

American Whalers In Western Australian Waters

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35

Most maritime nations of the world since the dawn of history have hunted whales, the greatest animals that live or have ever lived, and as this paper deals with a period of some fifty years from 1820 to 1870 when the United States of America was the leader in this enterprise, we must first pay tribute to the intrepid people who made it possible, advisedly I say people because women as well as men took part in it. The people of New England issuing from "their ant-hills" as Herman Melville described it in his classic work "Moby Dick", established this great industry; following the whale through the north and south Atlantic, across the Indian Ocean, along the shore of Western Australia and on through the Great Bight to the North and Pacific Oceans, from the Arctic to the Antarctic regions, in voyages that sometimes lasted as long as four years. On these voyages, from their nature smelly and bloody, many of the captains' wives accompanied their husbands, sharing hardships and dangers on their bearing and raising children and alas in some cases losing children. The dangers inevitable on these voyages included shipwreck, mutiny and destruction in pack ice.

From the earliest days of white settlement on the shores of New England the occupation of bay whaling had been pursued with Nantucket "the little grey lady of the Atlantic"; a sandy treeless wisp of an island of fifty-seven square miles, assuming the leadership. It was discovered by Bartholomew Gosnold in 1602 and settled by Quakers, led by Macey of Massachusetts in 1659. The Quaker influence always remained strong in the industry.

With the industrial revolution sweeping Europe the demand for ever-increasing quantities of oil to lubricate the machines and light the factories and streets, stimulated the hardy race of sea hunters to extend their operations in sea-going ships. Sloops of fifty to one-hundred tons were built in Nantucket at the end of the eighteenth century, and in 1730 the first schooner was launched. These vessels fished as far south as the Falkland Islands and across the Atlantic to the Azores and the West coast of Africa.

By capturing a sperm whale in "ye Deep" after being blown out to sea in a storm Captain Hussey, who brought it triumphantly into Nantucket, proved that these monsters could be successfully hunted, and profoundly changed the nature of whaling history. The spermaceti from the head is not only suitable for the manufacture of the best candles for which it was mostly used, but is

also the basis of the finest machine oils for delicate instruments, and of course the blubber yields the most valuable oil. The whale-bone of commerce came, not from sperm whales which were toothed, but from the Baleen whales. This product which in some cases was more valuable than the oil, was mainly used for certain garments whose design was guaranteed "to reduce the most portly figure to the standard of Beauty and Fashion".

By 1776 the fleet numbered 360 bottoms, with Nantucket alone possessing half of this number. However, the Revolutionary Wars dealt a disastrous blow to the industry. The people of Nantucket strongly religious in their Quaker faith, viewed the war as a major disaster, as whaling was practically their sole means of livelihood and Britain was the principal market for their whale oil and whale bone. Suddenly this market was gone and their ships liable to capture. A gentleman's agreement between the warring parties through the Society of Friends, allowing the Nantucketeers to operate twenty-four ships did little to mitigate their incredible hardships suffered during the war. When peace was declared their troubles were by no means ended. American whale oil arriving in England now had to pay an import duty, and the Massachusetts State Legislature passed laws severely restricting trade with England. It was, therefore, understandable that experienced Nantucket whalers were easily induced to take employment in the English whale industry. Colonies of Nantucket whalersmen were established at the ports of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, then at Milford Haven and Dunkirk, France. It was estimated that over two-hundred whalerships operating from British and European ports were captained by men from New England and that the crews of these vessels included at least a thousand American seamen.

However, the American whaling industry revived again and when the "Emilia", owned by Enderby & Son of London, rounded the Horn and captured the first whale in the Pacific, she was followed within a few weeks by the "Beaver" and the "Rebecca", and half a dozen other ships from New England ports. The captain of the "Emilia" was a man named Shields and to his first mate Achelus Hammond falls the honour of ironing the first whale in the Pacific.

The Napoleonic Wars inflicted a disastrous blow to the American whalers, reducing their fleet to less than forty, but again they recovered and by 1821 there were eighty-four vessels operating. The Golden Age was beginning. By 1846, the peak year, 736 vessels were operating; 680 ships and barques, 34 brigs and 22 schooners (more than half the world's fleet of whalers) were scouring the oceans of the world, bringing great wealth to the whaling ports of New England. During this period New Bedford assumed leadership, more than half the ships coming from that port.

The first American whalers reported to have visited our shores were the "Asia" under Captain Elijah Coffin and the "Alliance", Capt. Bartlett, who left Nantucket on October 6th 1791 and made landfall at Shark Bay in April 1792. The captain of the "Asia" went ashore as he reports in his log—"A gunning, but little or no grate game". She left Shark Bay on May 6, steering north and sailed away without hunting whales.

We learn from Major Lockyer's report, 1827, that the coasts "abound with the sperm whale which have not yet been molested from the whale ships not approaching so near the land from the dread of the coast. So far as I can learn from the sealers who have been down here; with common care and prudence not the slightest danger is to be apprehended". One of the first to conquer this doubt was the commander of the barque "Lucy Ann", from Boston, which arrived at King George's Sound on the 22nd December, 1828, and left six days later.

Nairne Clarke, in later years, was told by the sealers—"that complete set of pirates" in the words of Major Lockyer, that the sealers acted as pilots for the American whalers in the Bight, and that they engaged in "tonguing"—that is extracting oil from the head and other discarded parts of the carcasses.

It is certain that by 1833 the Americans had learnt the migratory habits of the hump back whales, who were following a course taken through untold generations from the cold seas rich in krill or plankton, where they fattened, to the warm waters round the Monte Bellos, where the young conceived the previous year, were born. Reaching the south coast in June the slow journey took them to their breeding grounds in August. During the return journey the young developed a covering of blubber enabling them to withstand the rigours of the icy Antarctic Seas.

From the Diary of Nancy Ann Turner, Augusta, 12th February, 1833—"The America", whaling ship anchored in our Bay".

24th May, 1834, "The Pacific", Captain Butler, an American whaler came in about two days ago.

18th June, "Papa and the boys returned home about noon. Both vessels had caught a whale. (Capt. Cole of the "America" had valued upon".

August 8th. "All the natives left this locality to go to the Eastern Beach after the carcass of a whale".

August 17th, "Cole has caught four whales".

Friday 13th Sept. "The Americans caught a whale. We went down to the tryworks to see it".

Sunday 15th Sept. "We took a walk after dinner to the tryworks. The whalers were busy cutting up and trying out".

This shows that the Americans had begun operations on shore; that is, bay whaling. The cutting in and trying out was necessarily bloody and smelly and at times difficult, so that any chance to transfer to shore was eagerly taken.

In a letter to W. J. Turner on September 17th, 1840, Captain W. M. Baker of the ship "Mentor" of New London wrote that "he lay in perfect safety in Flinders Bay from the First day of July to the seventeenth of September. There is from six to eight fathoms of water at the anchorage opposite the Barracks, a sandy bottom about a mile off shore, wood and water can be procured here in abundance and likewise a good supply of vegetables".

But by 1840 most of the settlers at Augusta had left and were establishing themselves at the Vasse in Geographie Bay where the American whalers were busily engaged in their lucrative pursuits.

Georgiana Molloy, writing to Captain Mangies from Fairlawm (near Bussellton of today), Jan. 31st, 1840, says: "At Augusta, as your cousin knows, we suffered much in every way, also enjoyed undisturbed happiness. I was reluctant to leave it and would gladly return but only prudence forbids. Last Thursday the American Capt. Cole arrived in the Bay having (to use a technical term) filled up. She proceeds instantly to America". Again writing to Capt. Mangies Mrs. Molloy says: "Since my last we have been on an excursion to Cape Naturaliste, Castle Bay and Rook and in a lovely Sabbath evening two ships came to anchor, the "Tzette" of Salem and the "Ducass" of Falmouth.

On April 10th: "All the American captains, five in number, concurred in declaring its valuable situation, not only wood and water, but the position. Several of the captains dug wells there and were very pleased with the result as they were very close to the beach. A granite quarry exists in this dell. There are seven fathoms of water close into shore where Captain Plaskett sent his boat daily for fish which is there in abundance.

We have had six American whalers in since January. The sailors are charmed with the Bay. They are of the greatest use to us and as yet have all been temperance ships; the best qualifications they could possess, indeed we have no public house in the district. Heaven grant this may long continue. Alas, this idyllic state could not last and soon there were taverns and reports of brawls in which American sailors were involved.

Every year now at the end of December, during January, February and March the "fleet" could be expected. They came

via the South and North Atlantic, calling at the Azores, Bahia in Brazil, the West Coast of Africa and the Cape of Good Hope, fishing on the way. They called at the little hamlets of Augusta, Vasse, Bunbury and Fremantle and Albany for refreshment and liberty leave for the men. The former in many cases was very badly needed as a notice in the Gazette of November 24th 1838 indicates: "It is reported that the 'Pioneer' American whale ship has put into our port to obtain a supply of vegetables, the crew have been suffering from the scurvy".

Some stayed to hunt sperm whale in the seas off the coast, whilst others engaged in Bay whaling and hunting the humpbacks and right whales along the coast; others passed on via Van Diemen's Land and New Zealand to the Pacific. No less than 260 American whaling ships are recorded as having visited these shores up to 1890.

Whilst in our ports the Americans traded their "Yankee Notions" for potatoes, meat, vegetables and wood. The former comprised a wide range of articles such as oil, molasses, tobacco, spirits, slush soap, whaling gear, jewellery, saddlery, crockery, tin ware etc.

It is interesting to learn from a Memoranda Book of Captain Molloy in 1838, details of this traffic. The total value of exports £186/6/-, Onions at £60, firewood at £48, pumpkins and other vegetables at £39.

The chief purchases from the whalers were: oil at £142/13/6, wearing apparel at £102/8/4, whaling gear and boots at £80/14/7, provisions at £65/11/11, molasses at £32/14/6, tobacco at £42/17/-, and spirits at £37/6/8.

It is extremely unlikely that the above is a true record of the imports of tobacco and spirits, because many and varied were the means of getting these ashore without paying excise. It was especially difficult for the tide waiters to police the traffic in Geographie Bay, where there were isolated farms from Bunbury to Cape Naturaliste.

Some of the problems to the administration caused by the visits of the whalers were outlined by Edward Grey, Resident Magistrate at King George's Sound. He says: "Vessels belonging to foreign powers are in the habit of remaining during the season of Bay whaling in Two People's Bay and other adjacent Bays, these vessels together with their masters and crews are thus, to a certain extent, removed from under my jurisdiction and yet interfere materially with the regulations and good order of this Colony in the following instances:

"They despatch boats to this harbour which are not, according to the existing regulations, compelled to enter into the Bond, for the observance of the Port Regulations, which is required from the masters of all vessels, they have thus held out to them both inducement and opportunity to smuggle. Secondly: They either send up in their boats or land in the neighbourhood of their vessels, sick and disabled seamen without sufficient means being provided for their support, so that these men may become chargeable to the public. Thirdly: They carry off from the Colony deserters and other persons who are not authorised to leave it.

"Fourthly: They collect in their vicinity a number of individuals who gain their subsistence by sealing along the coast and by tonguing and by rendering various acts of assistance to the vessels in return for which services they obtain tobacco and other prohibited articles and these are smuggled into the settlement."

During 1839 the Gazette called for men of war to afford protection from the encroachment of foreigners which infest our bays from the beginning of May to the end of October.

The Inquirer of May 24th, 1841, wrote: "We suppose, therefore, that Puffindorp, Groitus and Vettel must be consulted to see how far foreigners are authorised in entering our very bays and harbours in pursuit of what does not belong to them; in the meantime, however, we are to be subjected to the aggressions, aye, insults of these rapacious traders who, not content with walking off with our property, are enabled in consequence of their numbers, to brave our authorities at the out stations and put the law at defiance."

When Bay whaling became established on the coast at Bunbury, Fremantle, Vasse and King George's Sound, much resentment was felt at the competition from American whalers and there were many complaints to the Government, who intimated that it would give protection to the local men in the settled bays of the Colony, but had not the resources to do so in the outlying positions of the State.

In 1840 the "Samuel Wright" was again anchored in Koombana Bay, presumably for the winter, as were the "North America" and the "Hudson". The Colonial Secretary was directed to inform the Americans against them having any right to fish in the settled Bays of the Colony and to ask them if they were cultivating any and what land. In reply Capt. Francis Coffin of the "Samuel Wright" said he "considered it but just, that the Americans should have the right to fish in the bays of the Colony when there were no English whalers at the same place, because it was due to Yankee enterprise that the best anchorages on the coast, such as Doubtful

Bay, Cape Riche, Geographie Bay, Leschenault, and Safety Bay had been found and proved. With regard to the land about which the Government was so anxious, it was only half an acre in extent, situated about a short mile from Castle Rock, and he failed to see what could have prompted this strange enquiry."

On July 7th, 1840, during a violent storm, the "Samuel Wright", Francis Coffin, Master, and the "North America", Kempton, Master, in Koombana Bay and the "Governor Endicott" at Toby's Inlet, were driven ashore and became total wrecks. Capt. Coffin bought the hull of the "Samuel Wright" with all her rigging also that of the "Governor Endicott" and lost no time in putting the undamaged whale obats into operation at Bay whaling.

Archdeacon Wollaston records in his diary of November, 1841, that he had purchased the land and premises belonging to Captain Coffin who was anxious to return to America. He also purchased from the Yankee four kangaroo dogs "very cheap" for £15.

Wollaston recorded in his diary, 14th April, 1843, that a vessel which had been driven ashore in a tremendous gale was named the "North America" (Grinnel, Master). He says: "Shortly before I arrived in the Colony a whaler of the same name was also wrecked within a few yards of the same spot and came ashore in a gale in a similar way and her remains at this moment lies scattered on the beach". The vessel had been purchased by Capt. Scott, the pilot of the port of Fremantle, refloated, but in July had broken from her moorings and driven ashore again, and was irreparably wrecked.

In 1844 the Koombana Bay Fishery was established with James G. Witt as manager, proposing to fish in Geographie Bay. He complained to the Governor that two American ships, the "Charles Mary" and the "Halcyon" from New London were stationed in Castle Bay under Cape Naturaliste and that their presence there would injure the prospects of the Company as Bay whalers, and could not compete with whaling ships which have every requisite for carrying on the whale fishery.

The Colonial Secretary instructed John Molloy the Resident, that the American whalers were to be informed that they were forbidden to fish within three miles of the coast and as regards Geographie Bay, they were clearly to understand that, as it was one of the settled bays of the Colony, they were not to fish beyond a line drawn due east from the head of Cape Naturaliste to the opposite coast.

In the meantime James Witt had had an offer from the captains of the "Charles & Mary" and "Halcyon" to enter into a partnership whereby the Koombana Bay Whaling Company was

able to cut in and try out on board their ships and the Governor was asked to over-ride the order warning off the Americans; this was acceded to, but the Americans were to be given notice that they would not be allowed to fish there or remain another season.

On the fifth of August, during a violent gale, the "Halcyon" was driven on shore within two and a half miles of Toby's Inlet. The hull of this vessel was bought at public auction by Captain Molloy for £50 and it is probable that the great beam of the keel is that which was used in the building of his home "Fairlaw". The Company is recorded as having secured two and a half tons of oil for the season.

The "Inquirer" remarked on May 11th, 1844: "Castle Bay is a very good harbour with deep water close to the beach, wood and water are quite convenient and there are no harbour and pilot dues, nor any revenue officers near the place. Brother Jonathan feels himself tolerably comfortable".

It was reported in the Gazette of February, 1841, that there were a great number of whalers on the coast. Fifteen were lying at Leschenault and ten had put into Gage Roads, within the last fortnight, three or four of whom had come to Fremantle because of being unable to obtain supplies at the former port. Preference was given to Geographie Bay to avoid the Port Charges at Fremantle, Koozbana Bay and King George's Sound, which some American captains were reluctant to pay. It was felt in some quarters that the charges should be modified as the ports benefited by the sale of the surplus produce of the farmers. Some captains indeed anchored off shore and sent their whale boats in for provisions, thus avoiding the pilotage dues.

It was reported at this period, that the American whalers were "a nation fond of firing off their guns on the arrival and departure of their comrades. The anxious, expectant of news from England, are woefully annoyed at the salutes which ever and anon are supposed to proclaim the happy tidings of an arrival, but merely keep the promise of the ear. The number of Americans we have had in our port lately has been the occasion of a bush fire being kept up. It is idle to suppose that we have the power of preventing the masters of vessels from indulging in this rather expressive but innocent recreation".

Some of the recreations, however, were not so innocent. An affray which took place at Fremantle, in which many wounds and bruises were sustained, was with difficulty quelled by Mr. Vincent the gaoler, assisted by several of the towns people. The cry of those who were urging the most prominent of the riotous party was—"We want but a few more of our vessels in the harbour and we burn the bloody town about their ears".

During the 1840s and 50s large numbers of whalers called for refreshment, in some cases very badly needed, as this report of March 28th, 1849, indicates:

"Bunbury. The whaling barque 'Solomon Salters', 316 tons, James C. Stafford, Master, put in at this port on the 15th instant and will remain for a month or two until the crew have recovered from the scurvy which has broken out on board. The barque is out six months from Fall River and has taken seventy barrels of sperm. She brought blue drill, shoes, tobacco etc. for sale or barter". In another report in January, 1850, the "Solomon Salters" reappeared, taking nearly the whole of the potato supply on sale in the district.

In the main, the relations between the American officers and the local settlers were very friendly and cordial, as evidenced by an extract from a letter written by Charlotte Bussell, dated February 3rd, 1848—"The Bay looking very gay and cheerful, for there were four large American whaling vessels lying in the Bay. We meet plenty of American Captains, one of whom presented me with an elegant little riding whip, perceiving that I had only a stick. They are very kind people, the Americans. You would have smiled the other evening as four of them left our room bowing almost to the ground, after John, to their extreme surprise, had refused over and over again to take any fee for some magisterial business he had been engaged in for them. They could not understand his refusing to receive payment, so after a multitude of thanks and profound bows they departed. The next day I was presented with this whip".

Some American whalers have recorded their impressions of visits to Western Australia, one of whom is Nelson Cole Haley, who in the course of a voyage from May 1849 to 1853 in the barque "Charles W. Morgan" touched on the South Coast. In his book "Whale Hunt" he wrote—"This Bay is named 'Two People's Bay' for what reason I know not, for not a soul lives here, nor is there a house to be seen. It is a half circle in form and perfectly sheltered from the heavy westerly gales on the North West side. Some years ago whaler ships came here in certain seasons to catch right whales, but it has now been abandoned for that purpose. The wandering bands of natives from inland used to come here in the whaling days and feast on the carcass of any whale that had drifted on shore and would gorge themselves on it even if it smelt a mile a minute; so said those who had been whaling there. The natives no doubt are down to the keelson in the scale of humanity. They capture poisonous snakes by having a forked stick with pointed ends with which they fix the snake's head to the ground and cut it off with a sharp piece of flint. I have been told they have not any feeling of modesty with each other, any more than barnyard fowls have". The crew also reported seeing an immense snake crawling slowly

up a slight hill, now and then rearing his head four or five feet above ground and turning it from side to side with his large mouth open.

Young Nelson Cole Haley who was seventeen when this happened, followed the sea and became captain of American whale ships, in later life marrying the daughter of Capt. Robert Brown.

Robert Brown's daughter in after life, described a voyage in her father's ship the "North Star" from New London via Fyral and St. Pauls in the Indian Ocean to the Vasse in 1850. The captain's wife Charlotte had come to Australia with her parents Robert and Ann Hepplingstone in the "Warrior" in 1830. As a little girl she had lived at Augusta and the Vasse with her parents, having worked for a time for Mrs. Molloy at Augusta. In 1840 while proceeding to Scotland to be educated she was stranded at Cape Town, where the captain of an American whaler, seeing her plight took her to his wife at New Bedford. On board were John Hempstead, first mate, and Robert Brown, second mate. Both wanted to marry her; the latter, Robert Brown, won her and they were married in August, 1840, Charlotte being sixteen at the time. As was customary, she accompanied her husband on his voyages and two children were born.

Now she was pregnant again, but was fortunate in being able to persuade a girl, Harriet Layman, who had been born at Augusta, to help her in her confinement which took place in a storm in the Sea of Okhotsk, where the "North Star" had voyaged in pursuit of the valuable bowhead whale. Harriet later married John Hempstead (about whom we shall hear more later).

Robert Brown who had been an armourer on whaling ships had invented a harpoon gun, several of which he was able to sell to his fellow American captains, and one to Robert Hepplingstone, master whaler of Castle Bay who, however, found the gun unsuitable owing to its heavy recoil.

On board the "North Star" as boat-steerer was John Hepplingstone who had been born at Augusta on August 1st, 1831. As a boy he had witnessed the spearing of George Layman at Wonnerrup and after being educated at New London and with his background and upbringing became a whaler—what else? He left the "North Star" as mate and became first mate of the "Harmony" and "E. L. Frost" and in 1853 was given command of the latter ship. He became in turn master of the "Catherine", the "Hudson", the "Julian" and the "Triton", making a number of successful voyages. His declining years were spent in New Bedford, with his wife Ann Morgan of Nantucket and daughters. His only son died at sea on one of his voyages.

During the forties and fifties when American whaling was at its peak, numbers of their ships were visiting our shores and there were many news items about them in the local newspapers. The "Inquirer" reported from Busselton in February, 1852—"The good people of the Vasse have been astonished and edified by the appearance of a real Bloomer among them in the person of the wife of the captain of the 'Mannuel Ortiz' whale ship. She was dressed in pantaloons with tunic fastened up in front and skirts descending to the knees. The dress is described as 'not ungraceful'. One lady was so taken by the costume that she said 'she too would have a bloomer dress.'"

The American whalers were always plagued by desertions at our ports, one reason being that the crews were a very mixed lot, being drawn from many countries, the Azores, Portuguese West Africa (the negroes from that coast being particularly good harpooners), the South Seas, even small Norfolk Island and from drifters who joined and deserted from many ships.

The "Inquirer" reported on January 20th, 1853—"Of the eight sailors who attempted to make their escape from the American whaler, seven have been captured by our police and taken to sea by the captain, in irons, which we trust will be a warning to sailors for the future. And from the Vasse—"The Gypsy" has left. Ten or twelve of the men absconded, which caused her detention for so long.

"The sleepy little hamlets along the coast were always greatly enlivened by the annual visit of the fleet, whose crews' liking for horse-back riding proved remunerative to the local settlers. Their hired hacks were galloped furiously along the country road in a style of riding which amused the locals, being described as on the 'go ahead' principle, the tiller lines being in the bows instead of astern, the craft being allowed to steer itself, to any destination so long as it did not bring up short and send the rider over the bows."

In April 1858 it was reported that the captains of American vessels in Geographical Bay subscribed most liberally to the building of the new school-house and in May 1860, "that balls and parties are the usual accompaniments of the advent of the American whale ships, and I believe seldom has a more brilliant fete been celebrated at the Bay, than the one which took place on board the 'Eagle', Captain McNally, Master, on Wednesday last. This was the anniversary of the birth of George Washington and at sunrise the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood were awakened by a salute from the shipping in the harbour of twenty-one guns. This was repeated at noon and again at sunset.

"In the evening a party of fifty-seven sat down to dinner, which rather surprised me from the diversity of its dishes, the excellence of the culinary arrangements and the recherche character of the wines, but I have been informed that our Yankee friends are rather celebrated for their aptness in the commissariat department. After the toasts, quadrilles, polkas and gallops, etc., etc., the entertainment continued and the party broke up a little before sunrise. I omitted to mention that the whole of the quarter deck was most tastefully fitted with flags and banners belonging to her (the 'Eagle'), increased by those of the 'Almira', 'Marion' and 'Orion' which together with a profusion of lanterns presented an appearance which would have borne a favourable comparison with a first rate ball on shore".

These pleasant junketings alas took place at a time of impending tragedy, the terrible tragedy of Civil War, which as well as causing so much suffering and bitterness to the American people, dealt a devastating blow to the whaling industry from which it never recovered. The Confederate cruiser "Shenandoah" caught the Arctic whaling fleet unawares in 1865, captured and burnt twenty-five ships, mostly large ones. Altogether Confederate cruisers destroyed fifty whale ships and others were purchased by the U.S. Government and not replaced. Six years later, in 1871, thirty-three whale ships were lost in pack ice in the Arctic and, in 1876, twelve more were crushed.

These losses which amounted to fifty per cent of the fleet, meant that much new capital was needed for replacement but was not forthcoming, for investors lost confidence in the industry, preferring to invest in the booming industrial development which was now to take place.

From the Vasse, on March 5th, 1862, it was reported that the two whale ships "Atlantic", Sherman, Master, and "Jason", Spaulding, Master, sailed for the whaling ground having delayed their departure as long as possible in vain hope of hearing the news upon the arrival of the English mail. There had been rumours of war between England and America over the "Trent" incident, caused by the forcible removal of the Confederate Diplomats James Mason and John Sliddell on their way to Europe in the British steamer "Trent" by an over zealous officer, Capt. Wilkes of the "San Jacinto". Feelings ran high on both sides of the Atlantic, hot heads calling for war. The Prince Consort toned down Russell's note to the American Government; while in America, Secretary of State Seward was making desperate efforts to prevent war. Fortunately wise counsels prevailed, a face-saving formula was achieved, the diplomats were released and thus the horrors of international war were not added to the madness of civil war. The intelligence that

peace was likely to be preserved gave great satisfaction to five whalers anchored in Koombana Bay.

In February, 1864, Captain Gifford, master of the "Clarice", who was well known in our ports, called at Geographe Bay. On his previous voyage his ship had been captured and had been destroyed by the Confederate cruiser "Alabama", he and his crew set ashore at the nearest port; nothing daunted he took command of the "Clarice" and had so far pursued his voyage in safety.

A visitor to these shores in 1857 was John Hempstead, now master of the ship "Vesper". He called again in May, 1860, after being out eighteen months, but had secured very little oil. He had trouble in keeping his men together, several having deserted while at the Vasse. His wife Harriet stayed at Wonnerrup for the winter with her mother (the widowed Mrs. Layman was now Mrs. Rbt. Hepingstone), while the "Catherine" his ship (on this voyage) hunted whales in the seas round the Rosemary Islands. On his return in November he reported that he had killed 25 whales but that the sharks had devoured the largest portion of them.

In 1870 fourteen American whalers were reported at the ports of Western Australia, seven in 1876, none in 1880 and seven in 1885. During these years the whalers operated mainly in the seas south of Albany, hunting sperm whale from Cape Leeuwin, and eastward in the Bight.

In November 1870 the Consular Agent of the United States at Albany, stated "that in the last two years whaling operations off the coast have proved most remunerative to the adventurers concerned, as several ships have returned from whence they came (New Bedford) full of oil. The last vessel the "Vigilant" sailed from this port in January last (having been away two years) with fourteen thousand barrels of sperm oil. She is commanded by Captain Baker who is designated among his friends as Commodore of the whaling squadron stationed off the coast of New Holland." On this subject the Inquirer remarked—"If so, what a lesson to the energetic capitalists of the Colony. For here, outside the threshold of our door, is unlimited wealth, taken annually by a strange nation thousands of miles away".

The visits of American whalers to the lonely shores of this State made it easily the safest and sure way for ticket-of-leave men to escape and indeed it is certain that a number did so. The most famous escape of a prisoner was that of James Boyle O'Reilly. This young man, an ardent Irish patriot, had enlisted in the 10th Hussars at Drogheda in Ireland, with the intention of attracting Irish soldiers to the Revolutionary Movement, but his activities were discovered

in 1866. He was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Thus it was, but in 1867 he was sent to Western Australia and to a road camp at Koagulup on the Bunbury Vasse Road. Because of O'Reilly's outstanding qualities of character and education, he was made acting constable and as such took Warden Henry Woodman's weekly report to the Bunbury depot. Consequently it was not difficult for O'Reilly to contact the Roman Catholic Priest of the Parish, Father Patrick McCabe, to whom O'Reilly revealed his plans to escape in the Western Australian bush. "It is an excellent way to commit suicide," said Father McCabe who knew the Australian bush. "Wait a while, I will think of a better plan". Patrick Maguire, an Irish-born farmer of Dardanup, was the choice of the priest, as a man willing and able to help in his designs. After five months Maguire, who had taken a contract to clear the site of what is the present Bunbury racecourse, contrived to meet O'Reilly and tell him the details of the planned escape, which was for O'Reilly to be picked up by one of the American whaling ships in February and to be carried to a safe port.

A few weeks after this meeting, on December 27th, 1868, O'Reilly attempted to commit suicide by cutting the veins of his arm! Why at this time did O'Reilly attempt suicide? And why was it not reported to the authorities at Fremantle?

For many months Warden Henry Woodman and the likeable young convict had worked closely together, O'Reilly being somewhat segregated from the other convicts because of his position as acting constable. Hence it was that he was accepted socially by Woodman's family which included the attractive daughter Jessie. The two young people fell deeply and desperately in love and it was no doubt the terrible alternatives that faced O'Reilly which made him attempt his own life; to stay in Western Australia for many years as a convict or to escape and lose the person dearest to him. This was his choice. As Warden Woodman did not report the attempted suicide Boyle was able to stay at the road camp. No one can say what emotions surged in his mind and heart at this time, but we do know he became more and more determined to escape.

In early February Maguire again contacted O'Reilly asking him if he were ready. The plan then outlined was for O'Reilly to leave his hut at the Koagulup Camp at about ten o'clock at night, make his way to a point just east of Picton Junction, there to await his rescuers who would take him on horseback to the shores of the estuary, from where a boat would convey him out to sea for a rendezvous with the whaling vessel "Vigilant", Captain Baker, master, who was expected to clear Bunbury on the afternoon of

February 15th. Maguire and a friend, Thomas Mulligan, duly arrived and the three rode to the mouth of the Collier River where the boat lay. Mulligan then returned home, but three other men are said to have been there in attendance. The party rowed down the estuary past its outlet into Koombana Bay and the Port of Bunbury, and then steered northward without sighting the "Vigilant". O'Reilly particularly seems to have suffered greatly from thirst induced by the summer sun. So it was decided to pull to shore, where the Fenian was concealed in the bush, while Maguire proceeded to the house of Thomas Jackson, the keeper of a herd of buffaloes, to obtain food and drink. In the meantime O'Reilly was able to relieve his thirst by eating the flesh of a possum which he had succeeded in capturing. Maguire returned at nightfall with food and water and after a short stay departed, promising to return early next morning, which he did. From a look-out on the top of a sandhill the "Vigilant" was sighted heading north. Quickly launching the boat, they began the long row toward the whaling vessel. When the "Vigilant" was only two miles away she changed course and moved not toward them, but away and continued to do so until out of sight. The disheartened party returned to shore where Maguire left O'Reilly safely hidden in a thicket about half an hour's walk from Jackson's place with whom he had made arrangements for the Fenian to be supplied with food and drink. The former, who was neither Irish nor Catholic, had agreed to do this. Mr. Jackson told O'Reilly that at "Parkfield" there was a battered and warped dory, which the Fenian made seaworthy by caulking the seams with paper bark. Recklessly O'Reilly made the long, dangerous trip down the estuary into Koombana Bay, unobserved, where again he sighted the "Vigilant" and which again belied its name.

Making his way to shore he trudged back to his sanctuary, the thicket, where for five more days he waited the return of Maguire, who brought a letter from Father McCabe, who had made an arrangement with Captain Gifford of the "Gazelle" to pick up Boyle O'Reilly within a few days, together with a ticket-of-leave man, who suspecting that Maguire was implicated in the convict's escape, demanded that he be included in the party.

On the night of March 3rd, when Assistant Superintendent of Police, Timperly, was penning a report about the escape of the Fenian on the "Vigilant" (the generally accepted opinion was that he had escaped on that ship), O'Reilly, the ticket-of-leave man, Maguire, Mulligan and the Jacksons pushed the boat into the sea for the row to the rendezvous with the "Gazelle". This time things went smoothly. Towards evening two sailing vessels were sighted, the "Clarice" and the "Gazelle"; as the latter drew near a voice shouted, "Boyle O'Reilly come on board". To John Boyle O'Reilly

on the deck of the "Gazelle" Maguire shouted "God bless you, don't forget us, and don't mention our names until you know it's all over".

O'Reilly finally reached America via Liverpool, from whence he coolly made his way to America as an ordinary emigrant, becoming later editor and part proprietor of a Boston newspaper. His first book of verse, "Songs of the Southern Seas", was dedicated to Captain Gifford, Master of the ship which rescued him.

No one read with greater interest a notice posted on the Bulletin Board at the Telegraph Office at Fremantle at six-thirty on the morning of 29th March, 1876, an announcement of the arrival of the whaling barge "Catalpa", George S. Anthony, Master, than a Mr. J. Collins, a visitor to the Colony and who appeared to be a man of means. This gentleman immediately went to Bunbury by mail coach where he found that the crew of the "Catalpa" were very discontented and attempting to desert. Four of them took a boat forcibly and made off for the bush. Three of them were brought back in irons and put in irons on board and the fourth was confined in the local gaol. Mr. "Collins" and Captain Anthony sailed from Bunbury to Fremantle in the coastal steam the "Georgette", no doubt being interested indeed in the coast line south of Fremantle.

Thus a daring, well-planned and costly venture was going according to plan; a plan conceived and carried out by a committee of the "Clan Na Gael" headed by James Devoy, who had taken the advice of Boyle O'Reilly that the rescue of the Fenian prisoners could best be effected by equipping a whaling vessel which could cruise along the Western Australian coast without arousing suspicion. Twenty-five thousand dollars was raised, with which was bought the whaler "Catalpa". She was fitted for a whaling cruise with Captain George C. Anthony as Master, who was told to make landfall at Bunbury in the autumn of 1876.

John J. Breslin (who was in fact our friend Mr. Collins) and Thomas Desmond were ordered to go to Australia and place themselves in communication with the prisoners, Martin Harrington, Thomas Darragh, James McNally alias Wilson, Martin Joseph Hogan, Robert Cranston, and Thomas Henry Hassett. The last-named had earlier escaped from the convict gangs but had been recaptured, after being at large for two months. Cranston was the gaol messenger and thus had a great deal of freedom. Thomas Desmond, on arriving in the State, took up employment at his trade, that of carriage making, while Breslin became a popular figure in Fremantle and Perth and was shown over the interior of the prison by Mr. Doonan the Superintendent, and had had little difficulty in getting into communication with the prisoners.

Within a few days of their arrival at Fremantle final arrangements were made, horses and buggies hired to carry the prisoners

to Rockingham, the place chosen for the escape. As the men, being well-behaved political prisoners, had gained the confidence of the authorities they were employed on outside jobs. On Easter Monday James Wilson walked to the South Jetty where Michael Darragh and removing the furniture at the official Marine Residence on Hampton Road, Hogan who was painting dropped his brush, Darragh and Hassett (who were gardening) threw away their spades. All made their way to the waiting carriage and horses somewhere between the old cemetery and the piggery and made all haste to Rockingham, where Captain Anthony in a whale-boat with a crew of coloured men awaited them. Their embarkation was observed by a local settler who rode into Fremantle to report to the authorities. John Stone, Superintendent of Water Police, ordered a boat under command of Coxswain Miles, south to search for the fugitives. In the meantime the S.S. "Georgette" had been commissioned as a war steamer, left Fremantle at 9 p.m. having on board a detachment of enrolled pensioners and a body of policemen. At daylight next morning the "Georgette" sighted a barge standing south. Two hours later she drew alongside. The vessel turned out to be the "Catalpa" flying the American flag. It was noticed that one of her whale-boats was missing. The mate Samuel P. Smith refused to allow Stone on board to search, saying—"Don't know, got no instructions, but guess you'd better not anyhow". As the "Georgette" was short of coal she returned to Fremantle, sighting the police boat whose coxswain was ordered to continue cruising along the coast. Soon after noon the "Catalpa" was observed by the crew of the police boat to pick up a whale-boat. On their return to Fremantle the Governor ordered the "Georgette" to sea again to demand the surrender of the absconders. The excitement in Fremantle and Perth was by this time intense. A fatigue party of pensioners was set to coal the "Georgette", provisions laid in for one week and a twelve-pound howitzer mounted and a detachment of police embarked. All being ready by 11 p.m. the steamer set sail, early next morning, sighting a vessel bearing S.S.E. On nearing her the steamer fired a shot under her stern whereupon the "Stars and Stripes" were hoisted and she continued under full sail. The "Georgette" gained rapidly on the "Catalpa", firing a shot across her bows, the usual sign to "heave to". As the two vessels were now within hailing distance a parley ensued between the Superintendent of Water Police Stone and Captain Anthony who refused to admit that he had prisoners on board, stated that he was on the high seas and that his flag the "Stars and Stripes" protected him. He refused to allow his ship to be boarded and as Stone had orders to threaten as much as he liked but not to use any violence, he had perforce to allow the barge to sail on her way, and return to Fremantle. In America the Fenians received a tumultuous welcome.

The activities of the American whalers in the last years were well covered by the local Albany newspapers, the first to be published was the "Albany Mail", which wrote in 1883—"The barque 'Bartholomew Gosnold', 257 tons, W. H. Poole, Master, left New Bedford on April 23rd, 1881, for a voyage in the Atlantic and other oceans. Experienced gales of wind and thick fog June 16, then left for the west ground in the North Atlantic, fell in with sperm whales on August 3rd and in a short time took 240 barrels, past the Azores and in sight of them took five small whales. Arrived at Tenerife (Canary Islands) October 23rd with three hundred of sperm. Recruited ship and lost several men by desertion and cleared for another cruise. Passed Cape of Good Hope January 2, 1882. Saw right whales in South East Cape. Had one boat capsized and caught no whales. Passed Desolation Island, arrived King George's Sound March 23, and put into Albany for recruits etc. Lost by desertion fourth mate and four seamen. Left May 24, short handed for the whaling grounds. Took 155 barrels, returning to Albany June 16, where all deserters but one had been recaptured through the indefatigable efforts of W. J. Gilliam, American Consul, who took very much interest in securing the runaways and by the police, who were paid £3 to £4 per man as a reward.

The troubles in recruiting and keeping crews that beset the American captains can in part be attributed to the fact that in a country undergoing tremendous industrial expansion, wages on shore were much higher than on whaling-ships, thus making the whaling companies more and more dependent on foreign crews.

In the "Albany Mail" on May, 1883, it was reported that "nearly the whole of the crew of the 'Bartholomew Gosnold' were imprisoned for refusing to work for any other captain than W. H. Poole, who had been taken ill. They received sentences of twelve weeks' imprisonment and put to work on the roads. Captain Hammond who took Poole's place was forced to seek a crew as far afield as the Cook Islands where he engaged untrained Kanakas, some of whom had never been to sea before. On his return to Albany it was reported that the Cook Islanders rendering of their songs of Zion was much admired in the local Chapel. In March, 1883, the barque 'Moro Castle' arrived to bring stores to the whalers and to take their oil home. Messrs. Tucker & Co., of New Bedford, the owners of the vessels, had decided to keep a fleet of five or six on the south coast".

In June, 1884, several columns in the "Albany Mail" were given over to the court case of the Master of the whaler "Bertha", Ben Cleveland, Master, versus seven Portuguese seamen for refusing to go on board the vessel. These men who were shipped as crew at Fayal claimed that they had signed for six months only, whereas

the Master of the "Bertha" claimed that they had signed for the whole voyage. The Rev. T. C. Laurence appeared for the seamen whilst T. Dymes, American Consul, appeared for the captain.

The Magistrate, R. C. Loftie, decided in favour of Ben Cleveland and ordered that the men were to be taken on board the ship again. Mr. Loftie recommended that the Rev. Laurence and Father Mateu advise the men to sign articles and join the ship, the captain giving assurances that the men would not be ill-treated or punished.

On the evening of the 9th inst. a meeting was called by Mr. Maley to protest against the action of the authorities in sending the seven Portuguese seamen on board the whaler "Bertha". Mr. Maley addressed the meeting and concluded by calling for three cheers for the Portuguese which, it was said, was responded to feebly by a few jarrkins. Maley then disappeared through a fence. The services of a band having been procured, a large number of the leading townspeople marched up to the Residency making a demonstration in support of Mr. Loftie. After being thanked by that gentleman and God Save the Queen having been played, the company dispersed.

In 1888 only two whalers called at King George's Sound, the "Canton", 300 tons, Howland, Master, and the "Platina", 203 tons, Slocum, Master. The latter had seven cases of desertion, five of these had been recaptured. In January, 1890, the "Albany Advertiser" had advice from the Master of the "Canton" that she had fished in South African waters, but she did not return to these shores.

The American whaling industry continued for a number of years but did not recover its former prestige, as investors were loath to convert to steam and it was left to Norway to assume the leadership.

The "Charles W. Morgan" in which Nelson Cole Haley made his famous voyage, made her last whaling cruise in 1920. The stoutly-built ship was in active service as a whaler and had her share of the trials and tribulations apt to occur to a sailing ship. She is the last of the American whaling vessels and she now lies proudly in a bed of gravel at the Maritime Museum at Mystic, Connecticut, the chief tourist attraction of that State.