

# Old hangings, current dilemmas

## Daley-Halligan 200th raises questions of injustice today

By SARAH J. HEIM  
Staff Writer

**NORTHAMPTON** — Using the past to understand the present is at the heart of events scheduled to commemorate two men believed wrongly executed by the state two centuries ago.

For months to come, people in the region will be talking and reading about the lives of Dominic Daley and James Halligan, two Irish Catholic immigrants who were convicted of murder and hanged in Northampton 200 years ago.

The Daley & Halligan Bicentennial Committee was established in August to begin planning for a variety of anniversary activ-

ities to celebrate the lives of these two men, who were granted a posthumous pardon in 1984.

Many of the events are intended to stimulate conversation about contemporary issues of prejudice, justice, tolerance, diver-

*“For me, it’s not an Irish issue, it’s an issue of the tolerance and fairness of the trial. ... It makes us all stop and think.”*

*Kay Sheehan, chairwoman,  
Daley & Halligan  
Bicentennial Committee*

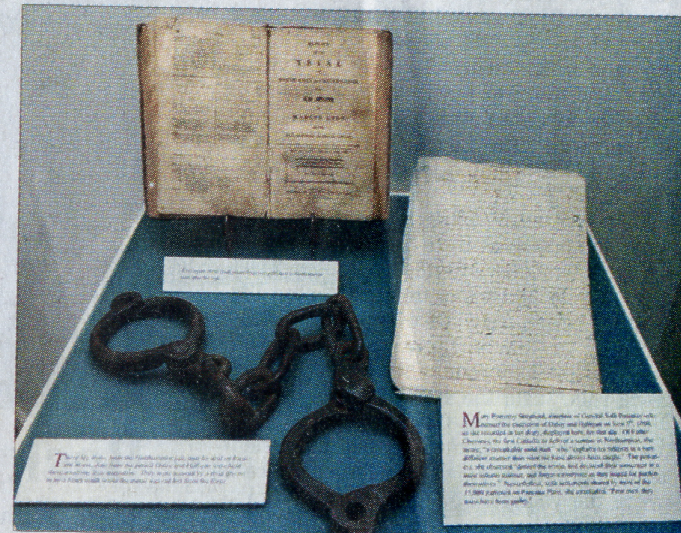
### More on this topic

- Events planned to commemorate Daley and Halligan. B7
- The story of their trial. B7
- On GazetteNet: A review of Michael White’s novel and an easy link to original documents and Historic Northampton’s online archives.

sity and the death penalty.

According to Northampton District Court Judge W. Michael Ryan, who co-chairs the bicentennial panel, when Daley and Halligan were convicted in 1806 — despite a lack of

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**An exhibit at Historic Northampton on the case of Dominic Daley and James Halligan includes court proceedings, leg irons from the period and a diary.**

GORDON DANIEL

# Daley & Halligan events 200th anniversary a time for questions

Here is a list of community events surrounding the Daley & Halligan Bicentennial and "On the Same Page" Community Read Program, including book discussions, lectures, and special events focused on the past and present justice system, immigration, capital punishment, and Celtic heritage.

## Friday

Michael White, author of "The Garden of Martyrs," will kick off the "On the Same Page" Community Read Program at three events:

- 7:30 a.m., Northampton St. Patrick's Association Breakfast at the Clarion Hotel, Route 5, Northampton. For tickets contact Chamber at 584-1900
- 10:30 a.m., memorial ceremony with reading of exoneration proclamation and laying of wreath at the Daley & Halligan Monument Site, West Street, Northampton

- Noon, Greater Easthampton Chamber of Commerce Luncheon at the Clarion Hotel, Route 5, Northampton. For tickets contact Chamber at 527-9414

## Sunday

- Daley & Halligan Bicentennial float in the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade

## March 20

- 7 p.m., Book discussion at Odyssey Book Store-Fiction Club, South Hadley

## March 21

- 10:30 a.m., "Irish Children's Tales," storyteller Diana Norman will share stories from Ireland, along with crafts and snacks, at the Emily Williston Memorial Library, Easthampton

## March 28

- 6:30 p.m., "The Flavors of Ireland," a cooking class and dinner celebrating Irish culinary heritage at 111 Pleasant St., Southampton. \$24 registration fee, preregistration required. Call 529-1600

## March 29

- 7 p.m., Book discussion at Forbes Library, Northampton
- 7 p.m., Book discussion at Meekins Library, Williamsburg

## March 31

- 6 p.m., "Waking Daley & Halligan," a night to honor Daley and Halligan with readings and Irish storytelling, along with a traditional Irish seisiun at The Harp Restaurant, Sunderland Road, North Amherst

## April 2

- 2 p.m., Daley & Halligan dramatic reading and reception with traditional Irish seisiun at Smith College, Wright Hall. Tickets available at State Street Fruit/Cooper's Corner, Smith College, or from Evelyn McCoy at 586-6564

## April 3

- 6:30 p.m., Learn about The Elms College Irish Cultural Center at Easthampton Council on Aging, 19 Union Street, Easthampton

## April 6

- 7 p.m. Book discussion at Roberto's Restaurant, Northampton

## April 10

- 7 p.m., "Death Penalty in Hampshire County: Daley & Halligan to the Present Federal Courts," a panel discussion with Judge W. Michael Ryan, and lawyers William Newman and David Hoose at First Churches, Main Street, Northampton

## April 18

- 6 p.m., Book discussion at Edwards Public Library, Southampton
- 7:30 p.m., Book discussion at Newman Center, North Pleasant Street, Amherst

## April 19

- 12 p.m. - 8 p.m., Celebrate Irish culture with Irish folktales, crafts, music, dancing, a children's program, Forbes Library, Northampton

## April 20

- 3 p.m., Traditional Irish Gaelic children's songs with Caera Aislingeach at Emily Williston Memorial Library, Easthampton

- 6:30 p.m., Celtic concert by Caera Aislingeach at Emily Williston Memorial Library, Easthampton

## April 21

- 7 p.m., Book discussion at Florence Civic Center, Florence

## April 23

- Michael White book readings and discussions

- 2 p.m., Munson Library, South Amherst

- 6:30 p.m., Williston Northampton School, Dodge Room, Reed Campus Center, Easthampton

## April 24

- 6:30 p.m., Book discussion at South Hadley Public Library,

## April 25

- 7 p.m., Book discussion at Amy's Place, Easthampton.

## April 27

- 7 p.m., Book discussion at Jones Library, Amherst

## April 28

- 2 p.m., Book discussion, Lathrop Communities, Bridge Street, Northampton

## May 1

- 9 a.m.-noon, Daley & Halligan: Teaching Tolerance—Lessons from the Past, an educational program focusing on the justice system and contemporary issues raised by the Daley and Halligan case at Old Hampshire Courthouse, Gothic and Main Streets, Northampton.

## June 4

- 3 p.m., Anniversary Mass, St. Mary's Catholic Church, Northampton

- 4:30 p.m., Daley & Halligan tribute reception at Historic Northampton, 46 Bridge St., Northampton. Tickets available at State Street Fruit/Cooper's Corner or through Bicentennial Committee members

## June 5

- 5:30 p.m., Interfaith service for justice and reconciliation at First Churches, Northampton, followed by parade to memorial site, West Street

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evidence — the Irish in Federalist Massachusetts were commonly perceived by locals as savage, brutal and uncivilized.

This stereotype was perpetuated by the British and through local newspaper reports, he said.

Ryan noted that the errors in the Daley and Halligan trial were made by "good people who thought that they were doing everything to ensure these men had a fair trial." Further, he said that the prosecutors "weren't acting maliciously or with evil intent — they thought these fellows were guilty."

"We can look at it and see it differently now," noted Ryan. "We aren't afraid of Irishmen anymore."

However, Ryan drew a few contemporary connections, noting that "some people are afraid of Arabs, or Muslims, or the two women or men holding hands on the streets of Northampton."

Daley and Halligan were pardoned by Gov. Michael Dukakis in 1984. A plaque commemorating the clearing of their names is located on the former Northampton State Hospital site, on a hill just off West Street, near the site where they were hanged.

"We want to educate ourselves on the blinding effect of stereotypes, and examine our views in contemporary life," Ryan said. "We hope that what comes out of this is a second look at our own behavior, and at our own community."

As part of the commemorative effort, an "On the Same Page" Community Read Program has been established, featuring the novel "The Garden of Martyrs" by Michael C. White. The book is a fictionalized account of the Daley and Halligan story, which touches on the topics of religion, immigration, capital punishment, and justice.

Committee members are encouraging the community to read the book and use it as a way to spark discussion. "We want to motivate the community to discuss these issues," said David E. Sullivan, the other Bicentennial co-chair and Hampshire Register of Probate.

Six hundred copies of "The Garden of Martyrs" will be circulating through the libraries in Northampton, Easthampton, Amherst, Williamsburg, Southampton, and South Hadley in the coming months, as well as in churches, cafes, banks and other community gathering places in the Valley.

A number of group book discussions are also scheduled in these cities and towns.

Sullivan noted that one of the largest national debates these days is how Americans welcome, or restrict, immi-

*"We want to educate ourselves on the blinding effect of stereotypes, and examine our views in contemporary life."*

*Judge W. Michael Ryan*

grants coming into the United States. "That debate has been waged for 250 years," he said.

Kay Sheehan, a committee chair, said she has already started to hear discussion of "The Garden of Martyrs" in Northampton.

"I ran into a couple of people in the past week who are reading the book and are so moved by it," she said. Another person she recently saw wanted to get a copy to send to a friend who no longer lives in the city.

"For me, it's not an Irish issue, it's an issue of the tolerance and fairness of the trial," said Sheehan. "It makes us all stop and think."

In addition to using the book as a launching pad for talking about contemporary issues, Historic Northampton has a Daley and Halligan exhibit on display to help stimulate discussion.

The exhibit, on view through the fall, includes the first published record of the trial, manacles from the Northampton jail of that period and a page from the diary of a witness to the hanging.

Kerry Buckley, executive director of Historic Northampton, who is also a committee chairman, said he hopes the historic documents will be used in local schools to explore issues of nativism, anti-Catholicism and the evolving concept of freedom and justice in the United States.

"What we want to emphasize is that you can use local history sources to get at bigger events or issues," Buckley said. "This is a really wonderful case study to examine a lot of these issues."

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