

Baa Baa Black Sheep?



Some family history can be unpleasant. Or, at the very least, unsettling. Such is the case surrounding my wife's great grandfather, Francesco Saccente.

Saccente was born in Italy in 1883 and, like many others, emigrated to the US in the early 1900s. He settled in Patchogue, New York. Over the next couple of decades he married three times, had fifteen children and made his living as a peddler of ice and coal.

One day, in 1933, he, with seven of his children in tow, paid a visit to the Miramar Beach Hotel in East Patchogue. While his kids were playing on the beach, he entered the hotel. Moments later, he was dead. Killed by a shotgun blast through the heart. James Stephani, the hotel's proprietor, was charged with murder. Saccente was fifty years of age at the time.

After a well publicized trial that stretched over four months, Stephani was acquitted by the jury and the incident was reclassified as an "accidental shooting." We may never know what really happened... even the main witness at the trial

reversed his earlier testimony and said that he now couldn't remember what took place at the time.

It so happens that, as I was poring over the newspaper articles about this event, I discovered another newsworthy story involving this family member. Five years earlier, Francesco and his son Louis were arrested for the assault of their neighbors, Raymond Anderson and his wife, who suffered two broken ribs and facial lacerations at their hands. According to the newspaper accounts, the Andersons were accusing the Saccentes of killing their dog and when Mrs. Anderson went to demand satisfaction, she was chased off by a shotgun wielding Saccente. Early the next morning, the Saccentes allegedly assaulted the pair as they were walking home. While the Saccentes were eventually acquitted in that case, Francesco found himself again charged with assault nine months later after beating up a man during a brawl in connection with an Italian celebration in West Patchogue.

In keeping with the "where there's smoke, there's fire" philosophy, I chose long ago to avoid arguing with my wife. I'm not saying she inherited any traits from her great grandfather but it seems to me to be prudent to err on the side of caution and defuse any potential conflict that may arise. Just in case.

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