

150th Anniversary Of Death On Gallows Of Innocent Pair Points Up Changes, Progress

Atty. Luke F. Ryan, former mayor, today drew attention to the historical significance of the fact that today marks the 150th anniversary of the trial and conviction in Northampton of Dominic Daly and Thomas Halligan for murder on April 24, 1806, in the following statement:

"As a lawyer and a student of the history of Northampton, it seems to me appropriate to direct the attention of our fellow citizens to the historical significance of today's date, April 24, 1956. It

marks the 150th anniversary of the trial and conviction, in Northampton, of Dominic Daly and Thomas Halligan, two natives of Ireland, for murder.

"It's significance, from an historical viewpoint, is not so much concerned, in my opinion, with the fact that these poor men were later proved innocent—for other innocent men in many eras have been convicted of

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crimes they did not commit. Nor is the real significance to be found in the fact that these victims of prejudice were Irish and Catholic—for throughout history, members of minority groups have always been the brunt of prejudice and injustice because they were different.

"No, the true significance of their martyrdom rests on these two factors: First, on the Christian fortitude and high spiritual qualities with which they met and endured injustice and death; and second, on the changed circumstances, legal, political and social, which happily exists in this community and Commonwealth today, 150 years later.

"The nobility of mind and heart which characterized Daly and Halligan in their awful predicament is no better summed up than in their own words in their letter to Fr. Jean Cheverus of Boston (later Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux). They wrote, 'We adore in the judgment of men, liable to be deceived, the decrees of Providence. If we are not guilty of the crime imputed to us, we have committed other sins, and to expiate them, we accept death with resignation. We are solicitous only about our salvation; it is in your hands; come to our assistance.'"

"The subsequent events of Cardinal Cheverus's stay in Northampton, living with the convicted men in the old jail on Pleasant St. until the day of their execution, is another story of sublime adherence to duty and Christian charity. There were great men in those days.

"The second significant factor for us today is probably the most important—the improvement in the social and legal standards in regard to the treatment and the rights of minority groups. Today, the one-day 'kangaroo trial' and conviction of Daly and Halligan, or anyone else, for a capital crime would be impossible.

"Today, we are all minorities; Catholic, Protestant, Jew and unbeliever, Irish, English, German, French, Italian, Polish, and whatever. No single nationality group or religious persuasion dominates or can dominate the social or political scene. This fact of history, as well as the awakened good will and brotherhood instincts of the citizenry, has, in a sense, required us all to recognize and put into practice the golden rule, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!'

"The laws, too have changed and improved to implement the changed social and political conditions over these 150 years. They now require that counsel be assigned by the court in all capital cases and paid for by the state. The defendant has a right to the issuance by the court of compulsory process, without cost, to bring in witnesses favorable to the defense, the judges themselves are chosen for their impartiality and learning in the law, the defendant can take the stand and testify in his own behalf, the courts are as independent and unprejudiced as the mind of man can make them, and lastly, a defendant is given adequate time and opportunity to prepare a defense.

"Such is the significance of this day, April 24, 1956. We can all view with satisfaction the enormous progress which has marked these past 150 years and though all is not yet perfect, we can all look forward to the future with confidence for the future of our city, our state, and our nation; and remembering the past and its direful lessons, we can resolve to ever be on guard to cherish and protect the rights of all men as we would our own—for they are our own!"