

Good friendships were among Joe Rini's most cherished possessions

It certainly helps pioneers if they have good friends.

That's the way Matteo J. "Joe" Rini felt about it, and if he wasn't a pioneer, he was close to being one.

Joe left Sicily in 1876 at age 16 with his brothers to find a better life in the United States. He had been a fisherman and olive grove worker and was used to the peace and quiet of small-town life.

But peace and quiet were not to be found in Cleveland, even in the 1870's, and he also couldn't find a job.

He was an immigrant, and despite the promise of the new world, immigrants could not find work in the late 19th century.

For one to fully appreciate freedom, one must have a full stomach and that's why so many Italian immigrants became fruit and vegetable peddlers.

The only work they could find was buying fruit and produce, then reselling it on the street from carts. That's what the Rini brothers did in Cleveland in the 1870's and that's why today there are Rini Bros. supermarkets there.

"They're all relatives of mine, descendants of the original fruit peddlers," one of Joe's grandsons, Tony, of Dover.

But Matteo, or Joe as he liked to be called, didn't like the big city. He moved first to Wooster, then to Canton, and finally in the 1890's, to Dover where he opened the first fruit and vegetable market and decided to settle.

He sent for his wife, Laura, and over the next few years were born Fred, Tony, Marion, and Lena. The first Rini Market was at Tuscarawas Ave. and W. 3rd St. Later he moved to 343 W. 5th st.

Family and business always came first with young Joe, but he had fond memories of the "neighborhood gang," and the lasting friendships he made — the part of America he always loved.

Among those good friends was Ernest "Mooney" Warther, who would become "the world's master carver." Today, hanging on

the walls of Warther Museum, are early pictures of Warther and Joe together in various enterprises.

On Aug. 7, 1910, Warther had a bet with a friend that he could swim 1½ miles against the current in the Tuscarawas River. It was Joe who covered Mooney's body with oil and grease to protect himself against the cold.

"Stories like that is one reason I'm working as a tour guide at Warther Museum today," said Tony, a retired postal worker. "The family friendship goes back more than 100 years. It's a great source of pride."

The "neighbor gang" friendship concept continued with the children. "My father, Fred, was a private music teacher in Dover and a music teacher in the county schools before teachers had to be certified," Tony said.

"Uncle Tony worked all his life as a shearer at Reeves Steel. I remember uncle Marion as the best sharpshooter in the county, but everyone in the gang was a good shot, and finally the group was barred from entering weekend turkey and bear shoots in the area because they would win everything.

"There were no cars, not even any radios in those early days, so they had to find their own recreation, and everyone hunted and fished," Tony said.

Marion Rini started shooting hand guns and shotguns at an early age. One time he went to a wild west show touring through the county and he was so good he was asked to travel with them. Grandpa Joe said no.

Two things Joe believed his children should learn were cooking and swimming before they were 10 years old. He believed it would protect them from loneliness.

Grandson Tony remembers the time Elliott Nugent, author and playwright, returned to his native Dover for an autograph session for his book, "The Male Animal."

Tony was in line and Nugent asked him, "what relationship are you to Matteo, Joe, Rini?"

When Tony said Joe was his



The Matteo "Joe" and Lorenza Ciancioli Rini family sometime around 1910. Standing behind their parents are Anthony (L), Lena, Marion and I. Fred.

grandfather, Nugent dropped everything else to talk with Tony. "Did you know he taught me how to make spaghetti sauce?" he asked.

In the early years in the United States Joe's mother, who remained in Italy, insisted that Joe make periodic visits to her, and he returned several times.

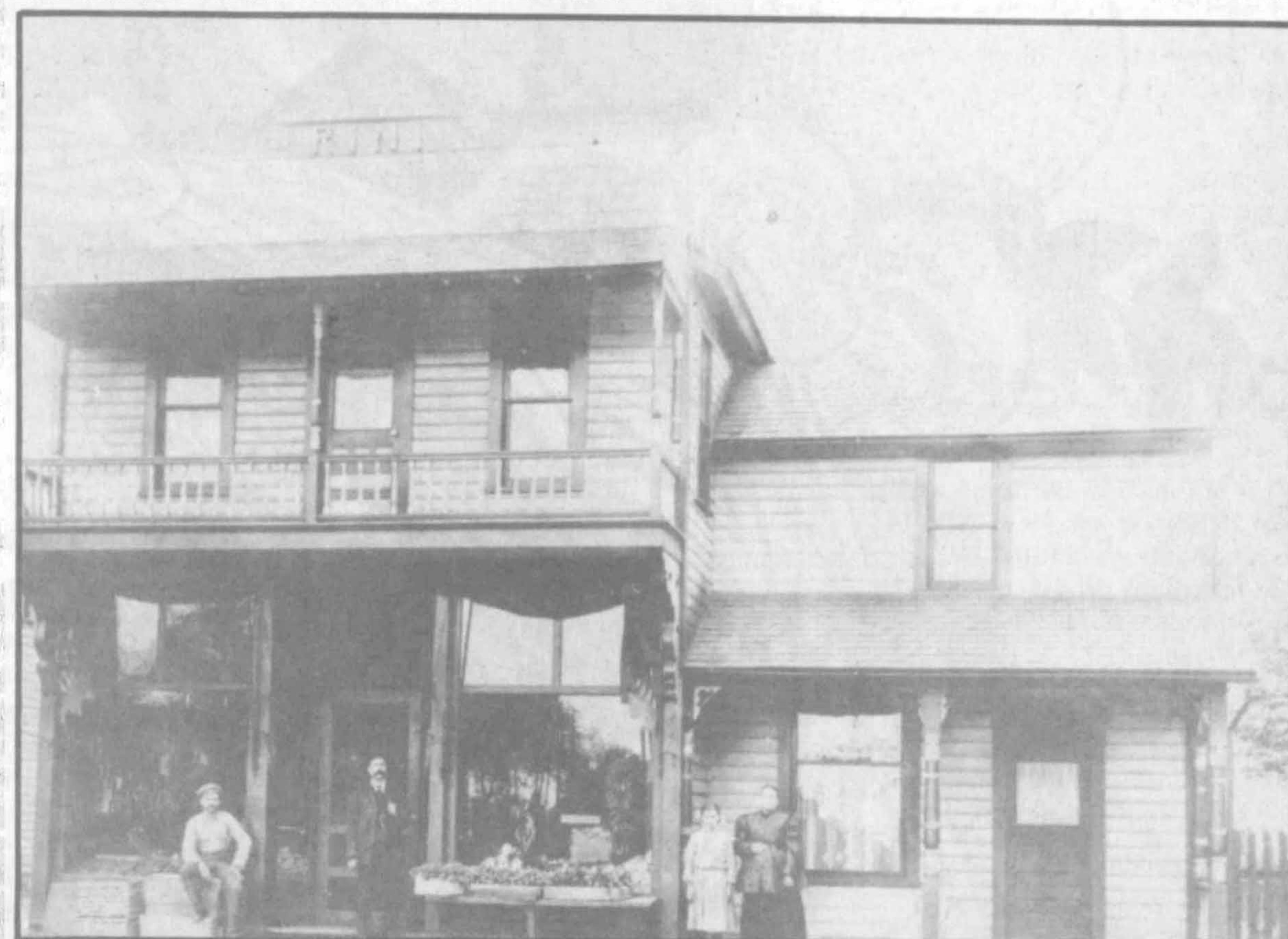
On one of these trips the boat was struck by a British battleship and Joe had to be rescued at sea. "We're glad he survived," Tony smiled.

He added that he and his wife had an opportunity to visit the original family village in Italy several years ago. "I will only say it remains poverty stricken," he said.

Tony has seven brothers and sisters, Laura Dattilo of Pittsburgh, Martin of Dover; Fred, Frank, Marion, and Mary Strazisar of Canton, and Lena Eaton of Milwaukee. There are cousins in New Philadelphia, Hartville, Pittsburgh and California.

Eleven of Grandpa Joe's grandchildren served in World War II. He died May 5, 1945, two days before VE Day — a day he longed for.

"I remember him always saying that while he also longed for the peace and serenity of a quiet fishing village, he never regretted coming to the United States," Tony said.



Joe Rini's store on W. 5th St. in Dover.