



Voyage of the Hougoumont and Life at Fremantle: The Story of an Irish Rebel

Thomas McCarthy Fennell

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" Like many 19th century Irish immigrants, Thomas McCarthy Fennell arrived in the United States to start a new life. Unlike other Irishmen, however, Fennell arrived on America's West coast by ship. He was a thirty year old ex-convict recently discharged from an Australian prison. As a condition of release he could not return to his native land. His crime? Treason, or as the Crown's trial judge put it, "compassing" against Queen Victoria. In the tumultuous 1860s Fennell organized Fenians – Irish and Irish-American Nationalists who sought by force to rid Ireland of Britain's dominance. He fought and was wounded in the 1867 Uprising, hardly a footnote in history, yet England's great Prime Minister, Gladstone, would refer to it as "the first streak of dawn." And indeed it added to the foundation that would eventually lead to the Republic of Ireland. Fennell was transported to Australia on the last prison ship dispatched there by Britain, the Hougoumont, a converted merchant vessel. On board for three months with 280 other convicts, Fennell and a small group of Fenians including John Boyle O'Reilly and John Sarsfield Casey (The Galtee Boy) stayed together. They prayed, sang and entertained each other. They even published a weekly newspaper. Fennell was in Western Australia, a colony that wanted convict labor, for over three years; first at Fremantle Prison and then on a chain gang. Pardoned in 1871 by Victoria, he made his way to America where he eventually settled in Elmira, New York. He remained active in the movement and was the one to propose the famous Catalpa Rescue of 1876. This is the true story of Fennell's incarceration, in his own words. Here he describes the humiliations and horrors of being a political prisoner thrown in with murderers, rapists and other criminals of the worst kind. He recounts floggings, daily strip searches and death at sea. Yet he and his fellow Fenians triumphed in the end, and Fennell would write his story. Now, Fennell's 70,000 word manuscript is available to the public for the first time. Articles by Walter McGrath and Matthew Bermingham accompany the text, along with other supplementary information, extensive footnotes, photographs and illustrations. What's being said about this book - "With a useful introductory essay, the editorial annotations, a good selection of illustrations, a selection of Fenian poetry and a number of articles to provide context, Fennell and King have made a valuable contribution to Western Australian history." H.A. Willis, The West Australian "You are to be congratulated on the high standard of the edition. It will be an important addition to the National Library's collection." Noel Kissane, Keeper of the Manuscripts National Library of Ireland "To have a record of daily life in the Prison during the 19th century and in such detail – is of inestimable value to us." Rob Besford, Fremantle Prison, WA "This voyage is of additional significance as it brought the last shipload of convicts to the Australian penal settlement." The Irish Times "I'd like to compliment you on bringing such a wonderful new source of Fenian biography to light so expertly." Keith Amos, author of The Fenians In Australia "I am pleased to add this to our collection as it will be extremely useful for research on the Fenians. There are so few first hand accounts of convict/Fenian life, making this all the more important." David Whiteford, The Batty Library, Australia "Marie King and Philip Fennell have combined their efforts to provide historical context and then present the purest form of these memoirs." John Benson, Pawling News Chronicle

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