

[Page 27 - From Italian Lives, Cape Breton Memories: From the Memoirs of Thomas Cozzolino](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 74](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1999/6/1

everyone out, unless you were very sick. On my way back, I met the "walking boss." He stopped me, and wanted to know where I was going. I showed him my finger. He gave me a new job. Even though I had no experience, he sent me back to work as a mule driver. Since they were going to pay me the same wages as the labourers, I thought I would try it. On my first trip with the mule, we reached the dumping area without a problem. But when I tried to back the mule to the edge of the cliff, I could not hold him. He went over the embankment, cart and all, about 35 feet. I was afraid; the cart was all broken up, but the mule was alright. I looked around and saw the "walking boss" coming towards me with a stick. I was afraid he was going to hit me; instead, he went for the mule, then gave me the stick saying, "Use this stick on him, and he will be alright." I did use the stick, and found that the work went well. That night, however, I began to think about all I had been through. I was getting discouraged, so I wrote my father asking him to send me enough money to return to Italy. But, before I received a reply • it took six weeks • I was doing pretty well. I had a new job in a grocery store selling provisions to the men, and making entries into the books when they bought things on credit. When I received my father's letter, there was a ticket for passage from New York to Naples enclosed. I immediately returned the ticket to him, and thanked him for being so kind. Later, I sent Salvatore the \$801 had borrowed from him, and thanked him for his kindness as well. I finally let my father know where I had gotten the money to come to America. Salvatore had never mentioned the \$80 to him; he thought Father was WHILE IN St, Pe'te'e STOP 'STAY& ENJOY OUR WARM UNIQUE HOSPITALITY THROUGHOUT OUR COMMUNITY & COUNTY t fiouFit RICHMOND COUNn at tHe FroNt aoor qf cape bretoN ISiaNd at RiCH|W|ONd CoUNtu A 30od pLace to nve BND do bUSiNeSS T'L 902-226-2400 • Fak 902-226-1510 still short of cash, and knew that he would be repaid at some point. I worked in the store for about four months. In all, I stayed in the Catskills for about five months. From there we all went to a place called Amsterdam, New York where they were building the West Shore Railway and a canal from Buffalo to Albany. I worked on the canal project as a labourer. As they were paying more for men who could drill, two other boys and I would go in the evening, after our day's work, to try to learn to use the hammer. The three of us got so we could use the hammer pretty well. We got on the drilling gang, and received 50 cents more per day. I kept that up for several months. From there we went to Little Falls, New York to do the same type of work. By the Spring of 1882, I had learned a little English and got a position as interpreter for the Italians. I had also learned a bit of Russian, so the contractor sent me to New York to hire more men. That fall a man came from Indiana looking for labourers to work at a quarry. He offered good pay. Someone sent him to me, and he offered me \$75 per month if I would go with 40 men to work there for the winter. He promised to pay the men \$1.75 per day for ten hours work. The work was at Okalla, Indiana. I got the men and we went. We liked the place very much; it was



warm all winter. We worked there for seven months. During that time, I tried to learn all the English I could. The contractor had a fine family; they were all kind to me, and tried to teach me English. When the work was completed, we went to Summerset, Pennsylvania where they were building a railway. We worked on the approach to the Laura Hill Tunnel, in the mountains, 12 miles from Summerset. After a while, I was made foreman of the "big rock cut." I did not have much experience in rock cuts. Although I had worked at many of them, I had never had charge of one before, and I did not know how to use dynamite, but I had good rock men in my gang. They said, "Go ahead, we will help you, and do good work for you." So, with their encouragement, I took the job. We worked there all winter and did good work. The contractor was well pleased. The next spring, the contractor, needing someone who could speak Travel Richmond County's Route 4 Discover Cape Breton Differently! KAYAK TOURS INSTRUCTION • RENTALS • KAYAKS • CANOES • BIKES • LOG COTTAGES on the Bras d'Or Lake PRIVATE & SCENIC Ask for brochure: KAYAK CAPE BRETON R. R. 2, West Bay, N. S. B0E 3K0 FAX or PHONE (902) 535-3060 Me?cjl. Morrison 'uneraCJ-fome PRE-ARRANGEMENT INFORMATION AVAILABLE Struing the, community for over 35 years ivith sympathy andunderstaiuCing. (Proznding a supportive environment tuith quiet efficiency. P 0 Box 10 • ST. PETER'S • 535-2119 A wonderful place to live, work, invest . ?? • 27