

[Alcide Savoie]

19825

Miss Mary Tomasi

63 Barre St.

Montpelier, Vt. The Granite Worker French

Alcide Savoie was a squat, stocky Frenchman. He sucked contentedly at a curved, worn pipe. "I've had almost twenty years of the sheds," he said, "ever since 1921. And," he added, "I've boarded and roomed in this same house for ten years."

It was characterless house, one of three similar structures set back from Berlin Street with always a view of a dismal line of sheds. The house was a three-storied wooden square, painted green. Mrs. LaCrosse, a stonecutter's widow, was the landlady.

I came down from Iberville, Canada, Savoie went on. I had no intention of coming to Barre or working in the sheds. I'd been out of a job for a few weeks, then I heard that cottages were going up fast at Mallett's Bay on Lake Champlain. I knew a little about carpentering, I managed to get a job there through the summer until late fall. Well, I hated to go back to Iberville, there was nothing there for me, so I started looking around. About this time the shed owners in the Barre district were complaining about the high wages they had to pay skilled workers, and it seems they were willing to break in new workers to save their pocketbooks. Good carvers were getting \$20.00 or more a day, but I'll say they deserved it. Their work meant everything to them. Anyway, that's how I got my chance to go in the sheds. I can't say [???] 2 I'm sorry - not yet. I work hard, and I feel fine. I've worked up to sawyer, that meanst \$8.50 a day, pretty good pay these days.

Library of Congress

My first year in Barre I roomed in a business block on N. Main Street. I wasn't lonesome. There were a lot of Canadians coming in from just north of Vermont. Some of us got in the habit of having our meals out together. We'd always take in the church suppers, - it was good cooking and a change from the restaurants.

That's how I met my landlady, at a supper the St. Anne's Society was giving. The society was just for married French women. A Catholic Society. Mrs. LaCrosse did the cooking that night and we all thought it was fine. Her husband had died of stonecutter's T. B. the month before, she told us she was going to invest her insurance money in a good, plain house and take in boarders and roomers. Four of us moved in the next week. She made a pretty good living out of it. Another granite worker's widow, she was French too, rented the house next door the following year, and took in boarders. The two women were friendly, but they knew we talked a lot about the food and compared meals, so there got to be plenty of competition. It suited us fine. Each one would plan the best meals she could afford, and still make a profit. I'd never eaten so well before, and I haven't since. It didn't last more than a year. The French woman next door married again, another stonecutter. He said he had to work in the sheds all day, he didn't want to be looking at them at night. 3 They moved to other end of the town.

Most of the roomers in this house are working in the sheds or quarries. The landlady treats us as if we were her family. In September of '38, the Commissioner of Industries of Vermont issued the regulation enforcing the use of goggles by various quarry workers, and refusing compensation unless the driller was wearing them at the time his eye was injured by either granite or steel chip. Before this, Mrs. LaCrosse used to keep after a couple of the quarry workers and see that they had goggles. In the winter, when they carried their lunch, she made sure that the [galses?] were packed in their boxes. Only men operating plug drills, jack-hammers, line drills, bull-sets, bit-grinders and [emory?] wheels are requested by the Commissioner to wear them. Owners of the quarries are ordered to provide the goggles, if they fail they are subject to penalty. If an injury is received by a

Library of Congress

worker whose employer has failed to provide goggles, he may collect compensation. It's a good regulation, and most of the fellows stick to it, even though it is a bother to those who aren't used to them. Sometimes I wear them in the sheds. It's funny, if a man hurts his eye today the rest of the men are sure to wear goggles for a week or two, then they discard them until the next accident. But we don't get as many eye injuries in the sheds as they do in the quarries.