1916 was an election year. For a few brief months it seemed that both candidates, Woodrow Wilson and Charles E. Hughes might support suffrage for women – finally.

It began on August 4, 1848. The New Bedford Mercury printed in full and without comment, the Declaration of Women's Rights from the Seneca Fall Convention, the first women's rights convention held in the United States. The Declaratory Whoop in Utica, New York took a more alarmist stance on the Declaration: "This bolt is the most shocking and unnatural incident ever recorded in the history of womanity."

In 1878, Senator Aaron A. Sargent from California introduced the 19th amendment to the Constitution, which would grant women the right to vote, but it would be another 41 years before Congress passed the amendment and submitted it to the states for ratification.

Between 1884 and 1906, this city was home to the New Bedford Suffrage League. On March 2, 1906, Ada W. Tillinghast, Secretary of the league, spoke before the Massachusetts legislature saying, "We are all a small part of a great thing and the question is whether the committee will ally itself with the onward march of progress." (i)

In 1914, Massachusetts women campaigned to force the legislature to support the amendment. The 1914 effort failed by two votes, one of them placed by State Senator Andrew P. Doyle of New Bedford. New Bedford politicians were never helpful to suffrage at any point. During a suffrage rally on May 19, 1915 at New Bedford High School Auditorium attended by 600 people, men dominated the evening, but one woman named Margaret Foley outdid them all. She spoke of the "square deal." New Bedford had given its suffragists. "I beg you to feel that the women of Massachusetts are struggling for justice. The ballot means something to you men. It means that much and even more to women...I am as sure we are going to win in this state as I am that tomorrow will be Wednesday." (ii)

The major opposition came from New Bedford and carried the day. Suffrage was opposed by the city's Congressman Walsh, on the ground that "last year's election showed the people of Massachusetts were not in favor."

On October 29, 1916, the New England Equal Suffrage League held its 22nd annual convention in New Bedford. They elected a man, W. Monroe Trotter of Boston, as President. The highest-ranking woman was Second Vice President Mary Gibson. New Bedford women, as far as they were allowed, supported Charles Evans Hughes in the national election. New Bedford did make national news on November 7, 1916. The Daily Missourian ran a United Press story noting that New Bedford was the first city in Massachusetts to report complete election results. The city went for Hughes, while the country went for Wilson.

Within a year the United States would be at war. The fight for suffrage continued.

To the Golden Door of America

In the 18th century and the opening decades of the 19th century, Irish emigration to the shores of America unfolded. At first, these newcomers were largely Scott-Irish Presbyterians who left the north of Ireland for economic and religious reasons. Then, in 1845, the potato crop in many parts of Ireland failed as a blight having made its way from America turned potatoes into a rancid, gelatinous, inedible mess. An Gorta Mor, Gaelic for "the Great Hunger," ravaged the Irish Catholic peasants. From a total population of eight million, over the next six years at least one million died of starvation and disease, and several million more fled their homeland in a desperate hope to make a living in the U.S., Britain, Canada, Australia and elsewhere. An Irish community, as a result, slowly took root in and around New Bedford.

An Appeal to Hearts and Minds

During the harsh winter of 1846-47, Ireland was in dire straits. The near-complete failure of the potato crop, and the British government's laissez-faire economic approach to the problem only made matters worse. Outrage sparked Famine relief efforts across the U.S., and New Bedford's Quakers pitched in. Congress approved the use of the warship U.S.S. Jamestown as a Famine-relief vessel, and in March 1847, she set sail for Cork, marking this country's first humanitarian mission abroad. The "warship of peace," commanded by Boston China trader Capt. Robert Benner Forbes, "carried more than 8,000 barrels of flour, rice, commalaid, bread, beans, ham, pork, peas and clothing." Famine-relief pledgebooks reveal that donations from New Bedford and Fairhaven played an important role in provisioning that humanitarian cargo. New Bedford even furnished part of the crew.

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New Bedford born brothers Henry and Moses Grinnell, partners in the great New York shipping firm of Grinnell, Minturn & Co. did more than just donate and collect funds. As major shareholders, they sent no less than four ships, and the Patrick Henry sailed twice and at their own expense on voyages in May and September of 1847.

Famine, Friends and Fenians

By Peter F. Stevens and Catherine B. Shannon, Ph.D.

Freedom, equality, and civil rights are timeless themes and yearnings that resonate as powerfully today as they did from the 1840s to 1916. During that time, New Bedford’s Quaker community (or Friends) played a pivotal role not only in the United States’ struggle for those ideals, but also in Ireland’s tortuous struggle for independence. New Bedford stood front and center in a sweep of history vividly relived through a major exhibition titled Famine, Friends and Fenians opening on October 21st.


Captain Joseph C. Delano of New Bedford, a distant relative of future President Franklin D. Roosevelt, commanded both voyages.

Repaying the “Irish Gift”

Captain Forbes viewed the mission as repayment of a historical debt to Ireland. In 1676, when King Philip’s War devastated New England, with the settlements in and around New Bedford being Ground Zero for the conflict. Reverend Nathaniel Mather, a Protestant minister in Dublin, arranged for relief supplies that were conveyed from Ireland to hard-pressed New England.

According to Forbes, “the amount of the contributions of Irishmen in 1676, if calculated at compound interest, would amount to a sum so large that I dare not say how much we should still be indebted….” He added that Famine relief served “partly for the payment of an old debt and partly to plant in Irish hearts a debt which will, in future days, come back to us bearing fruit crowned with peace and good will…”

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Of Slavery and Suffragettes

As the large and influential Quaker community of New Bedford and its surrounding towns stepped up for Famine relief, the spirit behind the effort became entwined with and embraced two other causes: abolition of slavery and women’s rights. In the early 1840s, a runaway slave named Frederick Douglass found sanctuary in New Bedford with the aid of local Quakers Joseph Rickleton, a merchant, and William C. Taber, a bookseller. In the bustling seaport, Douglass set forth on his path to fame as an abolitionist author, orator, and activist.

Douglass was an ardent admirer of Daniel O’Connell, the Irish politician who won emancipation for his fellow Catholics in 1829. Historian Edward T. O’Donnell, in his 2001 article “156 Years Ago – Frederick Douglass in Ireland,” writes that Douglass returned to America with a determination to emulate O’Connell’s crusade.

In August 1845, Douglass crossed the Atlantic to Ireland in hopes of hearing O’Connell speak and of meeting “The Liberator.” He heard O’Connell deliver a rousing speech in Dublin, awed by the oratorical wizardry of the Kerryman. Although their encounter was brief, Douglass returned to America with a determination to emulate O’Connell’s crusade.

Edward T. O’Donnell, in his 2001 Irish Echo article "156 Years Ago – Frederick Douglass in Ireland," writes that Douglass “was stunned by their [Irish peasants] windowless mud hovels with ‘a board on a box for a table, rags on straw for a bed,’ and a picture of the crucifixion on the wall.” It reminded him of the conditions he saw in slave quarters as a child.” Douglass was deeply moved by what he saw in slave quarters as a child. Douglass was deeply moved by what he saw in slave quarters as a child. Douglass was deeply moved by what he saw in slave quarters as a child.

The CSS Alabama Claims were argued by the New Bedford law offices of Crapo, Clifford & Clifford. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts demanded restitution from Great Britain for economic loss during the Civil War. In a speech on the Senate floor in 1869, he demanded $2 million in compensation with the territory of Canada as a down payment. Ultimately this was settled for $15.5 million in 1872. Listening attentively to all this was a secret Irish-American militant organization called the Fenians. They recruited many Irish men who had honed their martial skills in both Federal blue and Confederate gray and mustered to strike at the Crown by invading Canada, hoping to entice many Canadian Irish to their cause. Men who had honed their martial skills in both Federal blue and Confederate gray and mustered to strike at the Crown by invading Canada, hoping to entice many Canadian Irish to their cause. Men who had honed their martial skills in both Federal blue and Confederate gray and mustered to strike at the Crown by invading Canada, hoping to entice many Canadian Irish to their cause.

Fenians – Irish and Irish American Alike – on the March

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In the 1860s, the 26,000 British Army troops garrisoned, over 8,000 were sworn Fenians. The Fenian oath demanded fealty not to the Crown but to a free Ireland, turning their training and weaponry against their fellow Redcoats.

The insurrection was doomed almost from the start. Britain’s national security apparatus got wind of the pending insurrection and arrested the ring leaders. From 1865-1867, authorities rounded up civilians such as John Devoy and those wearing the uniform. These “military Fenians” like O’Reilly, a respected member of the vaunt “military Fenians” like O’Reilly, a respected member of the vaunt “military Fenians” like O’Reilly, a respected member of the vaunt.

To avoid creating matters, many ringleaders, including O’Reilly, were initially sentenced to hang, but were granted the “mercy” of penal servitude at Millbank, Dartmore, and other notorious prisons in Britain. Well known to some New Bedford whalers, for those who refused to serve on British warships during the Napoleonic Wars were imprisoned, and some died there. In October 1867, Fenian prisoners, along with 300 or so convicts boarded the Hooguemon, named after the now famous Flemish farm house that served as an armed fortress during the Battle of Waterloo, for what would prove to be the last convict ship ever sent to Australia.

To the End of the Earth

The ship’s arrival in Fremantle Harbor, Western Australia, brought the Fenians to “The Establishment,” a sprawling white limestone prison bordered on three sides by the vast bush and on the west by the shark-infested waters of the Indian Ocean. For the Fenians, endless days of suffering unfulfilled as they cleared land, dug roads, and built government structures in Fremantle and Perth, the territory’s new capital. Escape appeared impossible. Irish Fenians referred to the place as the “end of the earth.” Escape from “The Establishment”

Many New Bedford whalers were well-acquainted with the Western Australian port of Bunbury, about 100 miles from Fremantle. John Boyle O’Reilly, defying the odds, escaped in February 1869 aboard the Gazelle, a New Bedford whaler, with the help of local Catholic priest Father Patrick McCabe, who paid the vessel’s master, Captain David Gifford, for O’Reilly’s illicit passage. It was not unheard of for whalers to spirit away Irishmen from the penal colony, but Gifford took a huge risk in taking aboard O’Reilly, a man convicted of treason. Gifford would have been well aware of those losses inflicted by the Rafters and the other four years earlier, and this might have played a part in his willingness to help spring an Irish rebel.

On the Gazelle, O’Reilly developed a lifelong friendship with the whaler’s third mate, Henry C. Haraway, who led the Irishman from British authorities when the vessel was docked at the French-con- trolled island of Rodrigues. Eventually, O’Reilly reached Boston and earned national recognition as an author, poet, and editor of the newspaper The Pilot. However, he could not and would not forget his comrades left behind in “The Establishment.”

A Voice from the Tomb

In 1871, the British government issued conditional pardons to many of the “civilian Fenians” imprisoned in Britain and Australia as long as the prisoners agreed to settle outside of Ireland. Fiery young parol officer John Devoy turned up in New York City and became not only a reporter with The New York Herald, but also a leader of Clan na Gaeil, a splinter group to the Fenians.

At “The Establishment,” six military Fenians, Thomas Darragh, Martin Hogan, Michael Harrington, Thomas Hasset, Robert Cranston, and James Wilson, were wasting away. The Crown had no intention of releasing them. A smuggled letter from Wilson reached Devoy in 1874:

Dear Friend Devoy,

Remember me to your voice from the tomb… Think that we have been nearly nine years in this living tomb since our first arrest and that it is impossible for mind or body to withstand the continual strain that is upon them. One or the other must give way. In the name of my comrades and myself, [I ask you to aid us]...

Devoy soon turned to O’Reilly, who in turn introduced him to Henry Haraway, now a New Bedford Night Police Chief. Haraway facilitated the meeting between Devoy and John T. Richardson, a whaling agent. Devoy stayed in the Mariner’s Home on Johnny Cake Hill for the next few weeks. Together the plot unfolded in Richardson’s Water Street store, and the men settled on a plan to buy a whaling ship to sail to Fremantle and rescue the Fenian prisoners. They persuaded George Smith Anthony, previously in the employ of Jonathan Bourne and Richardson’s son in law, to capture the whaler and the mission. The plotters purchased the Catalpa, and on April 29, 1875, the whaler shipped out of New Bedford.

Anthony, with not a drop of Irish lineage, seemingly had no reason to agree to the dangerous venture. Why did he accept? According to his great-grandson James Ryan, Anthony, a staunch Quaker, simply believed that it was “the right thing to do.”

Model for Movie Scenes in the Cardiga Expedition presented to Samuel Smith, First Max. Museum Collection, 1929

For up-to-date calendar listings visit www.whalingmuseum.org
The Catalpa appeared to be another whaler on her way to the hunt- ing grounds of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Thirty-one-year-old Captain Anthony was hiding the truth from his crew, except one, Dennis Duggan, a ruthless Fenian operative and a carpenter by trade, was advised to ensure that there was no turning back. The Catalpa, a lone unarmed whaler, was bound for Western Australia to rescue six Irish rebels from Fremantle and defy Great Britain, the mightiest maritime power in the world. Unwittingly carrying out the ruse that the Catalpa’s mission was one of whaling, Anthony’s men took their first sperm whale within a week, and at the end of October 1875, the vessel docked at Fyalk Island, in the Azores, to offload 210 barrels of oil for transport back to New Bedford. The catch was worth over $12,000. At least six of the crewmen deserted at Fyalk, perhaps suspecting that something about the voyage was suspicious. Anthony needed to replenish the crew to dine with her captain, William Cozens, the very same Cozens who had commanded the Hengoed venture years earlier. Unsuspecting of any foul play, he graciously offered his guest, worried about Western Australia’s reputation, a detailed chart of the region.

However, time and the element of surprise were working against Anthony, for he was only one in a two-part plot. Devoy wrote that the ship’s tardiness posed a crisis for “our men on the ground in Fremantle.” John Brelin and Tom Desmond, a pair of tough, wily Fenians, “three men on the ground,” having sailed from Long Lochs to Australia in September 1875. Brelin was posin in and around Fremantle as a wealthy American mining speculator named James Collins. He so endeared himself to the Governor of Western Australia, Sir William Cleaver Robinson, that Robinson arranged a tour of “The Establishment” for him.

Brelin’s partner, Desmond, a carriage-maker, found work as a wheelwright in Perth and met regularly with Brelin. With the aid of half dozen or so local Australian-Irishmen, plans were made to cut local telegraph wires just before the intended breakout.

The mission’s ringleaders grew frantic as the last week of March 1876 arrived with no word of the whaler. On March 27, 1876, the Catalpa finally dropped anchor off Bunbury. Anthony sent a coded telegraph to Brelin, in Fremantle, and Brelin took a mail coach to Bunbury to meet the captain.

“Let No Man’s Heart Fail Him”

After several more delays, the escape date was selected Easter Monday, April 17, 1876. Brelin, informing the anxious prisoners, “Let no man’s heart fail him, for this chance can never occur again.” Easter Monday was a holiday, and most of the guards and officials would attend the Royal Perth Yacht Club Regatta.

The six Fenians slipped away from work details, down the Rocking- ingham Road, and clambered into the two carriages. Brelin and Desmond tore down the sandy route to reach Rockingham Beach near 10:30 a.m. The eight men scrambled aboard a whaleboat, and Anthony had to assure his gaping sailors that all was proper. As they bent the oars out into the surf, carbone-wielding police galloped onto the beach in pursuit.

A Gathering Storm

Having cleared the treacherous reef, another problem confronted Anthony. He peered at massive dark clouds spilling in from the horizon. “The storm descended upon us,” Brelin wrote, “...the Catalpa had disappeared in the increasing darkness, and we began to pitch and plunge upon monstrosous waves until we all could see were walls of water everywhere.”

All through the night, Anthony barked “the torturous sea [that] threatened to swallow our frail craft and its exhausted occupants” and the winds that snapped off the boat’s mast. The gale blew out near dawn with the men exhausted and frightened but alive.

“...our men on the ground in Fremantle...”

Their ordeal was nowhere near over. Shortly after 7 a.m., Anthony spotted the Catalpa, bobbing in international waters some ten miles to the southwest. He also spied a plume of smoke to the northeast, the British steamship Georgette and a Water Police cutter were bear- ing down on both the Catalpa and the overloaded whaleboat.

The Race for the Catalpa

The race for the Catalpa commenced. The Georgette bore down on the Catalpa. Captain Grady, the Georgette’s commander, shouted at First Mate Smith, to prepare to be boarded. Grady tersely noted that “my request was peremptorily refused by the chief officer (Smith).” Grady, low on coal, was forced to turn back to re-supply at Fremantle.

Anthony ordered his men to row harder “as if we were closing in on a prize sperm whale.” They pulled alongside the Catalpa at 2:30 p.m. The cutter, with no official orders to board, had to turn back for fear of causing an international incident, but Anthony knew the British would return.

The following morning, April 19, 1876, the Georgette, now full of fuel, steamed to the Catalpa, her decks bristling with bayonets and a 12-pounder cannon. There was no breeze and the Catalpa was drifting into territorial waters. Captain Grady knew this and shadowed the bark. Through his speaking trumpet, Captain Grady demanded that Anthony “heave to and shorten sail.” The New Bedford captain refused. The cannon belched. Round shot hissed just above and beyond the Catalpa. Grady demanded that the Catalpa lower sail and let his party board. Perry recounts, “The anxiety of the entire crew was at almost the breaking point.” Anthony played his bluff, pointing at the American flag atop the Catalpa. “If you fire on this ship,” Anthony ordered, “you fire on the American flag. It is an act of war!” Below decks, the Fenians clutched rifles and revolvers. Anthony’s desperate bluff worked. Then a breeze picked up and Anthony gave the order to head out to open sea. Grady, defeated and humiliated, turned back, wary of sinking an American ship in international waters. His only remaining hope being that the Royal Navy might intercept and seize the Catalpa. In fairness, Grady’s hands were tied, as he had specific instruction from the Governor not to fire in inter- national waters. The Governor likely knew of the pecuniary outcome of the C.S.S. Alabama Claims.

Homeward Bound

The Catalpa was supposed to go whaling on the return voyage, but the escaped prisoners, terrifiled of the Royal Navy, demanded that Anthony sail straight for America. He agreed, as he feared he would otherwise have a mutiny on his hands. The rescue ignited an inter- national furor, with threats and counter-threats by Washington and Parliament. Anthony steered the Catalpa into New York Harbor to a hero’s welcome in August 1876. Intriguingly, both major political parties of the day clambered to be the first aboard as these Irish refu- gees sailed into the harbor. In the Houses of Lords and Commons, a spate of fiery speeches denounced the Irish, the United States, and the authorities in Australia.

New Bedford Welcomed Home “The Conquering Hero”

A week later, the Catalpa returned to a tumultuous welcome in New Bedford. Historian A.G. Evans writes that “the Catalpa sailed into its home port...to the sounds of an artillary salute: one gun for ev- ery state in the Union, and one for every country in Ireland. Great crowds had assemblled on the wharf, cheering wildly...”

On Friday August 26, 1876, New Bedford’s Liberty Hall was packed for a reception honoring Anthony, his crew, Hathaway, and John Boyle O’Reilly. As Anthony was introduced, a band played “See the Conquering Hero Comes.”

New Bedford and the Course to 1916 – The Easter Rising

The grateful Irish-American community presented the Catalpa to An- thony and Richardson as a gift. Anthony would never sail into inter- national waters again, for the British government would have arrested him on sight. In 1897, Anthony was a guest of honor at the Clan na Gail convention in Philadelphia and received a thunderous ovation from thousands of Irish and Irish-Americans as he presented one of the Catalpa’s flags to the organization (see the other in the exhibit!)

The Catalpa expedition was embraced by Irish and Irish-Americans as the very symbol of defiance against Great Britain and wouldloom large in the decades leading to the 1916 “Easter Rising” in Ireland. In New Bedford, on May 7, 1916, a rally of the recently formed “Friends of Irish Freedom” gathered at Hellen Hall to hear the news that Padraic Pearse and other leaders of the Rising had been execut- ed in Dublin by British Army firing squads at Kilmainham Gaol. The New Bedford Morning Mercury reported that “Captain Henry C. Hathaway...retold the story of the Catalpa rescue.” Eamon de Valera was one of the leaders of the insurrrection, but he outmanned the hangman because of his U.S. birth certificate. Britain did not want to stoake further Irish-American sentiment right on the brink of the U.S. intervention into WWI.

Four years later, de Valera, who became the first legally elected president of the Republic of Ireland, made a special stop on a fund-raising trip to America in 1920. In New
Famine, Friends & Fenians
A symposium on Irish and Irish-American history
Saturday, October 22nd | 9 am – 5 pm

Members: $50; Non-members: $65
To register: 508-997-0046 ext. 100
Online: whalingmuseum.org
For information call 508-997-0046 ext. 135.

Papers delivered by:
- Dr. Christine Kinealy, Director, Ireland’s Great Hunger Institute, Quinnipiac University on Frederick Douglass’ visit to Ireland;
- Dr. Catherine Shannon, Professor Emerita of History at Westminster State University on 18th and 19th century Irish immigration;
- Author Peter Stevens on his book The Voyage of the Catalpa: A Perilous Journey and Six Irish Rebels;
- Denis Strong, Irish National Parks & Wildlife Service, on whaling and whales off the coast of Ireland.

Presentations by:
- Michael Dyer, Senior Maritime Historian on the Irish Donation of 1876 and on the crew of the Catalpa;
- Jay Grinnell, a Grinnell descendent on Grinnell, Minturn & Co.;
- Ken Hartnett, former editor, Standard-Times on the Fenian invasions of Canada;
- Paul Meagher on Massachussetts’ participation in Meagher’s Irish Brigade;
- Margaret Medeiros, author and historian on the Quaker support of famine relief efforts and on New Bedford’s reaction to the 1916 Easter Rising;
- David Nelson on his grandfather Frank Perry;
- Jim Ryan on his great-grandfather Captain Anthony;
- Brendan Woods, historian and storyteller, on 19th century Fremantle, Australia;
- Film: The Catalpa Rescue directed by Lisa Sabina Harney and produced by Essential Media in Australia;

Evening Performance:
Members: $25; Non-members: $35
To register: 508-997-0046 ext. 100
Online: whalingmuseum.org
Music: Sean Tyrell of Connemara, “Message of Peace”
Irish music and commentary inspired by John Boyle O’Reilly.

Early 20th Century Norwegian Whaling in Co. Mayo, Ireland
A Photographic Exhibition Opening October 21, 2016
Presented by the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Ballycroy, Westport, Co Mayo

By Keith Bourke
At the beginning of the 20th century, whales were priced for both their meat and oils. Norway imposed a ten year ban on whaling in their waters in 1904 due to their own depleted stocks. As a result, Norwegian whalers wished to expand their operations in other areas.

In 1908, attempts were made by two Norwegian businessmen to set up a station on the Shetland Island off the Scottish coast. When this attempt failed, a second one was made on Arranmore in Co. Donegal, Ireland. Opposition from local commercial fishing interests scuppered both bids. However, thanks to a man from Youghal, Co. Cork, a station would be built at Rusheen, on South Inishkea, Co. Mayo. The Norwegians maintained the Arranmore Whaling Co trading name.

The station at Rusheen, was beset with problems, as the company had to contend with some militant islanders. Around 30 local hands were employed on Rusheen. All the men were from South Inishkea as the islanders refused to allow strangers from the mainland to work at the station but also the inhabitants of the neighboring North Island. The foreman and timekeeper, Johnny O’Donnell, was the “king” of the island and enjoyed the distinction of owning the only dwelling on the island with floorboards. The station had its best catch of 182 whales in 1909, with blue whales, fin whales and sperm whales among the haul. The whale’s blubber and oils were exported primarily to Scandinavia and an on-site mill ground down the whale bones to