

Tontitown Storie



The Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum

Fall 2012, Vol. 8, No. 2

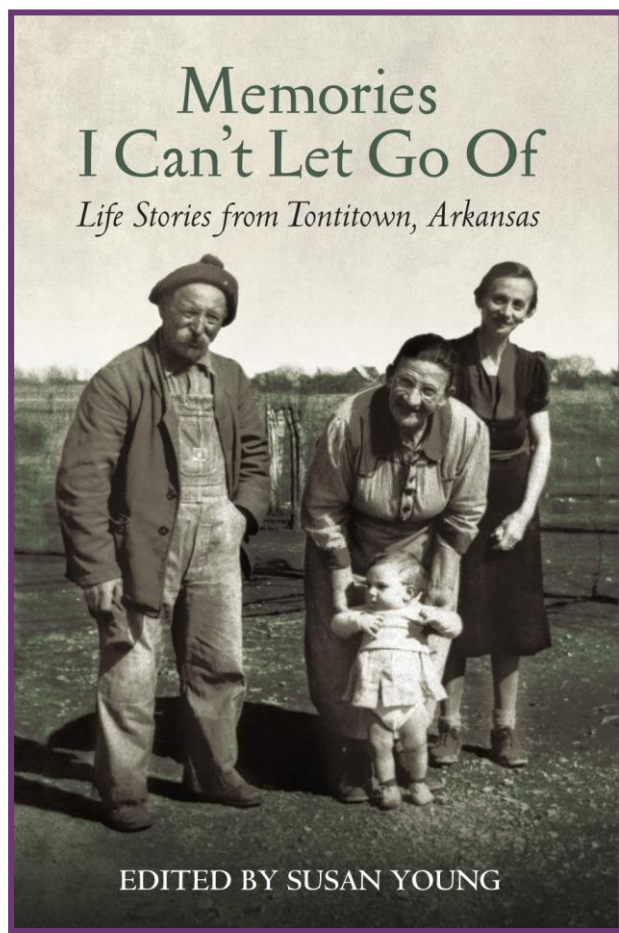
Saluti from the Board

Memories I Can't Let Go Of — the title of Susan Young's latest book was taken from Francis Pianalto's interview and is the perfect title. Introduced during the Grape Festival this year, book sales exceeded everyone's expectations. Susan sold out early on the third day of sales and had to take orders until a new shipment arrived.

The cover photograph of Santo Ceola, Maria Ceola, holding Dickie Ceola, and Allesandra "Alice" Ceola Mussino taken during the 1940's is from the Phyllis Brunetti Hale and Beatrice Taldo Mussino, Tontitown Historical Museum Collections. It speaks volumes about generations of family, love, and commitment. It is a perfect cover for Susan's book, containing stories of Tontitown citizens interviewed over a period four years, starting in 2002.

Forty eight people were interviewed by Tontitown Preservation Project volunteers. Andy Franco, Nova Jean Fiori Watson, Brenda Pianalto, Ruth Ann Roso Ritchie, and Mary Maestri Vaughan conducted the interviews from 2002 through 2005. Bob Besom, former director of Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, Dr. Michael Pierce, professor of history at the University of Arkansas, and Susan Young guided the volunteers and conducted some of the early interviews. Transcribing the interviews was difficult and time consuming. Pauline Fiori Franco, Nancy Baker Maestri, Frances Verucchi Franco, Bev Cortiana-McEuen, and Brenda Pianalto undertook the daunting task. Frank Maestri and Danny Watson provided unwavering support, and Jim and Peggy Borden led video production.

When the interviews were conducted a set of questions about family, school, friends, and community were asked each interviewee. Susan has taken these oral interviews and woven them into a narrative format that flows beautifully.



Latest Tontitown Book Features Oral Interviews
edited by Susan Young, designed by Liz Lester

Individually, the interviews weave a story of hard times where each family member, even the very young, contributed to the survival of the family. Collectively, they tell a story of how the residents of Tontitown survived during the Great Depression.

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Curator's Choice

by Charlotte Piazza

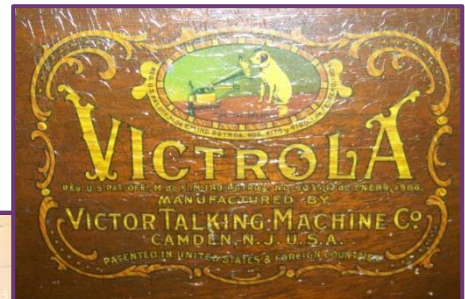
A very nice piece of history in the way of a victrola was recently donated to the Tontitown Historical Museum. The victrola was donated from the estate of Catherine and Josephine Piazza.

The story is that Catherine and Josephine, along with their mother Angelina Piazza, purchased the victrola for \$3.00 at James Taldo's estate auction.

Rita Piazza McKenzie Cloer and family delivered the victrola to the Museum. Josephine requested that the victrola be donated to the Museum, and Rita and family carried out Josephine's wishes.

This victrola was made by The Victor Talking Machine Company in 1906. The victrola still works, and includes two storage compartments filled with records.

James Taldo and then the Piazza's had a very nice record collection, including these selections, and many others: Bob Willis and his Texas Playboys, *Goodnight Little Sweetheart*; Red Foley with Roy Ross and His Ramblers, *Foggy River* and *Lay Down Your Soul*; Jimmie Rodgers, *Yodeling Cowboy*; and Roy Rogers, *Melody of the Plains* and *New Worried Mind*.



Victrola donated in Memory of Catherine & Josephine Piazza

Rita Piazza McKenzie Cloer, son Darrell McKenzie, granddaughter Ashley Kisner Nightengale, daughter and son-in-law, Doris Ann and Carl Kisner.

Leon Zulpo said, "What I really remember about my childhood days in Tontitown is how people helped each other. Neighbors helping neighbors that is the way I grew up." Neighbors pooled resources to help each other butcher hogs and clear land. They weighed their milk and shared in making cheese because the milk from one family would sour before enough was saved to make cheese.



Community Gathering, believed to be making cheese, ca. 1915

*photo courtesy Bastianelli Collection, Tontitown Historical Museum
from "So Big, This Little Place," page 114, by Susan Young*

The photograph shown above of the Ceola, Maestri, Morsani, and Roso families, and Father Bandini, appears on page 114 of "*So Big, This Little Place*." It remained a mystery until we learned from the stories in Susan's book that they were making cheese.

The men in Tontitown worked hard, some leaving for months at a time to work the mines in Oklahoma. But these interviews also tell of the mothers who raised families, tended fields, canned enough food from the garden to last their family through the winter, preserved meat, and made all of the clothes for their family. Helen Crane Morsani tells of sowing thirty-five acres of wheat. Francis Pianalto said, "Uncle Victor Ceola, Uncle Fred Ceola, Uncle Nel Ceola, Daddy, Gabriel, Lawrence, and Oliver carried seventy-three rabbits home from a hunting trip. After they were dressed and cleaned, Mama washed, cut up, boiled, and canned about seventy-three quarts of rabbits." Mrs. Pianalto raised thirteen children. These women are the unsung heroes of Tontitown.

The children were often up at three in the morning. They did their chores, ate breakfast, tended their rabbit traps, and many then walked from two to three miles to school. Alma Roso Hunter shared, "We walked to school. In the wintertime I remember as a very small child,

when it was snowing and the wind was blowing very, very hard Daddy would carry me so I would be facing south, and he would take the wind and carry me to school."

The Italian community shared a strong faith. They did not question the authority of the priest or nuns, (Catholic sisters), who taught their children. Many of the nuns were strong disciplinarians; and the older boys loved to provoke them. Story after story tells of how the nuns used a ruler to whack a child over their knuckles.

These are stories of faith, family loyalty, and friendships during hard times. All of those who were interviewed expressed a sense of pride in their families and the community where they grew up. After settling in Northwest Arkansas in the late 1800's, these Italian families were now landowners who had enjoyed prosperity. The Great Depression that devastated all of the Ozarks was a difficult time, but the people of this Italian community were survivors.

You will find yourself laughing out loud, or feel a tear trickling down your cheek, as you read these stories. They will bring back memories, or remind you of similar stories told to you by your parents or grandparents.

Family Focus ... Alma Cigainero Hartman

excerpts from Alma's oral interview in *Memories I Can't Let Go Of*, edited by Susan Young
[...] indicates additional stories in the book, pages 95-101

Alma Cigainero Hartman was born January 20, 1919, in Tontitown, Arkansas, to Joseph and Iginia Pianalto Cigainero. Alma was 84 years old when she was interviewed in 2002.

My mother was born in Vicenza, Italy. Her parents were Dominic and Catherine Penzo Pianalto. They came to America [to Sunnyside] with their four children: Leo, Irlinda, my mother Iginia, and George. My mother was three years old [when she came to America]. She remembered the trip, how cold it was, how uncomfortable it was. My grandmother Catherine died in Sunnyside giving birth to twins. She and the twins are buried there.

When the family came to Tontitown [in 1898], they first lived in a log cabin on the old Fiori place just south of Highway 68 [today's Highway 412] on Barrington Road. Dominic and the kids, along with Dominic's brother and sister-in-law, Pete and Theresa—we called her Aunt Tracy—all lived in that log cabin.

A few weeks after they were here a tornado came. Pete, Aunt Tracy, and Dominic took all the kids around a bed in the southwest corner of their house. They were kneeling around the bed praying the rosary. The tornado took the top of the cabin off, took it all off except the bed that they were around. They said Father Bandini had said Mass in that corner several times. After all of that, they found a bottle of holy water in the debris that wasn't broken. That was a miracle. [...]



Alma in the backyard of Cigainero homeplace, 1922

Photo courtesy Alma Cigainero Hartman,
Tontitown Historical Museum, S-2003-2-549



Alma during her oral interview ~ 2002

My father, Joe Cigainero, came to Tontitown from Texarkana, Arkansas. The doctor in Texarkana told Papa's father that he had to be sent to the higher country because of his health. Papa had very bad asthma and was told he would not live six months if he stayed there. He came to Tontitown and stayed with Kate Neal, roomed and boarded there. That's how he met Mama. Papa was maybe 11 or 12 when he came to America. He was 15 years older than Mama. Mama was not quite 18 when she married; he was 33. They remained married 60-some years.

Papa bought land here and four of his brothers came before he got married and helped him build this house we are in today. This is where my parents lived until both of them died. My parents had five children: Catherine, Eileen, Alma, Madeline, and Lillian.

My father was a very good carpenter. He did not go to school one day in his life, but he could build the most beautiful things you ever saw. He could take lumber that somebody threw away and make something out of it. I know when he worked for B. and Richard Ardemagni [owners of Tontitown Mercantile], they would have bought [lumber] for him to work with. But he would go out back and find something and say, "This will do fine." He would take all these scraps and make shelves or whatever out of it. [...]

Family Focus, Alma Cigainero Hartman ... continued

When we were growing up, we were never hungry. There was always enough food. Our meat was pork. We always had salami. We had cows, so we always had cheese. We all pitched in to help Mama in the kitchen, because she had been in the field most of the day. We peeled potatoes. We had vineyards, strawberries, and always raised chickens. We ate a lot of eggs. [...]

Before we had electricity, we had an Aladdin lamp that we used when we all sat at the kitchen table and studied. It was hard, but that was all we knew. Whenever Eugene Pianalto and another fellow put in our electricity, it was heaven. Mama and Papa told us to keep the lights off except when we really needed them. [...]

After 10th grade, I went to California. Ernest Pianalto had married a Haney, and they had a store [in California.] They wanted me to come work in their store. I went to California by bus. I went alone. After I worked [for the Pianaltos] awhile, I moved to Gilroy where Frindy [Florinda] Bariola lived, and worked with her, waiting tables at the Hecker Pass Inn. It was an Italian restaurant. Then I went to San José to work at telephone company for three or four years.



Alma ~ May 2012
At 93, still making pasta with her family!



Alma's second restaurant, Alma's Cafe ~ 1967-68

*Photo courtesy Eugenia Hartman,
Tontitown Historical Museum, S-2008-99-7*

They had a big earthquake and I didn't stay there any longer. I transferred to San Bernardino and I lived with Aunt Linda [Irlinda] Haney and her daughter Martha. I worked long distance there. Then I came home.

I met my husband, George Hartman, when Louis Pianalto and his sister Mary were going up to this restaurant and dance place in Caverna, Missouri. I went up with them and met George there. Louis knew George; they were in the Navy together. At that time I was working at John Granata's Winery, where I labeled wine.

George and I had four children: Duane, Patricia, Eugenia, and Mary Nell. We had a café here in Tontitown. It was on the southwest corner of Hwy 412 and Barrington Road. There were two apartments upstairs—the Peronas lived in the southwest corner, and we had the apartment in the northeast corner. George, I, and the children were running the café. It burned. We lost everything, our home and our business. Everything. [...]

When I was growing up, every night we all said the rosary together. We had to kneel down. If we didn't kneel down, we didn't dare go to sleep. Looking back on my childhood, as poor as we were, I wouldn't trade those days for any part of my life. Those were the happiest days of my life.

~ *Donations in Memory and in Honor* ~

It is with gratitude and pride that we display memorial and honorarium donations in the Tontitown Historical Museum.

Beato & Violet Haney Ardemagni
Cathy Ardemagni
Cecil Ardemagni
Gene & Irma Taldo Ardemagni
Leo Baudino
Kathleen Brock
Cel & Mary Ceola Cortiana
Gordon & Imogene Ardemagni Cortiana
Rudy Costa
Candida Morsani Crane
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Pete & Mary Cortiana Fiori
Joseph Angelo "Andy" Franco
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Lee Wana Bariola Keck
Anna Morsani Kitchell
Dawn Latham & Michael Latham Family

Lynn Maestri
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Leo & Lucy Ceola Pinalto
Henry Piazza
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Elizabeth Morsani Williams
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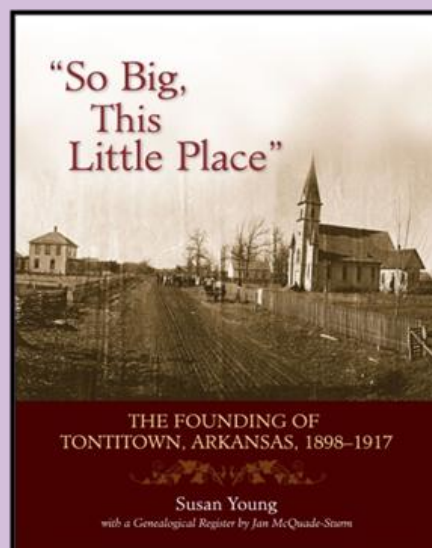
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Tontitown Storia is published by the Tontitown Historical Museum Board, usually in the Spring and Fall. Please submit story ideas or other comments to Bev Cortiana-McEuen at 479-361-2609, or at email bcortiana@cox.net.

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Mention this ad during the
**11th Annual Tontitown Reunion &
Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear**
and purchase our book for \$20.00!



✓ **Mark Your Calendar ...**

2012-2013 Museum Events

Date	Event
November 4, 2012	11th Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear Co-sponsored by the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History St. Joseph's Parish Hall, 1:30 – 4 p.m. Speaker: Susan Young , editor of <i>Memories I Can't Let Go Of</i> Music: Loretta Brunetti
To be announced	2013 Arkansas Heritage Month May Event
June – September 2013	Tontitown Historical Museum, Regular Season Hours Open Saturdays and Sundays, 1 – 4 p.m. or by special appointment, call 361-2498 or 361-2607
August 6-10, 2013	115th Tontitown Grape Festival, It's About Tradition Tontitown Historical Museum, Special Hours Thursday, August 8 1 – 4 p.m. Friday, August 9 1 – 7 p.m. Saturday, August 10 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.



Tontitown Historical Museum Amici (Friends)

☒ **Yes, I want to be a member of Tontitown Historical Museum Amici!**

Benefits:

- ✓ Satisfaction in supporting the growth of the Tontitown Historical Museum to preserve and protect the heritage of Tontitown.
- ✓ Receive annual membership card.
- ✓ Receive 10% discount on Tontitown history books: *"So Big, This Little Place"* and *Memories I Can't Let Go Of*
- ✓ Receive special invitations to museum events, including the Annual Tontitown Reunion and Polenta Smear.

Mail your tax-deductible check to:
 Tontitown Historical Museum
 P.O. Box 144
 Tontitown, AR 72770
 (or give it to any Museum Board member)

Annual Membership Levels

- ☐ Individual – \$10
- ☐ Family – \$20
- ☐ Senior Individual – \$8
- ☐ Senior Family – \$15
- ☐ Sponsor – \$50 to \$249
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join today!**

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257 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard
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11th Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear ~ Sunday - November 4, 2012 ~ 1:30 - 4:00 p.m. ~

The Tontitown Historical Museum and Shiloh Museum extend a cordial invitation to an extra-special **Tontitown Reunion and Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear** on Sunday, November 4, 1:30-4 pm. Susan Young will present a program on her recently released book, *Memories I Can't Let Go Of*. This extraordinary book, a compilation of oral interviews of Tontitown elders, debuted during the 2012 Tontitown Grape Festival. Along with Susan, Loretta Brunetti will share lively traditional Italian tunes. Don't miss this special day—yummy polenta and umedo, fond friendships, and fun time!



Memories I Can't Let Go Of released at the 2012 Tontitown Grape Festival
Standing, l-r: Nova Jean Fiori Watson, Liz Lester
Seated, l-r: Susan Young, Mary Frances Maestri Vaughan, Frank Maestri

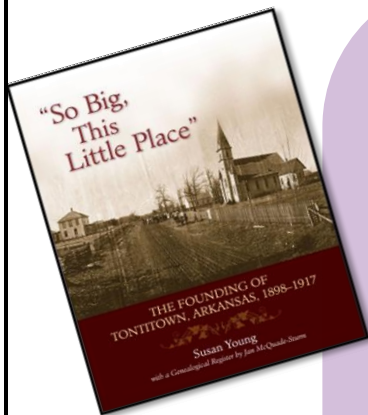
Tontitown Storia
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11th Annual Tontitown Reunion & Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear

SUNDAY – NOVEMBER 4, 2012 – 1:30 TO 4:00 P.M.
ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH PARISH HALL

Tontitown Historical Museum will be open from **12:30 - 1:30 p.m.**
Stop by before the Polenta Smear!

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1:30 – 4:00 | COPY PHOTOS, ENJOY PHOTO DISPLAYS, VISIT & LAUGH! :)
WIN DOOR PRIZES AND HAVE FUN! |
| 2:00 – 3:15 | POLENTA & UMEDO, DESSERT SERVED |
| 2:30 | SPECIAL PROGRAM
SUSAN YOUNG – <i>MEMORIES I CAN'T LET GO OF</i>
Books available to purchase and Susan will sign them.
LORETTA BRUNETTI – FUN MUSIC! |



The "SMEAR" is Almost Here! *by Loretta Brunetti*

It's that SPECIAL time of Year
Our Annual TONTITOWN Polenta Smear.

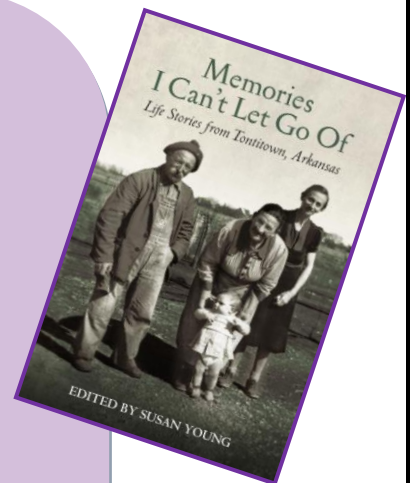
Sunday Nov. 4th, is the date
So get here early, and don't be late.

It's a time to gather with family & friends
Preserving OUR History, so it never ends.

A time to visit & reflect on the past
To make sure our History will ALWAYS last.

Tontitown History is IMPORTANT to Our State
So bring old pictures & documents for us to update.

IT'S ALMOST HERE
Get ready for the 'SMEAR'!



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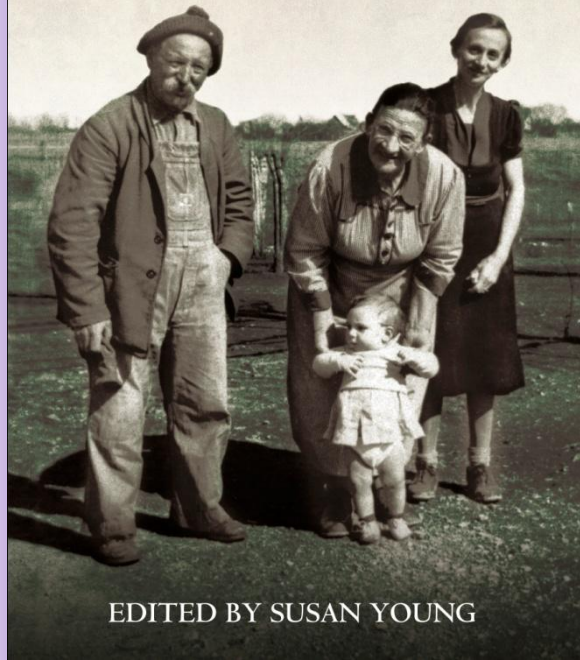
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Memories I Can't Let Go Of

Life Stories from Tontitown, Arkansas



Oral Interviews:

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