

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Massachusetts	
COUNTY: Norfolk	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:
Norfolk County Courthouse

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Sacco-Vanzetti Trial Site

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
650 High Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Dedham

STATE: **Massachusetts** CODE: COUNTY: **Norfolk** CODE:

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	_____	_____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
County of Norfolk - County Commissioners' Office

STREET AND NUMBER:
650 High Street

CITY OR TOWN: **Dedham** STATE: **Massachusetts** CODE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Registry of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:
650 High Street

CITY OR TOWN: **Dedham** STATE: **Massachusetts** CODE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY: Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: STATE: CODE:

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Norfolk County Courthouse has assumed its present appearance by 1921, the year of the Sacco-Vanzetti trial. As completed in 1827, however, by the noted Boston builder, Solomon Willard, it was a severe, rectangular, prostyle Greek Revival edifice of granite, with nearly-identical tetrastyle pedimented porticos at either end.* When the Norfolk County Commissioners proposed enlarging the structure some 35 years later, during the Civil War period, conservative Dedhamites raised a cry of opposition. Hence a compromise was effected by meticulously adhering to the original Greek purity of the building's architecture in the pilastered, three-bay extensions that were built to either side of the north, or main, portico. The predecessor to the present dome, which rests on an octagonal drum rising directly behind the portico, was also added at this time.

The same regard for Greek Revival precedent was displayed when the final and most extensive alterations occurred between 1892 and 1895, after plans prepared by the Boston firm of Gridley J.F. Bryant. Two additional wings were built to either side of the south portico--thus achieving the present H-shaped ground plan, the dome was rebuilt on a rather more elaborate scale, and finally, the earlier interiors gave way to Greek motifs executed in golden oak and marble. One-over-one window sashing was installed, as well. Subsequent changes have been negligible, and confined to such minor modifications as refurbishing the washrooms, and repainting.

A longitudinal corridor, distinguished by a floor and wainscoting of white marble, extends the length of the building between the north and south entrances. From the principal foyer at the north end of the corridor, a marble staircase ascends in three runs to the second floor, where the famous courtroom is situated. Two minor stairways are located in the short transverse passage at the opposite end of the building. In this hallway, moreover, stands a pair of early telephone booths, spacious cubicles of oak dating, it seems likely, from the 1890's remodeling, and containing multi-paned fixed windows.

The courtroom and the adjacent subsidiary chambers are situated in the center of the original part of the building. Natural light filters through a row of clerestory windows of ground glass, and through the

* A singular architectural feature of the south portico is that the shafts of the four columns rest on octagonal pedestals rather than conventional square bases.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1921-1927**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

In the half century since it was the setting for the famous Sacco-Vanzetti trial, the Norfolk County Courthouse has remained singularly unchanged, a mute testimony to the occurrence which for a time focused world attention upon it. The Sacco-Vanzetti Case, as perhaps no other single event, crystallized the tensions of the 1920's. "Hostility to radicals, antipathy to foreigners, and a jealous protection of the status quo," three eminent American historians have observed, "were revealed in the most sensational murder trail since that of the Haymarket anarchists."¹ In the wake of post-war disillusionment and the hysteria of the Red Scare, the central issue--the guilt or innocence of the defendants--was swept aside; ultimately and tragically, the trial became a confrontation between a heterogeneous emerging America and the conservative, establishment traditions of an older one. "In the end it was much more than a trial," writes one chronicler of the case, Francis Russell. "It became one of those events that divide a society."² Then, as now, the Greek Revival-style courthouse, and the self-contained old New England town surrounding it, seemed fittingly to express those very values which the unrest of the time appeared to threaten. "Almost always when I see the great dome so secure above the peaceful community," Russell has stated, "I find myself thinking back to the Sacco-Vanzetti trial. Whatever one's feeling about the trial, its presence still seems tangible in the courthouse on High Street."³

¹Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Lenchtenburg, The Growth of the American Republic, Vol. II, Sixth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 411.

²Francis Russell, Tragedy in Dedham--The Story of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962, 1971), p. 1

³ibid., p. 3.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bonner, Thomas. Our Recent Past: American Civilization in the Twentieth Century. Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.
 Ehrmann, Herbert. The Untried Case; The Sacco-Vanzetti case and the Morelli Gang. New York: Vanguard, 1960.
 Joughlin, G. L. Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti.
 Link, Arthur S. American Epoch: A History of the United States Since the 1890's. Second edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963.
 Morison, Samuel Eliot, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg. The Growth of the American Republic (Volume II). Sixth Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "		42° 14' 55"	71° 10' 36"	
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **1 acre**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Robert S. Gamble and Chris Redburn, Historic Sites Survey

ORGANIZATION: **National Park Service** DATE: **July 1972**

STREET AND NUMBER:
1100 L Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** STATE: **D.C.** CODE:

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

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7. Description (Continued) (1)

leaded skylights in the coffered ceiling. The main doorway is at the north end of the courtroom, directly opposite the bench, which stands against the south wall. In the rear, flanking the bench itself, are two doorways leading to the judge's chambers and the offices of the superior court. Doors along the lateral walls of the room open into smaller counsel chambers and, on the west, the jury room. Painted their original pale-pink, with a trim of beige and white, the walls and ceiling are enhanced by applied plasterwork. A bas-relief frieze beneath the clerestory windows echoes both the sunburst medallions inserted between the openings above and the bolection moulding that frames the rectangular panels with which the walls are ornamentally treated. The furnishings, for the most part original, match the oaken door surrounds and the paneled wainscoting. Original, too, is the wall clock behind the bench. The clerk's table is below the judge's dias, and immediately beyond are the tables for the prosecution and the defense. In the southwest corner of the room is the jury enclosure.

The most notable change in the courtroom since the 1920's has been the removal of the prisoner's cage which formerly stood opposite the jury box, where the sheriff now sits. Considered inhumane by the mid-20th century, the cage was done away with after the Second World War. A balustraded bar separates the official court facilities from the long wooden spectator seats.

In the decades since the world-renowned case was tried here, necessary refurbishing throughout the courthouse has been executed with unusual sensitivity, so that today, even in minor detail, the physical surroundings are largely unchanged.

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8. Significance (Continued) (1)

The chain of occurrences that precipitated the case began on April 15, 1920, when a paymaster and his guard-assistant were shot to death in a shoe factory robbery at South Braintree, Massachusetts. Some three weeks later, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italian aliens and admitted anarchists, were arrested on a Boston streetcar and charged with the crime. Amid rising American nativism and xenophobia, the guilt of the two men was presumed from the outset. In September, they were indicted, and the trial began shortly thereafter at the Superior Courthouse in Dedham. The eloquence of the defendants, the obvious bias of the court, and the general political climate soon combined to make the trial a national and international cause célèbre.

The prosecution built a case on circumstantial evidence and the testimony of several witnesses who identified the defendants as having been in the area at the time of the crime. Sacco and Vanzetti steadfastly maintained their innocence. Both claimed to have been far from the scene when the murders were committed, and had their own witnesses to testify to that effect. The issue which emerged as the keystone of the case, however, was the leftist political views of the pair. The prejudices of Judge Webster Thayer were undisguised. His utterances both in and out of court clearly revealed his desire to send the two men to their deaths. Virtually every ruling the judge made was in favor of the prosecution.

Not radicals alone, but civil libertarians throughout the world, were outraged by the treatment accorded the defendants. There was even greater shock when, on July 14, 1921, Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted and sentenced to death. Thus began six years of intricate legal maneuvering, as men and women of many shades of opinion in this country and abroad labored to obtain a new trial. Under Massachusetts law, this could be authorized only by Judge Thayer, and he refused, despite the continuous efforts of a succession of lawyers to discredit the conclusions of the first trial. But mounting public furor prompted the Governor of Massachusetts to appoint an investigative committee composed of President A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard and others to examine the proceedings of the trial. When the committee corroborated the initial conclusions of the court, it appeared to many people to be an act of class reprisal perpetrated by the arrayed forces of upper-class New England respectability. Basing his stand on the committee report, the Governor refused to pardon the condemned men, or commute their sentences to life imprisonment. Last-minute pleas from relatives, intensive legal efforts,



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8. Significance (Continued) (2)

and widespread public outcry proved unavailing, and Sacco and Vanzetti were electrocuted on August 23, 1927. The day was marked by strikes and demonstrations in both the United States and Europe. Edna St. Vincent Millay lyrically expressed her dismay in verse,⁴ and, as Samuel Eliot Morison has said, "Citizens of Massachusetts who loved justice remembered John Adams and the Boston Massacre case and Judge Sewall's retraction in the case of the Salem witches and hung their heads in shame."⁵ Shortly before he died, Vanzetti himself spoke movingly of the ordeal through which he and his companion were passing:

If it had not been for this thing, I might have lived out my life among scorning men. I might have died, unmarked, unknown, a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man, as now we do by an accident.⁶

Whether or not Sacco and Vanzetti were indeed guilty is today an academic question. They were tried at least as much for their political views and foreign origins as for their alleged crimes. It is probable that no other trial in American history dominated the public interest for so long a time, nor made the divisions in American society so brutally clear.

⁴Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Wine from These Grapes," quoted in Morison, Commager, and Leuchtenburg, The Growth of the American Republic, 6th edition (Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 412.

⁵Morison et al., p. 412.

⁶Quoted in Thomas Bonner, Our Recent Past: American Civilization in the Twentieth Century (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 147.

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9. Major Bibliographical References (Continued) (1)

Russell, Francis. Tragedy in Dedham - The Story of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962 and 1971.

Smith, Frank. A History of Dedham. Dedham, Massachusetts: The Transcript Press, 1936.