

Memorializing Sacco and Vanzetti in Boston



Taken August 23, 2007. Courtesy of the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society.

Adrienne Marie Naylor
19 December 2008
Professor Green – Public History

'WHO WERE THOSE PEOPLE?' historian Howard Zinn asked a member of the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society in November 2008. Zinn had just delivered a lecture for the benefit of the Society on 'The Meaning of Sacco and Vanzetti' to a crowd of at least 250 people overflowing the Dante Alighieri Italian Cultural Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was taken aback that interest in the case was still alive. 'I didn't know what to expect. I thought, how many people are still interested in Sacco and Vanzetti? Maybe seven? Ten? Fifteen? I can't even—but this place is full!'¹ Accustomed to smaller crowds composed of all the same familiar radical characters of Greater Boston, I, myself, was surprised at the size of the diverse and intergenerational crowd. I recognized less than half of the faces I saw; those belonged to friends and acquaintances involved with a broad array of social and ecological justice struggles. I was not immediately able to account for everyone else's presence, which became a subject of discussion at the Society's next meeting. Where did these people come from? Were the young ones Zinn's students? Were the older ones the Dante's regular crowd, interested in all things Italian? Were the middle-aged ones the archetypical Zinn-loving Cambridge liberals? Did they read about the event on Zinn's website, or in the *Globe* or the *Times*? Did they come for an opportunity to hear the

¹ Howard Zinn lecture, 'The Meaning of Sacco and Vanzetti,' November 7, 2008. Retrieved November 21, 2008, video available from http://saccoandvanzetti.org/zinn_11-7-08.wmv

legendary, aging historian speak or did they come because of a prior interest in Sacco and Vanzetti? Whoever they were, they had packed the Dante for the first time in years on account of two dead anarchists and a legal case over eighty years old.

In May 1920, police arrested Italian immigrant workers and anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, questioning them about their citizenship and their radicalism. The two were charged, held, tried, convicted and sentenced to death. They were accused of the murders of a paymaster and his security guard during a payroll robbery that many believe they did not commit. Public opinion on the case was polarized. Even before Celestino Madeiros, a known criminal and member of a gang specializing in armed robbery, confessed to his participation in the crime and the absence of Sacco and Vanzetti from it, the evidence against the defendants was shaky. Both had multiple alibis, but the witnesses accounting for their whereabouts during the crime, workers who were not native speakers of English, were mocked and dismissed as liars by the court. The anti-immigrant, anti-anarchist prejudice of the judge, jury and prosecution alike was profound. Judge Webster Thayer, who not only tried the two, but presided over and gleefully denied all motions for a new trial, was quoted as calling the two 'anarchistic bastards.'² One of the jurors, in conversation with a friend who believed the pair to be innocent, snapped,

² Paul Avrich, Sacco and Vanzetti: the Anarchist Background (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3.

'Damn them, they ought to hang anyway!'³ The prosecution regularly dwelled on the citizenship and radicalism of the defendants, factors that had little to do with a well-orchestrated payroll robbery in South Braintree, Massachusetts.

The cause of Sacco and Vanzetti became known around the world, setting off protests, strikes and riots from Chicago to Buenos Aires to New York to Johannesburg to Paris to Tokyo, pressuring the governor of Massachusetts to call off the execution. Nevertheless, shortly after midnight on August 23, 1927 in Charlestown State Prison, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts put Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti to death in the electric chair, ending their seven-year imprisonment. Their trial, riddled as it was with prejudice, is widely considered to be one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in American history. The two condemned anarchists are often invoked as a symbol of protest against the inequity of American society and its criminal justice system, inspiring works of drama, art, and music from the time of their execution to the present. One such work, a bas-relief by the famous sculptor Gutzon Borglum, was presented for permanent, public display on the Boston Common to the governments of the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on the 10th, 20th and 30th anniversaries of the execution. Each time, the work and its subjects were denied the use of public space in Boston.

³ Bruce Watson, Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind (New York: Viking, 2007), 249.

Then, on the 50th anniversary in 1977, Governor Dukakis issued a proclamation that the two had not received a fair trial and that 'any stigma and disgrace should be forever removed from their names.' On the 70th anniversary of the execution in 1997, Mayor Menino of Boston and acting Governor Cellucci of Massachusetts met in the Boston Public library and, repeating the assertion that Sacco and Vanzetti had not received a fair trial due to the bias against them, formally 'accepted' Borglum's bas-relief, announcing the intent of the city to cast the artwork in bronze and place it outdoors in a more public place by the year 2000.⁴ As of this writing, the bas-relief remains indoors.

'THERE'S NO STORY IN IT ... Just a couple of wops in a jam.'
 - city editor of the *New York Call*.⁵

Garnering publicity for the cause of the condemned workers began as an uphill battle, a battle fought by the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. The group, made up of the co-defendants' friends and comrades, had formed shortly after the Italian immigrants were arrested in May 1920. Well-organized and highly efficient, the Committee's work intensified so that by 1925, they had moved to a 2nd floor office at 256 Hanover Street in Boston's North End, then the epicenter of working class Italian life. With a broad and ever rotating cast of characters, the Defense Committee

⁴ Thomas Grillo, "Sculpture to remind of Sacco, Vanzetti," *The Boston Globe*, August 20, 1997.

⁵ Bruce Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind* (New York: Viking, 2007), 56.

served as a clearinghouse for information and agitation, international outreach, a massive legal defense fund, and correspondence with individuals and institutions alike. The driving force of the Committee was always its treasurer, anarchist Aldino Felicani. 'Friendly, open, and guileless,'⁶ Aldino Felicani 'talked to everybody, listened to everybody, learned from everybody.'⁷ An immigrant himself and a printer by trade, Felicani was a close personal friend of Sacco and Vanzetti. Socialist labor organizer Mary Donovan acted as secretary, while anarchist shoe worker Joe Moro also performed secretarial duties for the Committee. Though it was, from its beginnings, an organization made up of working class radicals, its composition altered as the case gained publicity. Most notably, journalist Gardner Jackson, a liberal sympathetic to labor and radical causes, quit his job at the *Boston Globe* to work full time for the Committee. 'Jackson brought in a respectable, social, liberal element,' Felicani recalled. 'We were now able to reach people we never could have dreamed [of] reaching before.'⁸ Harvard law school professor, later Supreme Court Justice, Felix Frankfurter was so incensed by the Sacco and Vanzetti matter that he risked his career and reputation by not only being an outspoken public figure and writer on the case, but by

⁶ Francis Russell, Sacco & Vanzetti: The Case Resolved (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

⁷ Oreste Fabrizi in Paul Avrich, Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 140.

⁸ Bruce Watson, Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind (New York: Viking, 2007), 266.

significantly funding and advising the Committee's work. Despite all their efforts, the Defense Committee ultimately did not prevent the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Notwithstanding this crushing defeat, their work on behalf of the anarchist workers was not over in 1927.

I do not remember when or where I first heard of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, but I know that it was after I became an anarchist myself. The more I learned about the case, the more infuriated, disappointed and unsurprised I was that an episode so central to 20th century world history could be obscured and forgotten, left out of textbooks, kept out of classrooms and out of the public memory of my generation, especially when its lessons are just as relevant now as they were 80 years ago. Immigrant workers are still scapegoated for the nation's social and economic ills, discriminated against, rounded up, detained and deported in the name of national security. The state is still acutely interested in pre-emptive repression of dissent, recently seen in the case of the RNC 8 in the Twin Cities, who, for the crime of organizing food, housing and other logistics for protestors, are each charged with four conspiratorial felony counts, two of which have terrorism enhancements.⁹ The overwhelming majority of developed nations have abolished the death penalty; its retention in the U.S. keeps the United States in alarmingly poor company with other

⁹ For information and news on their plight, see <http://rnc8.org/>

countries notorious for human rights abuses. And so it came to pass in spring 2007 that Boston's young, historically minded anarchists joined forces with a broader, intergenerational coalition of community, labor and immigrant rights organizers, anarchist historians, archivists and activists to create the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society. For two years, we have been organizing annual marches and events in memory of our two martyred comrades. In December 2007 we replaced a plaque at 256 Hanover Street to the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee that had been put up in 1976 and removed by unknown hands in the 1980s. We have also been working with the city to make the long-promised public memorial to Sacco and Vanzetti a reality. Through working with historians who have dedicated years of their lives to the study of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, I came to learn that the Society was not first in demanding official recognition and reparation for the wrongs committed against the two immigrants; the struggle to memorialize the two workers began shortly after the electric chair took their lives.

The Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee met August 31, 1927, a week and a day after the execution of their comrades, to outline their future work. The meeting's minutes outline a five-point plan, the last of which is 'Memorial to Sacco and Vanzetti.'¹⁰ Yet when the Defense

¹⁰ Minutes of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, August 31

Committee's September 1927 bulletin was printed, the fifth point was changed to 'Generally proclaiming the vindication of Sacco and Vanzetti.'¹¹ Similarly, the Citizens National Committee for Sacco and Vanzetti, a group of affluent liberals operating in New York City, outlined their post-execution plan in six points, the sixth being 'To create a memorial for Sacco and Vanzetti.'¹² The Defense Committee, receiving word of these plans, found the first five points objectionable enough to send two of its members, Mary Donovan and labor organizer Powers Hapgood, to the November 7, 1927 meeting of the Citizens National Committee. Explaining the objections of the Defense Committee, Boston's broader radical community and the families of the condemned workers, the result of this meeting was an entirely different five-point plan for the group, which also changed its name to the Sacco-Vanzetti National League. Though it was not a point to which the Defense Committee objected, the new five-point plan omitted mention of a memorial.¹³

Meanwhile, Boston's wealthier supporters of Sacco and Vanzetti, Gardner Jackson and Felix Frankfurter, were

1927. Felicani,

(Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

¹¹ The Official Bulletin of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, September 1927, page 5. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

¹² Citizens National Committee for Sacco and Vanzetti, August 23, 1927. Statement. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.

¹³ Sacco-Vanzetti National League, 7 November 1927. Meeting minutes. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.

concocting their own memorial to the dead. They envisioned a House of Free Speech or Freedom House in memory of Sacco and Vanzetti for liberal organizing, meeting and lecturing. It was to be established on Beacon Hill behind the Massachusetts State House and opened on the 1-year anniversary of the execution. Desiring a large piece of artwork to go over the front entrance, they sought out sculptor Gutzon Borglum, creator of Mt. Rushmore, and longtime friend of Frankfurter. Frankfurter was dubious as to how willing Borglum would be to memorialize two immigrant radicals, given the sculptor's extreme patriotism and his former association with the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁴ After meeting with Jackson, Frankfurter and Felicani,¹⁵ however, Borglum became convinced of the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti, writing to Jackson,

If two innocent men have been electrocuted under order of the American courts, much as I love my country and always shall, above any and all things ... I will do anything I can to make the martyrdom of these men a burning, living protest against the injustice practiced in the name of modern jurisprudence!¹⁶

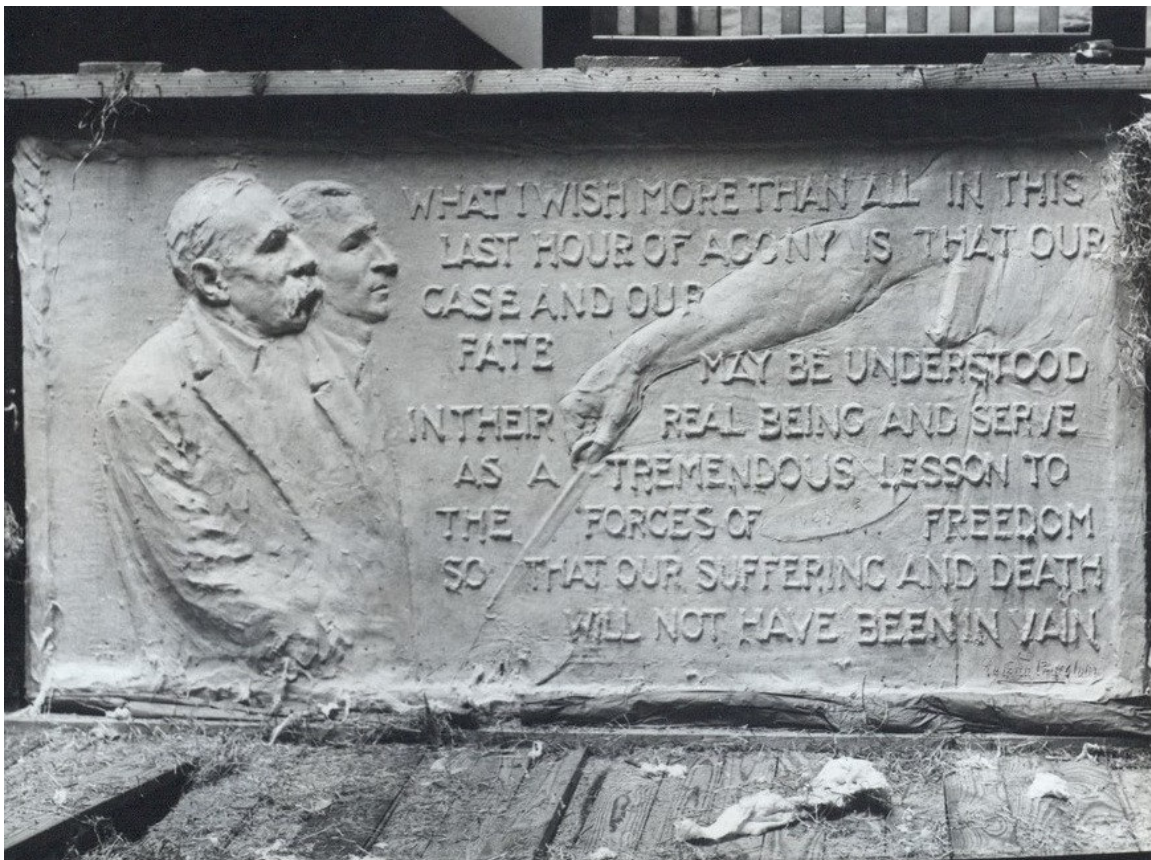
Refusing pay for his labor, Borglum met the deadline and sent a plaster draft of his work to Boston for the Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Committee's 1-year commemorative event.

¹⁴ Howard Shaff and Audrey Karl Shaff, Six Wars at a Time: The Life and Times of Gutzon Borglum, Sculptor of Mount Rushmore (Sioux Falls, S.D.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1985), 5-6.

¹⁵ Mary Borglum to Prof. G. Louis Joughin, June 4, 1944. The Borglum Archives, Corpus Christi, TX.

¹⁶ Howard Shaff and Audrey Karl Shaff, Six Wars at a Time: The Life and Times of Gutzon Borglum, Sculptor of Mount Rushmore (Sioux Falls, S.D.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1985), 252.

The Memorial Committee was a prestigious assemblage of swells plus Aldino Felicani. Together they arranged for a distinguished line-up of speakers and attracted 2,000 people to the 'orderly'¹⁷ meeting on August 23, 1928. Elizabeth Glendower Evans unveiled Borglum's 3.5' x 7' bas-relief at the conclusion of the event in Boston, held at the Scenic Auditorium on 12 Berkeley Street. Afterwards, the plaster work was placed in storage.



August 22, 1928. *Associated Press Photo*

As for what became of the Freedom House, it is like so many mysteries surrounding the Sacco and Vanzetti case. The minutes of the executive committee of New York City's Sacco

¹⁷ "MOURN SACCO AND VANZETTI; Two Thousand Attend Orderly Memorial Meeting in Boston," *New York Times*, August 24, 1928.

Vanzetti National League from October 3, 1928 relay that Gardner Jackson had acquired the title to the building on Beacon Hill for \$16,000 and that the cost of remodeling would amount to an additional \$15-20,000. The minutes go on to relay that 'the Boston group have \$12,000 on hand, and plan to cover the balance of \$4,000 with mortgages.'¹⁸ On December 18, 1929, the secretary of the National League wrote to Gardner Jackson, thanking him for 'the full report on the house,' describing it as 'corking' and assuring Jackson that 'we will surely be able to do something about it.'¹⁹ The April 4, 1930 minutes of the League's executive committee note that, 'while the committee agreed that it was desirable that the plans for the house should proceed and that it should be owned by the League, no definite action was taken.'²⁰ In 1947, describing the plans, the *Boston Herald* remarked that it had 'failed to materialize.'²¹ Borglum's biographer states that the city refused to issue the necessary permits.²² Still other sources claim the

¹⁸ Sacco-Vanzetti National League, October 3, 1928. Executive Committee Meeting Minutes. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.

¹⁹ Huntley, Margaret S. to Gardner Jackson, December 18, 1929. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.

²⁰ Sacco-Vanzetti National League, April 4, 1930. Executive Committee Meeting Minutes. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.

²¹ "Ask Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial," *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 24, 1947.

²² Howard Shaff and Audrey Karl Shaff, Six Wars at a Time: The Life and Times of Gutzon Borglum, Sculptor of Mount Rushmore (Sioux Falls, S.D.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1985), 252.

project fell through due to lack of funds. I was not able to determine when, why or by whom the plans for the Freedom House were halted, though I am inclined to believe that the city denied the permits, as there was no shortage of interest or money for the project.

While the plans for the doomed Freedom House were still in the works, the Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Committee ran into trouble for their second anniversary memorial event. The Scenic Auditorium, where their first anniversary meeting was held, was badly damaged by fire. The Scenic Auditorium was the only venue in town whose owner, himself an immigrant, would stand up to social, economic and constabulary threats and allow the Memorial Committee to use the space. On August 7, 1929, the Committee ran an advertisement on the front pages of the *Boston Herald*, the *Boston Traveler* and the *Boston Post* listing the names and affiliations of its most esteemed speakers, asking if the citizens of Boston should fear the words of such respected intellectuals. The ad went on to describe the situation in which the Committee found themselves. Their applications had been rejected from more than 35 hotels, theaters and halls with capacity of 1,000 or more, including Faneuil Hall, otherwise known as the Cradle of Liberty, and the Old South Meeting House, reputedly a haven for unorthodox and unpopular ideas. A week later, their call unanswered, they announced to their

mailing list that they were going to be holding their memorial event at Town Hall in New York City.²³

I found no record of a 1930 commemorative event, though a 1931 4th anniversary meeting was held, intriguingly, at the Old South Meeting House. As Gardner Jackson recalled, the most generous offer the Old South had made previously was that of \$25 to rent a vacant lot. Should the police disrupt the meeting in the lot, the Old South would allow the Memorial Committee to meet to protest the disruption of their meeting.²⁴ Despite persistent conflict in obtaining venues, these annual memorial meetings continued, though with lessened attendance and diminished vigor in their planning, until 1934.



Final draft of Borglum's bas-relief in bronze. Courtesy of the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society.

Borglum had completed his bas-relief of Sacco and Vanzetti in bronze by 1930 in a special alloy that was both

²³ Circular letter from the Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Committee, August 13, 1929.

Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

²⁴ Gardner Jackson, Esq. address at Town Hall in New York City, August 23, 1929. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

bullet proof and 'axe proof.'²⁵ This version was slightly different from the first draft, a plaster cast of which had been sent to Boston two years earlier. Conceptually it was the same image, showing the two men in profile confronted by an arm holding the scales of justice with 'archaic law' outweighing 'justice,' accompanied by a quote from Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The main visual difference was that the new version had leaves breaking up what was negative space in the first. Yet with the Freedom House doomed, there was nowhere for the bronze relief to go, relegating it to storage at the foundry.²⁶

For the 10th anniversary of the execution, Borglum's bas-relief was back in the news. On August 22nd 1937, Mayor Mansfield and Governor Hurley received identical letters from the old guard of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. Calling it 'a symbol by which the people of our state may be constantly warned in the decades to come,' the letter gifted Borglum's bas-relief to be placed upon Boston Common. The letter was signed Aldino Felicani, Gardner Jackson, Mary Donovan, Powers Hapgood and Michael Flaherty.²⁷ In statements to the press, the incredulous politicians, neither of whom had read the Committee's letter, declared that the idea was outside both their jurisdiction and their

²⁵ "Ask Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial," *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 24, 1947.

²⁶ Mary Borglum to Prof. G. Louis Joughin, June 4, 1944. The Borglum Archives, Corpus Christi, TX.

²⁷ Aldino Felicani, Gardner Jackson et al. to Governor Hurley. August 22, 1937. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

approval. Said Mayor Mansfield, 'Such a proposal might have to go before the council. If I have final say on the matter, however, it has no possible chance of acceptance.'²⁸ Similarly, Governor Hurley attributed responsibility for public art approval to another department and opined that the Defense Committee's gesture was 'patently absurd.'²⁹

This was not the only time Hurley would publicly denounce Sacco and Vanzetti and their sympathizers. The WPA Guide to Massachusetts had been released four days earlier on August 19, 1937. Its discussion of the immigrant workers' case caused an uproarious controversy to erupt in the press and among many Bostonians. The Governor responded by delivering anti-immigrant, anti-radical tirades, vilifying the Guide and its creators.³⁰ Even before Hurley began his public attacks, Roger N. Baldwin of the ACLU commented, 'The fuss over the statement in the WPA Guide Book strikes an outsider as nonsensical, for the Guide Book merely credited disbelief in the guilt of Sacco and Vanzetti to "many people."' ³¹

Borglum died in 1941. In 1943, the war effort needed the space in the foundry that was occupied by his bas-

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Offer of Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial is Scouted by Governor and Mayor," *The Boston Herald*, August 23, 1937.

³⁰ Christine Bold, "'Staring the world in the face': Sacco and Vanzetti in the WPA Guide to Massachusetts," [The Massachusetts Historical Review](#) NA 2003. Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/mhr/5/bold.html>

³¹ Roger N. Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union, "Statement," August 23, 1937. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

relief. The piece was moved to Borglum's studio in North Stamford, Connecticut and appeared in the news again on the 20th anniversary of Sacco and Vanzetti's execution. The bas-relief was once more presented to the local governments for placement on Boston Common, but joining the old guard of the Defense Committee in writing to Governor Bradford were 150 'prominent Americans'³² among them Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein and representatives of Ivy League universities. These had all signed a 2,500 word manifesto which,

on the basis of its sponsors and content is looked on as a manifesto of American liberals even more than as a memorial to Sacco and Vanzetti. It attempts to chart a course midway between communism on the one hand and the current wave of anti-Communist sentiment on the other.³³

According to a September 9th telegram Gardner Jackson sent to Mary Borglum, the sculptor's widow who was acutely interested in being relieved of the massive plaque, an appointment was secured with Governor Bradford.³⁴ Nevertheless, on October 4, 1947, Bradford announced to the press his rejection of the artwork, citing it as outside his jurisdiction as well as saying that he saw 'no useful purpose in stirring up the bitter passions and prejudices of 20 years ago, particularly at a time when the world is striving for unity, not discord.'³⁵

³² "Ask Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial," *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 24, 1947.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gardner Jackson to Mary Borglum, September 9, 1947. The Borglum Archives, Corpus Christi, TX.

³⁵ "Sacco and Vanzetti Memorial Offer Left Open Despite Bradford Rejection," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 4, 1947.

Mary Borglum died in August 1955. By the time her surviving family went to sort out the contents of Gutzon Borglum's studio a month later, they discovered that the space had been vandalized repeatedly. Finding the bronze bas-relief of Sacco and Vanzetti, the sculptor's son Lincoln Borglum contacted Felix Frankfurter, now a Supreme Court justice, who coldly insisted that he 'did not commission it' and 'could not help with the disposition of it.'³⁶ Frankfurter did send the note on to Gardner Jackson, but not hearing from Jackson by February 1956, Lincoln Borglum wrote to a cousin who had expressed interest in the piece, asking \$200, 'worth \$300 for the bronze.' The check ultimately had to be returned because, through an incredibly confusing scuffle that Robin Borglum Carter was able to partially reconstruct from legal, personal and business correspondence, the bronze bas-relief had been lost.³⁷ By the time Jackson wrote in August 1957 about possibly having the piece installed publicly in Boston, it was long gone.

Jackson probably had not yet received his reply from Lincoln Borglum when, on the 30th anniversary of the execution on August 23, 1957 he, Felicani and historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. once more gifted Borglum's bas-relief to the city and state governments. The mayor forwarded the proposal to the Parks & Recreation Department whose Commissioner, Frank R. Kelley, wrote to Felicani on

³⁶ Carter, Robin, "MYSTERY," email message to researcher Stephanie Schorow, January 28, 2000.

³⁷ Ibid.

September 11, 1957, 'The Board voted unanimously to disapprove your request.'³⁸ While ideologically disappointing, logistically, of course, this was just as well given that the artwork was not accounted for.

So what became of the bronze cast of Borglum's bas-relief? This, also, is a mystery. Robin Borglum Carter's findings point to the work being stolen, so it is entirely probable that the massive piece was melted down for the valuable bronze alloy and sold. Still, others hold out hope that the plaque, an incredibly heavy and unwieldy item, remains in a crate in storage in a warehouse or someone's garage. Yet while the final draft of Borglum's work is lost, extant in photographs only (at least for the time being), the work is not completely lost. One Sunday in June 1960, Aldino Felicani received a visit from 'Mr. Greene, a gentleman dealing with storage merchandise.'³⁹ Having found the plaster draft of Borglum's work in storage, Mr. Greene, elsewhere referred to as an 'unknown dustman' and an 'anonymous junkman,'⁴⁰ sought out Felicani and was paid \$50 for his services. Felicani donated the piece to the

³⁸ Commissioner Frank R. Kelley, Parks & Recreation Department to Aldino Felicani, September 11, 1957. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

³⁹ Aldino Felicani to Gardner Jackson, July 1, 1960. Gardner Jackson Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.

⁴⁰ Carol Adams and Rev. David Carol Olson, "The Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Sculpture," Community Church of Boston website. Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from <http://www.commchurch.org/saccovanzetti.htm> and Leslie Miller, "Boston accepts Sacco and Vanzetti memorial," *South Coast Today*, 24 August 1997. Retrieved 21 November 2008, available from <http://archive.southcoasttoday.com/daily/08-97/08-24-97/a03sr012.htm>

Community Church of Boston, an 'active peace and justice congregation'⁴¹ in Copley Square, who accepted the sculpture as their altarpiece 'on permanent loan.'⁴²

The political climate, as it related to the legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti in Massachusetts, was still incredibly hostile in 1959 when Representative Alexander Cella's petition to posthumously pardon the condemned Italians caused an eruption at a 'raucous'⁴³ hearing. To the great horror and amusement of his dignified companions, anti-fascist Aldino Felicani, aged 68, held up a menacing fist and asked his friends, 'Should we break the meeting up?'⁴⁴ A young law school student named Michael Dukakis also attended the hearing.⁴⁵ Eighteen years later, on the 50th anniversary of the execution in 1977, Dukakis, then governor, proclaimed that the two workers had not received a fair trial due to pervasive anti-immigrant, anti-Italian, anti-radical biases. While there was backlash against the governor's proclamation, this nonetheless marked a turning point. Unfortunately, Gardner Jackson passed away in 1963 and

⁴¹ Community Church of Boston website, "About Us." Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from http://communitychurchofboston.org/home/?page_id=2

⁴² Carol Adams and Rev. David Carol Olson, "The Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Sculpture," Community Church of Boston website. Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from <http://www.commchurch.org/saccovanzetti.htm>

⁴³ Bruce Watson, Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind (New York: Viking, 2007), 365.

⁴⁴ Boston Public Library, and Paul Avrich Collection (Library of Congress). Sacco-Vanzetti, Developments and Reconsiderations, 1979: Conference Proceedings (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1982), 33.

⁴⁵ Bruce Watson, Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind (New York: Viking, 2007), 365.

Aldino Felicani in 1967; neither lived to see the cause to which they had dedicated much of their lives vindicated in the official narrative of Massachusetts.

Perhaps brought on by executive acknowledgement of judicial malefaction, in 1979 the Boston Public Library called for a symposium on the case and its legacy. On this occasion, the Library formally accepted the mammoth collection of Aldino Felicani's papers and relevant effects from his sons Anteo and Arthur Felicani, including the Borglum plaque. The Community Church of Boston was invited to participate and, before the transfer of Borglum's plaster bas-relief to the library took place, had three metal castings made of the piece. A bronze casting now hangs in the Borglum Historical Center in Keystone, South Dakota. An aluminum casting hangs in the Gardner Jackson Reading Room at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. The third casting, also in aluminum, is the altarpiece at the Community Church of Boston.⁴⁶ The 1928 plaster draft of Borglum's work hangs outside the Rare Books and Manuscripts department on the third floor, down many a labyrinthine hall of the Boston Public Library. It was in this corner of the library on the 70th anniversary of Sacco and Vanzetti's execution that the press joined Mayor Menino and acting Governor Paul Cellucci in 1997 as the two formally 'accepted' the sculpture. Repeating the assertion that the

⁴⁶ Carol Adams and Rev. David Carol Olson, "The Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Sculpture," Community Church of Boston website. Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from <http://www.commchurch.org/saccovanzetti.htm>

anarchists had not received a fair trial, the politicians announced plans to have a bronze casting made and installed publicly in an undetermined site in Boston by the year 2000. Meeting little friction,⁴⁷ this task was originally assigned to the Browne Trust Fund, who estimated the cost at \$8,000.⁴⁸ In January 1999, the *Boston Globe* reported that a group calling themselves the Sacco and Vanzetti Memorial Committee was working on having a memorial installed in DeFillippo Park in the North End, a project approved by the Parks Commission. A spokesperson from the Memorial Committee estimated that the project would cost \$50,000 and that 'several thousand dollars' had already been raised.⁴⁹ Nothing seems to have come of these plans.

In September 2007 the John Adams Courthouse opened an exhibit, 'The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti: Justice on Trial.' Free and open to the public during the business hours of the headquarters of Massachusetts' judicial branch, the exhibit is a series of placards, photographs and interactive multimedia sources in a small room detailing not only the varied aspects of the case, but the prejudicial socio-political context in which it occurred. Put together by a senior administrative attorney for the state Supreme

⁴⁷ City Council President James Kelly opposed the use of Browne funds saying, 'The message [the sculpture] sends out is our judicial system just doesn't work. I don't think elected officials should be sending that kind of message.' Schorow, Stephanie, *The Boston Herald*, August 20, 1997.

⁴⁸ Thomas Grillo, "Sculpture to remind of Sacco, Vanzetti," *The Boston Globe*, August 20, 1997.

⁴⁹ Mary Hurley, "Memorial site eyed for Sacco, Vanzetti," *The Boston Globe*, January 17, 1999.

Judicial Court and a graphic designer for the state Social Law Library, the exhibit is an instructive look into the legal system and the ways in which it can be misused. While the exhibit is not especially accessible to the average citizen, in terms of content and placement it is undeniably the most significant tribute to the anarchist workers to date. Two months after the exhibit opened, the Rose Kennedy Greenway Park was opened to the public in the North End. There, the public found a timeline of local historical events spelled out in a series of plaques. One of these, reportedly due to the advocacy of a private citizen of the North End, is about the Sacco and Vanzetti case.

In 2006, on the 79th anniversary of Sacco and Vanzetti's execution, a commemorative march took place in the pouring rain to Forest Hills Cemetery, where the two immigrants were cremated. The march was intended to bridge the perceived ideological gap between Boston's 'red' anarchists, those primarily engaged in human rights and labor struggles, and Boston's much prosecuted 'green' anarchists, those focused on environmental justice and animal rights. Though a few older leftists participated and migrant workers' rights organizers attended, the march was composed overwhelmingly of young anarchists carrying flags and banners. Blaming ineffective outreach and inclement weather, and finding that the lessons of Sacco and Vanzetti's case hold relevance far beyond their martyrdom to the anarchist cause, grander plans were made for the 80th anniversary. What began as an attempt

to organize a better march grew into a broader, intergenerational coalition of community, labor and immigrant rights organizers, anarchist historians, archivists and activists operating as the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society. The group organized a series of educational, agitational and social events surrounding the 80th anniversary of the execution.



Taken August 23, 2007. Courtesy of the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society.

At the initiative of Boston City Councilor Felix Arroyo, who joined the march on the 23rd decrying the persecution of immigrants, the death penalty and the state repression of dissent, the Boston City Council passed a resolution extending its 'admiration to the Sacco and Vanzetti

Commemoration Society' and declared August 23, 2007, Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Day in the City of Boston.⁵⁰ As the 2007 march wound through Hanover Street on the North End, a Society member put up a temporary historical marker on the 256 Hanover Street building that had been used by the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee over 80 years earlier. On December 1, 2007, with the permission of the building's proprietors, the Society installed and dedicated a new plaque to replace the one that had gone missing in the 1980s. Former governor Michael Dukakis was among the forty or so participants.



Former governor Michael Dukakis and Society member Jake Carman unveil historical marker. Courtesy of the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society.

August 23, 2008 saw similar commemorative events to the Society's 2007 ones. City Councilor Chuck Turner presented

⁵⁰ "City of Boston passes resolution in commemoration of Sacco & Vanzetti." Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from http://saccoandvanzetti.org/sn_display1.php?row_ID=37

the Society with a nearly identical resolution, declaring August 23, 2008 Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Day in the City of Boston. The Society has, all the while, been working to overcome the financial, logistical and bureaucratic obstacles that have thus far prevented the public installation of a casting of Borglum's work.

While going through transcripts of addresses given at memorial events, I found this quote from 1928 that struck me as unusually relevant. 'Men and women ... are still anxious to do something to right the wrong, to do honor to the memory of Sacco and Vanzetti.'⁵¹ These words were spoken by liberal scholar Robert Morss Lovett, Esq. on the one-year anniversary of Sacco and Vanzetti's execution to a crowd of 2,000 people in Boston. As has been shown by the ongoing interest in the immigrant workers' case in Boston, through attendance at the Society's memorial events and the people that packed the Dante to hear Zinn's lecture, we are still anxious to right the wrongs committed by the state against Sacco and Vanzetti. As of this writing, though, friends of Sacco and Vanzetti seem to have triumphed against the two immigrants' foes. Nearly all of scholarship upholds the unjust nature of the trial, if not the innocence of the pair. The executive branch of the state government has declared the trial unjust. The judicial branch of the state government has set up an exhibit on its own shortcomings in

⁵¹ Robert Morss Lovett, Esq. address at the Scenic Auditorium in Boston, August 23, 1928. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.

the matter. The municipal government has publicly approved the work of a group that seeks 'to preserve the memory of Sacco and Vanzetti's struggle to radically change society' and 'draw connections between the struggles of Sacco and Vanzetti and similar struggles today.'⁵² If all goes as planned, the installation of Borglum's bas-relief will become a reality within a year. What more could a local devotee of the martyred anarchists want?

I found the answer to this question every time I mentioned the names Sacco and Vanzetti and received blank looks. These empty stares met me at least twice as often as affirmations of knowledge on the case that had torn apart our town and shaken the world in the 1920s. Only scholars, radicals, and a diminishing category of people of a certain age know the story that should be part of our collective consciousness. The seven-year suffering and ultimate electrocution of two immigrant dissidents has been omitted from the official historical narrative transmitted to every subsequent generation. By erasing Sacco and Vanzetti and the socio-political theater in which their lives were ended, the lessons of their case have been obscured. Eighty years later, we are seeing alarming repeats of the conditions that made martyrs of Sacco and Vanzetti. I mentioned the example of eight anarchists in the Twin Cities currently facing terrorism charges for organizing supportive infrastructure

⁵² Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society Mission, retrieved November 21, 2008, available from http://www.saccoandvanzetti.org/sn_display1.php?row_ID=8

for out of town protestors, but here in Boston, two anarchists were arrested in June on charges of disturbing the peace and damaging public property for their use of Crayola brand sidewalk chalk.⁵³ Our local politicians may have taken a stand against the scapegoating of immigrants, but raids are still conducted in Massachusetts. Every night in this country at least 26,000 people sleep in Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities while hundreds of thousands are deported each year,⁵⁴ all for the crime of being born in a different part of the world. As anyone who has been in general population in any jail or prison in this country can tell you, justice for the poor remains elusive while white-collar criminals enjoy the comforts of their homes in ankle bracelets, when they are apprehended at all.

Installing Borglum's 7' x 3.5' plaque in an oft-frequented location in Boston is a step in the right direction toward doing justice to the memory of the two slain idealists, but the legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti requires more than public artwork. The case should be part of the history curricula in public schools and connections need to be made to the repressive social and economic factors that have not gone away after 80 years. Study of the Sacco and Vanzetti case demands an examination of the

⁵³ Ric Kahn, "Out of Line," *Boston Globe*, November 16, 2008. Retrieved 18 December 2008, available from http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2008/11/16/out_of_line/?page=2

⁵⁴ Fact sheets, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement FY07 Accomplishments," retrieved November 21, 2008, available from <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/pi/news/factsheets/fy07accmplshmntsweb.pdf>

present governing systems; perhaps this is why the legacy of the case continues to be obscured by authorities, known only to those who seek it out. As labor organizer and writer Lucy Parsons wrote in 1905, 'Anarchists know that a long period of education must precede any great fundamental change in society.'⁵⁵

In all my months of researching the commemoration of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti and the Borglum bas-relief created in their memory; in all the countless times I weaved my way up to, in and out of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department at Boston Public Library and past the plaster work on the wall; despite being entirely visually familiar with the piece; despite blowing a kiss to my slain comrades every time I passed their image, I never really stopped to ponder the words sculpted onto the piece. I would persistently tune out most information pertaining to the case itself or to anything the two did or said while they were alive, as these were irrelevant to my research. One evening, however, up to my neck in sources, I realized that I was not entirely sure what the plaque said, despite quite possibly knowing more about it now than anyone else alive. And so I pulled out one of the pictures of the work and very carefully read Bartolo Vanzetti's words, written on the last day of his life. And then I began to cry because I realize how little has changed in 80 years.

⁵⁵ Lucy E. Parsons and Gale Ahrens, *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity: Writings & Speeches, 1878-1937*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2004), 31.

What I wish more than all in this last hour of agony is that our case and our fate may be understood in their real being and serve as a tremendous lesson to the forces of freedom so that our suffering and death will not have been in vain.

Acknowledgements :

My research was made possible only with outside guidance, advice and assistance. I would like to thank Kimberly Reynolds, archivist at Boston Public Library, for not only making organized sense of the behemoth that is the Aldino Felicani Collection, but for being so helpful, patient and pleasant while making its contents available. Researcher and writer Stephanie Schorow was very generous in meeting with me and sharing the sources she had found on the subject a decade earlier and giving renewed meaning to my project. Special Collections Librarian Sarah Shoemaker at Brandeis helped me to accomplish all of my goals for the single day I was able to spend in Waltham. My thanks go to Robin Borglum Carter for the work she has put into the Borglum Archives and for making herself accessible to field inquiries about them. Keeper of the Anarchist Archives, as

well as fellow Society member, Jerry Kaplan has always been very gracious in sharing knowledge, information and sources. And, of course, Professor James Green's input and guidance has been invaluable from the start of this project.

Newspaper and magazine articles:

- "Ashes," *Time Magazine*, October 5, 1927. Retrieved 14 October 2008, available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,769393,00.html>.
- "Ask Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial," *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 24, 1947.
Associated Press Photo, August 22 1937.
- Grillo, Thomas, "Sculpture to remind of Sacco, Vanzetti," *The Boston Globe*, August 20, 1997.
- Hurley, Mary, "Memorial site eyed for Sacco, Vanzetti," *The Boston Globe*, January 17, 1999.
- Kahn, Ric, "Out of Line," *Boston Globe*, November 16, 2008. Retrieved 18 December, 2008, available from http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2008/11/16/out_of_line/?page=2
- Lavoie, Denise. "Sacco, Vanzetti case exhibited in Boston," *USA Today*, September 23, 2007. Retrieved 14 October 2008, available from http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-23-1822387430_x.htm.
- "Massachusetts Refuses a Plaque in Memory of Sacco and Vanzetti," *Life Magazine*, September 6, 1937.
- Miller, Leslie, "Boston accepts Sacco and Vanzetti memorial," *South Coast Today*, 24 August 1997.
- "MOURN SACCO AND VANZETTI; Two Thousand Attend Orderly Memorial Meeting in Boston," *New York Times*, August 24, 1928.
- "Offer of Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial is Scouted by Governor and Mayor," *The Boston Herald*, August 23, 1937.
- "Sacco Aftermath," *Time Magazine*, September, 5, 1927.
- "Sacco and Vanzetti Memorial Offer Left Open Despite Bradford Rejection," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 4, 1947.
- Schorow, Stephanie, "Sacco and Vanzetti: Who will keep them alive?" *The Improper Bostonian*, June 14-27, 2000.

Books:

- Avrich, Paul, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Avrich, Paul, *Sacco and Vanzetti: the Anarchist Background*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.

- Boston Public Library, and Paul Avrich Collection (Library of Congress). Sacco-Vanzetti, Developments and Reconsiderations, 1979: Conference Proceedings. Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1982.
- Loewen, James W. Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong. New York: New Press, 1999.
- Parsons, Lucy E. and Gale Ahrens, Freedom, Equality & Solidarity: Writings & Speeches, 1878-1937. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2004.
- Russell, Francis. Sacco & Vanzetti: The Case Resolved. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Shaff, Howard and Audrey Karl Shaff, Six Wars at a Time: The Life and Times of Gutzon Borglum, Sculptor of Mount Rushmore. Sioux Falls, S.D.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1985.
- Watson, Bruce, Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind. New York: Viking, 2007.

From the archives:

- Baldwin, Roger N. of the American Civil Liberties Union, "Statement," August 23, 1937. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- Borglum, Mary to Prof. G. Louis Joughin, June 4, 1944. The Borglum Archives, Corpus Christi, TX.
- Circular letter from the Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Committee, August 13, 1929. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- Citizens National Committee for Sacco and Vanzetti, August 23, 1927. Statement. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.
- Felicani, Aldino, Gardner Jackson et al. to Governor Hurley. August 22, 1937. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- Felicani, Aldino to Gardner Jackson, July 1, 1960. Gardner Jackson Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.
- Huntley, Margaret S. to Gardner Jackson, December 18, 1929. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.
- Jackson, Gardner Esq. address at Town Hall in New York City, August 23, 1929. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- Jackson, Gardner to Mary Borglum, September 9, 1947. The Borglum Archives, Corpus Christi, TX.
- Jackson, Gardner, to Mary Borglum, July 5, 1952. The Borglum Archives, Corpus Christi, TX.

- Kelley, Frank R., Commissioner, Parks & Recreation Department to Aldino Felicani, September 11, 1957. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- Lovett, Robert Morss Esq. address at Town Hall in New York City, August 23, 1929. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- Minutes of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, August 31 1927. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- The Official Bulletin of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, September 1927. Felicani, (Aldino) Sacco and Vanzetti Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston.
- Sacco-Vanzetti National League, 7 November 1927. Meeting minutes. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.
- Sacco-Vanzetti National League, October 3, 1928. Executive Committee Meeting Minutes. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.
- Sacco-Vanzetti National League, April 4, 1930. Executive Committee Meeting Minutes. Francis Russell Collection, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University Libraries.

Internet sources:

- Adams, Carol and Rev. David Carol Olson, "The Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Sculpture," Community Church of Boston website. Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from <http://www.commchurch.org/saccovanzetti.htm>
- Bold, Christine, "'Staring the world in the face': Sacco and Vanzetti in the WPA Guide to Massachusetts," The Massachusetts Historical Review NA 2003. Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/mhr/5/bold.htm>
1
- Carter, Robin, "MYSTERY," email message to researcher Stephanie Schorow, January 28, 2000. Hard copy in the author's possession.
- "City of Boston passes resolution in commemoration of Sacco & Vanzetti." Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from http://saccoandvanzetti.org/sn_display1.php?row_ID=37
- Community Church of Boston website, "About Us." Retrieved November 21, 2008, available from http://communitychurchofboston.org/home/?page_id=2
- Fact sheets, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement FY07 Accomplishments," retrieved November 21, 2008, available from

<http://www.ice.gov/doclib/pi/news/factsheets/fy07acmplshmntsweb.pdf>

Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society Mission, retrieved November 21, 2008, available from

http://www.saccoandvanzetti.org/sn_display1.php?row_ID=8

Zinn, Howard lecture, 'The Meaning of Sacco and Vanzetti,' November 7, 2008. Retrieved November 21, 2008, video available from http://saccoandvanzetti.org/zinn_11-7-08.wmv