

# 'Justice' late for Irish pair

It was 199 years ago that Daley and Halligan were hanged for a murder they didn't commit.

By FRED CONTRADA

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NORTHAMPTON — With thunder and lightning as punctuation, members of the current criminal justice system yesterday stood on the spot where two Irishmen were hanged nearly two centuries ago and read a proclamation exonerating them. James Halligan and Dominic Daley were sent to the gallows on what is now Hospital Hill on June 6, 1806. Their conviction and execution has since come to be recognized as the product of rampant prejudice against Irish Catholics in that era as well as one of Northampton's darkest moments.

With umbrellas shielding them from the rain, Hampshire County Sheriff Robert J. Garvey, District Court Judge W. Michael Ryan, Register of Probate David E. Sullivan, and Hampshire Probate Court Chief Probation Officer William O'Riordan took turns reading a 1984 proclamation by then-Gov. Michael S. Dukakis decrying the treatment of Daley and Halligan and removing "any stigma and disgrace associated with their names."

According to historical accounts, Daley and Halligan were in the wrong place at the wrong time when Marcus Lyon was found bludgeoned to death in a stream in Wilbraham. A 13-year-old boy who lived near the murder site told authorities he had seen two men acting suspiciously on the nearby toll road. The boy picked Daley out of a lineup as one of the men he had seen. Daley and Halligan were the only two men in chains at the lineup.

Because Wilbraham was then part of Hampshire County, the trial took place in Northampton, where the Supreme Judicial Court convened. The court-appointed defense lawyers were given 48 hours to prepare a case. The attorney general's staff had been working on it for months.

The trial took most of April 22, 1806. At the end of the day, the two were found guilty. Father John Cheverus, a Catholic priest, journeyed from Boston to provide the prisoners comfort but was turned away at a local inn because he was a "papist." Cheverus nonetheless celebrated the first Catholic Mass in the city's history at the jail.

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Ryan and O'Riordan said yesterday that everyone who went to St. Michael's School or St. Mary's Church, when he was growing up knew the story of Daley and Halligan. "We were taught by our families about the 'rock on the hill' (a memorial to the two men)," O'Riordan said. "It was passed to my generation and we plan to continue it."