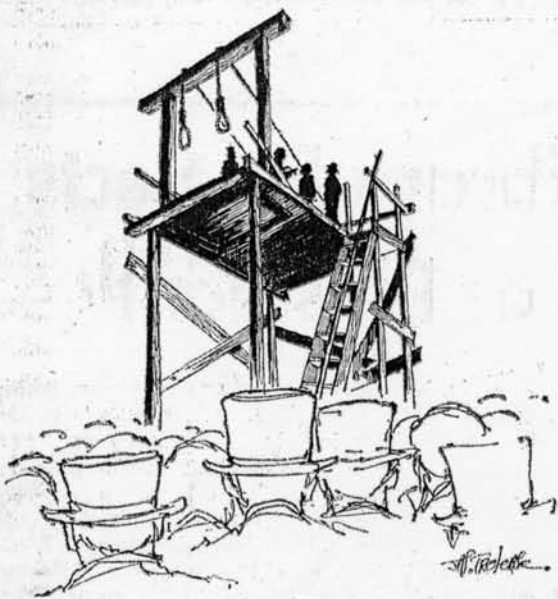


A Case of Bigotry

By WAYNE PHANEUF

Before there were any Mayors Sullivan or Dunphy, before the magnificent Catholic churches graced just about every town in Massachusetts, things were very, very different.

Anti-Catholic feelings, anti-Irish feelings, ran high,



and at the county seat in Northampton prejudice hung out as plain as the Saturday wash.

Into this climate wandered Dominic Dailey and James Halligan, two Boston Irishmen who would never wander away.

The two were arrested and charged with the murder, in Wilbraham, of a mailman named Marcus Lyons, who was killed in November 1805.

In April of 1806, before a packed courtroom, the men were tried and convicted, although the evidence was largely circumstantial.

Sent to Jail

Dailey and Halligan were remanded to the jail after a sentence of death was imposed. The men were to be hanged on June 5, 1806.

Whenever a sentence of death was imposed, it was customary for a clergyman to preach a sermon for the souls of the condemned. But Dailey and Halligan presented a problem. They were Catholic.

Since there was no Catholic priest around, the Irish prisoners sent a letter to the Rev. John Cheverus of Boston, who came to their aid.

Father Cheverus must have felt like Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem when he arrived in Northampton. There was "no room at the inn" for a Catholic.

He spent the first days of his stay in prison with the condemned men.

On the day of the execution Northampton was jammed with humanity. A crowd estimated at 15,000, the largest ever, had come to see the Irishmen hang.

When he saw the huge crowd, Father Cheverus spoke to the multitude from First Church.

Accompany Men

He chastized the women who had accompanied the men to the execution.

"Are there then men, to whom the death of their fellow beings is a spectacle of pleasure, an object of curiosity?" Father Cheverus said.

"But you especially, O women! What has induced you to come to this place?"

He told the women "I blush for you, your eyes are full of murder."

Not a woman attended the hanging after Father Cheverus' remarks. They waited for their menfolk away from the execution site.

By saying Mass for the condemned men, Father Cheverus was the first Catholic priest to hold services in Northampton.

Named a Cardinal

In later life he would be made a cardinal, and has been proposed for beatification, the first step to being named a saint.

And what of the two Irishmen, Dailey and Halligan? They marched stoically to the gallows, impressing the ghoulish crowd with their cool demeanor.

Years after the execution, a man gave a deathbed confession that he was the real killer of the mailman.