

The Catalpa Documentary



When the *Catalpa*, a 200-ton whaling ship left New Bedford, Mass on April 29, 1875, only Captain George Anthony knew its real mission: to rescue six Irish political prisoners (Fenians) held in a British stockade in Western Australia.

The Fenians were Irish rebels who had made several unsuccessful attempts at insurrection against English rule in the 1860's. Many were captured and sentenced to a life of penal servitude at the Freemantle Gaol near Perth.

By 1870, several Fenians were pardoned, but a handful remained behind bars. In 1871, inmate



James Wilson wrote an emotional letter to John Devoy, a former prisoner living in New York, calling himself, "a voice from the tomb." This resulted in an elaborately planned rescue mission to free the six Fenian prisoners.



The Plot
Devoy, a *New York Herald* reporter and *Clan na Gael* leader, undertook a four-year fundraising drive that would net \$25,000 from fellow *Clan na Gael* members, staunch supporters of the Fenian cause. Donations came from laundresses and ditch diggers as well as

from bankers, attorneys and physicians.

With the initial \$5,200 Devoy and his colleagues (including John Boyle O'Reilly of Boston and Jim Reynolds of New Haven) bought the *Catalpa*, a whaling ship in New Bedford, Mass. They persuaded Captain George Anthony, a New England Quaker, to sail her to Freemantle for the rescue mission.

Meanwhile, *Clan na Gael* members John Breslin and Thomas Desmond, traveled separately to Australia to alert the prisoners and coordinate the rescue.

When the *Catalpa* arrived at its rendezvous near Freemantle on March 27, 1876, Breslin and Desmond spirited the freed men to a nearby beach where Captain Anthony met them with a longboat.

Soon the six prisoners, aided by Breslin and Desmond, clambered aboard and made a perilous 28-hour journey to the *Catalpa* through British-occupied waters.

Their troubles, however, were still far from resolved. A British gunboat eventually overtook the *Catalpa*, firing a shot across her bow. When Captain Anthony ordered the U.S. flag to fly above the *Catalpa*, the gunboat gave up its pursuit.

Four months later, the *Catalpa* docked in New York Harbor to a gala welcome on Aug. 19, 1876.

The *Clan na Gael* scored a major propaganda victory against the British, and the story of the *Catalpa* became a legend of Irish-American history.

Freemantle Gaol



THE PROPOSED DOCUMENTARY

A documentary film on the *Catalpa* is long overdue. Day Productions, with the support of several Irish-American organizations, is securing rights to primary research materials: photos, letters, maps, and other documents. Initial funding has come from the generous support of Irish-American groups, and fiscal sponsorship is through the Irish-American Lobby Education Foundation, Inc. and The International Documentary Association.

PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

Mark Day, who recently produced and directed the award-winning documentary *The San Patricios*, (the story of the St. Patrick's Battalion) is the Producer-Director. The Executive Producer is Paul Espinosa whose PBS credits include *The Lemon Grove Incident* and the highly acclaimed series *The U.S.-Mexican War: 1846-1848*. Michael Anderson, Director of Photography has numerous credits with PBS, BBC and European television. The sound technician is Jaime Kibben, a veteran location audio expert with 20 years experience in broadcasting and film. Peter Stevens, author of *The Rogue's March*. John Riley and the San Patricios, is Director of Research.



JOIN THE PLOT!

Currently, we are seeking funds for research, production and post-production. Your contribution will be gratefully appreciated. Don't hesitate to call us if you have any questions about the project. All donations are tax-deductible. Checks should be made out to our non-profit sponsor, The

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