

Grandpa Caccamise's Raspberry Farm In Plugville

by Lynne Belluscio

Dr. William Caccamise who lives in Pittsford, has been sending family histories and genealogy to the Historical Society for our files. It is great stuff and we are very glad to have the stories of one of the early Italian families.

In some of the recent letters are two wonderful stories written by Victor Caccamise, William's cousin. Victor's father, Joe was only two when he came with his father, Salvatore, from Valledolmo, Sicily in 1888. The family moved to LeRoy in 1889. Grandfather Salvatore lived on Mill Street, but he owned four acres of land on the stone outcroppings of "Plugville." If you've never heard of Plugville, you're not alone, but it is northwest of the village, on West Bergen Road, north of Randall Road, just before you head down the hill.

Both sides of the road are lined with stone walls, cleared from the limestone and fossil remnants of the huge fossilized coral reef in the area. Victor wrote about his grandfather's cottage, with a two stall shed behind for the "faithful

old mare and a brown Jersey cow. Encircling the four-acre farm stands a cobblestone fence three feet high with each stone stacked carefully by Grandpa's skilled hands."

Grandpa had cleared the rocky soil and built the stone fences, but after planting raspberry bushes, he discovered that folks often helped themselves to the ripe fruit. So during raspberry season, he moved out to the cottage. But it was not only the two legged thief that ravished the fruit. After an onslaught of blackbirds, Grandpa took aim with his trusty shotgun and his grandsons built impressive scare crows. The boys enjoyed coming out to the cottage.

The stone fences became the place for the "Sundown Skirmish at Oatka Fort." Armed with slingshots and soggy paper wads, the boys found refuge in the stone fence which became a hideout, a barricade and a fortress. "It is a cool summer morning when we three kids, Sam, Al, and I and Pa pull into Grandpa's dirt drive in our Reo touring car. Pa gives a toot on his horn and the cottage door flings open. Standing there, thin, short, straight as a post, with a gray handlebar mustache, a thick shock of grayish hair and a perpetual twinkle in his dark eyes, our Grandpa waves a gnarled hand and calls out, 'Come in! Come in, all of you!'" So Victor and his brothers would pick raspberries and Grandpa would pay 5 cents a box minus 10 cents for the stains around their mouths.

Some of the raspberries

would be sold in LeRoy, but the better place to sell them was the public market in Rochester. "It was a six-hour drive to the big city so Grandpa was up at midnight the next day. After a hearty breakfast and several steaming cups of coffee, he hitched the brown mare to the leaden wagon and drove off in the starlit night.

Beside him on the wide seat, he placed his lunch bucket containing homemade bread and cheese and a jug of strong tea. Across his lap lay a woolen blanket for the predawn summer mornings could be very chilly. A wide-brimmed straw hat covered his shaggy head and he wore a clean pair of blue striped overalls under a checkered woolen jacket.

On each end of the wagon seat, flickering brightly, a kerosene lamp cast a circle of light on the gravel road, hardly enough to light the way but, nevertheless, enough to prevent a head-on collision with another vehicle in the murky darkness." Victor and his brothers lived in Chili and Grandpa would arrive at 4 am to pick the boys up for the ride into Rochester. After a while Grandpa would begin to hum. "He could not sing a lick but he sure could hum a sweet tune. His favorite was "Oh Solo Mio", and that's what he hummed all the way to the market."

It was still dark when they arrived at the public market, but soon it became crowded with eager customers. "Where is Salvatore's berry wagon!" They would holler. "Over here! Over here!" Grandpa would shout, his brown eyes twinkling, and then Grandpa, his handlebar mustache



twitching, would take in the money from eager buyers, as fast as Sam and I could hand out the boxes of the red ripe fruit." In an hour all the boxes of raspberries were sold and Grandpa would gossip with his friends and soon they would head back to Chili to drop off the boys.

"Of course he always looked forward to Ma's special lunch awaiting him. Even though we had eaten Grandpa's bread and cheese, we were all as hungry as wolves. Ma always had a big glass of Pa's homemade wine beside Grandpa's plate and after dining and drinking with great gusto, he would take his leave. Before rounding the first turn, Grandpa would be sound asleep. Slowly, but surely, his faithful mare took him safely back to his cottage in Plugville."

Victor wrote at the end of this story, "The tiny settlement of Plugville has changed very little since Grandpa left, and though he is gone now, the cottage remains standing, though sagging in protest against the elements and time." Grandpa Salvatore Caccamise died in 1940 at the age of 93. Victor, his grandson, who wrote these wonderful stories, died in 1996.



Grandpa Caccamise's Rock Wall in Plugville.

