

Tontitown Storia



The Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum

Spring 2015, Vol. 11, No. 1

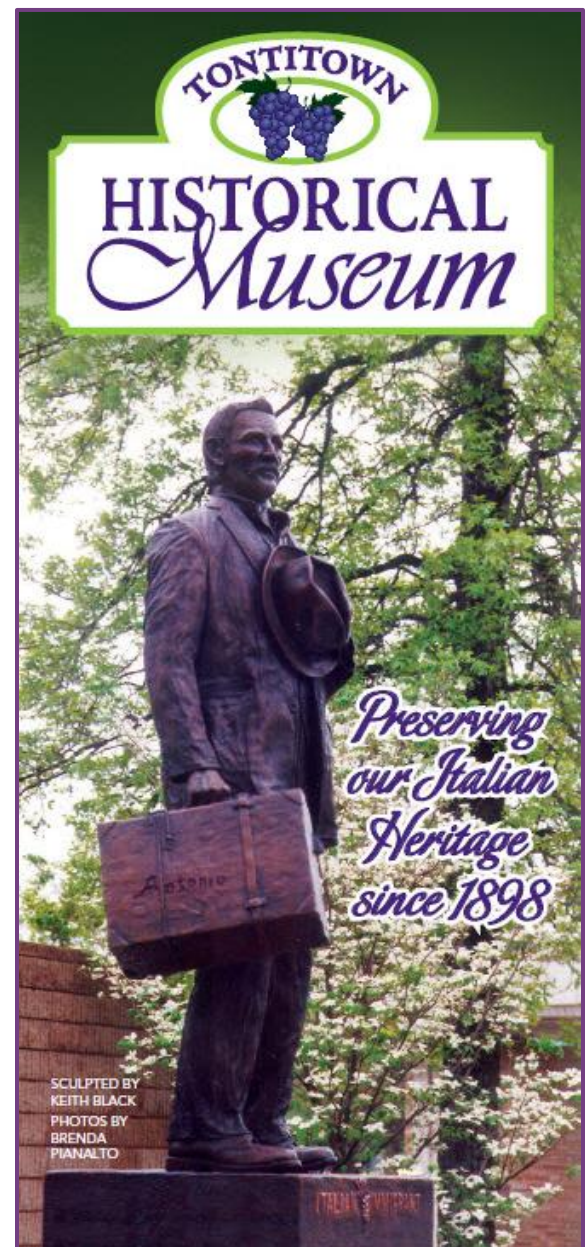
Saluti from the Board

We've had a spectacular spring in Northwest Arkansas this year. The flowers, bushes, and trees have shown their colors with brilliance. The flowering dogwood in front of Tontitown City Hall often provides that perfect backdrop for a special photo of "Antonio," the Italian Immigrant statue. Shown here is a photo taken by Brenda Pianalto, which we chose for the eye-catching front of a newly designed rack card, part of our marketing campaign partially funded by a grant from the Arkansas Humanities Council and Department of Arkansas Heritage. We are in the final phases of completing the grant, and soon will have new rack cards at the Arkansas Visitor Centers and new brochures for local distribution. Many thanks to talented Liz Lester Designs for designing these and the new Amici membership materials.

The Amici membership campaign – *So Big, This Little Museum* – is gaining momentum. We're receiving several renewal and new memberships every week, and have a list of members-to-date on page 3. We graciously thank all of our supporters, and are proud to see *Amici, Friends of the Tontitown Museum* window clings on cars around town and across the country. Yes, folks, we have Amici members from coast to coast! Grazie mille to all!

We are super excited with the start of city employee support for the museum. Rachel Bellamy, Office Clerk for the city, is the perfect person to work at the museum on Fridays. We have a long list of projects, and having Rachel dedicated to help on a regular basis will make a huge difference. Many thanks to Mayor Paul Colvin, Jr. and all the City Council members for helping us jump a huge hurdle by providing paid staff time.

Finally, we want to invite you to **Tontitown Heritage Day**, on Sunday, May 17 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the museum and in Harry Sbanotto Park. It will be a good time to visit Antonio and feel the courage that all our settler families had in leaving their homeland to venture to the unknown in America for a better life. Read more about the May event inside and on the back cover. Hope to see you there!



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Curator's Choice

by Charlotte Piazza and Bev Cortiana-McEuen



The Emigrant statue in Valli del Pasubio

photo courtesy Henry and Charlotte Piazza

The *Italian Immigrant* statue at Tontitown City Hall was made in the likeness of *The Emigrant* statue in Valli del Pasubio. Dedicated in Valli del Pasubio on May 1, 1992, *The Emigrant* represents the pioneer spirit of the Italians who left their homeland to find a better life. Around that statue are flags for the many countries that the Italians emigrated to, including the United States of America. Then Mayor Fredie Taldo received a letter from Valli del Pasubio (included in the insert of this newsletter) commemorating that heartfelt dedication day.

Lorine Taldo, Henry Piazza, and Charlotte Piazza saw the Emigrant statue in 1996 while visiting Valli del Pasubio. They and other Tontitowners wanted to similarly honor their homeland.

The Tontitown City Council got behind the project in 1996 and commissioned Keith Black, award-winning artist from Prairie Grove, to sculpt the statue for Tontitown's special 100th anniversary in 1998.



The Italian Immigrant statue at Tontitown City Hall,

with sculptor Keith Black ~ 1998

photo by Brenda Pianalto

Henry Piazza chaired a committee to work with Keith Black. Pauline Franco, Joyce Penzo, Peggy Penzo, and Charlotte Piazza researched family information for the statue base. The committee reviewed Keith's work to ensure the Tontitown Immigrant was represented with Italian characteristics. Pauline Franco helped Keith create the face with more Italian-like features. Keith replaced his original derby-type hat with a more fedora-type hat, like one that belonged to Dominic (Dick) Piazza, Henry's father. Keith's wife, Dorris, always named his sculptures, and coined this one "Antonio." Thus, Antonio is written on the suitcase.

Many supporters volunteered to help. The \$31,000 project was completely funded by private donations, encouraged by the Tontitown City Council from 1996-1998. Earl Mussino recommended Locarni Marble Co. in Carthage, Missouri for the granite base. PAM Transport supplied transportation. The statue was fired by the Hoka-Hey Fine Arts Foundry in Dublin, Texas. The committee, including Dickie Roso and Lloyd Bariola, helped install the statue in late July 1998. It was covered with a parachute until it was revealed and dedicated during the special celebration of the 100th Tontitown Grape Festival on August 8, 1998.

Keith Black passed away in 2006. He always created a small replica of his sculptures, and gave Antonio's miniature to Henry Piazza. The *Italian Immigrant* signifies the appreciation, respect, and honor that we have for our Italian ancestors who made a new life in Tontitown. We invite you to take some time to feel that special spirit during one of your visits to the Tontitown Historical Museum and Harry Sbanotto Park.



Grazie Mille to Amici Members



Our membership campaign – ***So Big, This Little Museum*** – is in full swing. We thank those of you who recently answered our letter or email to join/renew membership, and understand some are in the mail. Your donations are accumulating in the Museum Building Fund for future expansion. If you haven't joined or renewed your membership yet, an Amici form is on page 7. Again – ***Grazie Mille, Amici!***

Lifetime

Loyce Ardemagni
Richard & Bernadette Ardemagni
Kenneth Brock
Mike & Bernadette Pinalto Collins
Mary Costa Wersky-Colombero
Genevieve (Genny) Della Rosa
Deutsch
Leona Della Rosa Kasting
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Paul & Dolores Maestri Stolfi Dicks
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Lawrence McGlone
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Robert Serio
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Everett Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram

Concordia

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Individual

Loyce Ardemagni
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Cory Bowen
Holly Childs
Sandy Christophersen
Celia Cigainero-Stigall
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Jennifer Pinalto
Roger Pinalto
Patricia Simoni

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Nelda Bariola Duplissie
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Jana Mayfield
John P. McGlone
Cynthia Pinalto
Ellen Verucchi Goff
Nova Jean Fiori Watson



Family Focus ... The L.J. Granata Winery & Co.

by Annette Pianalto Drake and Martha Anne Swearingen
Leopold John (L.J.) Granata's great-granddaughter and great-great-granddaughter

The Granata Winery, once the largest in Arkansas, is an icon of Tontitown's traditional Italian heritage. Born of determination and hard work, it exemplifies the spirit and dedication of the Italian immigrants.

Founder, Leopold John (L.J.) Granata, was born April 15, 1887, in Valli dei Signori, Italy (known as Valli del Pasubio after 1926). He left Italy as a teenager in 1902 to work as a miner in Germany. Mr. Granata saved his money and in 1908 made the journey to America. With the saved funds he purchased 175 acres of land in Tontitown to build his farm home, produce grapes, and begin what would later become the L.J. Granata Winery & Co.

Mr. Granata married Mary Louise Fiori on June 8, 1911, and together they had four children: Florence Granata Fiori, Alice Marie Granata Leatherman, Lawrence Batiste "Buster" Granata and Catherine Assumpta "Dolly" Granata Mhoon. Mr. Granata proudly received his United States citizenship in 1928. Mrs. Granata received her U.S citizenship in 1959.

In the beginning it was hard for all the Tontitown immigrant families and the Granata family was no exception. To make ends meet before the winery was established, Mr. Granata worked in the coal mines at Krebs, Oklahoma, along with many others from the Tontitown community. Mrs. Granata traveled with him in the beginning and their first child, Florence, was born in Krebs on May 7, 1912.



The Granata farm and winery

On Highway 68 (now 412), 2 miles west of Barrington

Photo courtesy Janice Swearingen



Leopold John (L.J.) & Mary Fiori Granata Family, mid-1920's

Back, l-r: Alice, Mary Louise, Leopold John (L.J.) and Florence
Front, l-r: Catherine "Dolly" and Lawrence "Buster"

Tontitown Historical Museum, Lillian Cortiana Granata collection

The winery started modestly in the home cellar with a single 50-gallon barrel. In 1935, the winery was federally licensed as Bonded Winery #43. By this time the winery had grown to 29 barrels with 6,500 gallon capacity per barrel. The family owned and operated business sold 496,000 gallons of wine at its peak in 1941 and was the largest in Arkansas.

Bringing old country traditions to the United States, L.J. Granata Winery & Co. created what were called "imitation wines" of those originally found in Italy. Among the varieties produced, many wines found great success:

- *Honeymoon* – a brand that included Port and Sherry grape wines
- *Razorback* – a traditional table wine
- *Granata's* – a white grape wine
- *Red Fox* – a grape blend
- *Uncle Joe* – an apple wine.

Family Focus, The L.J. Granata Winery & Co. ... continued

Mr. Granata insisted on the name Uncle Joe in what is thought to be a tribute to longtime employee Joe Ranalli. In 1939, Mr. Granata took the young neighbor-boy under his wing and taught him wine making. Joe Ranalli is patriarch of the Ranalli family that now produces wine at the new Tontitown Winery.

A heart attack in 1965 slowed Mr. Granata and the winery production, but he maintained a supervisory role in day-to-day operations. By this time there were only 35 acres of vineyards on the farm. Mr. Granata died on June 24, 1970, at the age of 83. The winery closed one year later.

While the winery structure is no longer standing, the family home where L.J. Granata Winery & Company was formed still stands just west of Pianalto Road across from Ranalli Farms. It serves as a reminder of the dedication shown by Tontitown's early settlers to bring prosperity and growth to the community, making it the wonderful place it is today.



L.J. Granata - early-1960's



L. J. Granata Winery bottling machine
on display at the Tontitown Historical Museum
with other wine making artifacts

Photo courtesy Annette Pianalto Drake



Top: Granddaughter Martha Granata Pinalto, 58th Grape Festival Queen Concordia, 1956

at the Granata Winery

Photo courtesy Janice Swearingen

Bottom: Proudly showing newly bottled wine, ca 1930

l-r: Alma Roso, Margaret Taldo Roso,
daughter Dolly Granata Mhoon, and Virginia Fiori Bariola

*Photo courtesy Virginia Fiori Bariola,
Tontitown Historical Museum. S-2003-2-158*



Eustacchio Cortiana Cousins

Board members Bev Cortiana-McEuen (left) and Brenda Pianalto (right) had the best time meeting cousin Linda Buck Tessier (center) recently. She and her husband Phil live in San Clemente, California, and made a short stop in Tontitown while on an RV trip. It was their first time here, and they were excited and moved to see the preserved history of her ancestors. We shared stories of our Cortiana grandparents – Cel, Dominico (Dick), and Mary – and families. We love creating treasured memories with our kissin' cousins, and look forward to more cousin visits at the museum!

Tontitown Historical Museum 2015 Board of Directors

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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.

~ Donations in Memory and in Honor ~

It is with gratitude and pride that we display Memorial and Honorarium (H) 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
 Gilbert & Lucia "Shortie" Cortiana
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 Joseph Angelo "Andy" Franco
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 Gloria Mae Maestri Sallis
 Harry & Dorothy Fiori Sbanotto
 Agatha Morsani Smith
 Lillian Pianalto Smith
 Marie Tessaro
 Bruce Vaughan
 Daniel "Danny" Ray Watson
 Elizabeth Morsani Williams
 Leon & Sally Verucchi Zulpo

✓ Mark Your Calendar ...

2015 Museum Events

Date	Event
Ongoing	Tontitown Historical Museum, Regular Hours Open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 1 – 4 pm or by special appointment, call 479-361-2498 or 479-361-9800
May 17, 2015	2015 Tontitown Heritage Day at Harry Sbanotto Park, 1-4 p.m. Museum Open; Music by Bert and Heather Supporting Arkansas Heritage Month <i>From the Delta to the Hills:</i> <i>Different landscapes, a common heritage</i> 
August 4-8, 2015	117th Tontitown Grape Festival, It's About Tradition Tontitown Historical Museum, Special Hours Thursday, August 6 1 – 4 pm Friday, August 7 1 – 7 pm Saturday, August 8 10 am – 7 pm 
November 8, 2015	14th Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear St. Joseph's Parish Hall 1:30 – 4 pm



*"So Big,
This Little
Museum"*

Benefits

- Satisfaction in supporting the growth of the Tontitown Historical Museum to preserve and protect the heritage of Tontitown.
- 10% discount on Museum purchases
- Amici window cling

Mail your tax-deductible check to:

Tontitown Historical Museum
 P.O. Box 144
 Tontitown, AR 72770

(or give to any Museum Board member)

Annual Amici Membership Levels

- ☐ Individual – \$15
- ☐ Family – \$20
- ☐ Senior Individual – \$10
- ☐ Senior Family – \$15
- ☐ Amici – \$50 to \$249
- ☐ Concordia – \$250 to \$499
- ☐ Heritage – \$500+

**Renew
or Join
Today!**

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

PHONE _____

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Volunteers are the backbone of Tontitown Historical Museum. May we call on you to volunteer? ☐ Yes!



251 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard
P.O. Box 144
Tontitown, Arkansas 72770

***Don't miss our May Event ~ Tontitown Heritage Day!
Sunday, May 17 ~ 1:00-4:00 p.m. ~ Harry Sbanotto Park***

The Tontitown Historical Museum Board invites you to a fun afternoon of friendship, music, outdoor activities, and history! Come visit the museum, take a special children's tour, play on the park playground, and enjoy some treats on us — hot dogs, yummy Ranalli cookies, and water. Bring your lawn chair and sing along to tunes by **Bert and Heather**, a local duo and favorite at the Tontitown Winery Sippin' and Singin' nights. It's sure to be a great Italian time! See you there!



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Spring 2015, Vol. 11, No. 1
insert follows

*Tontitown Historical Museum Board
cordially invites you to a fun, free afternoon!*

Tontitown Heritage Day

Sunday - May 17, 2015

1:00 - 4:00 pm

Harry Sbanotto Park & Tontitown Museum

- Music by **Bert and Heather** ~ local duo and favorites at the Tontitown Winery Sippin' & Singin' nights
- Museum open ~ Special tours for children
- Outdoor activities ~ Fun for all!
- Hot Dogs ~ Ranalli's cookies ~ Water
- Visit with old friends ~ Make new friends ☺

Supporting Arkansas Heritage Month



**Grazie Mille -- Many Thanks
to our sponsors!**

Tontitown Winery
Bryan L. McEuen,
Benton County Farm Bureau



*Bring lawn chairs or blankets if you like
~ Cancelled if raining; No rain date ~*

Mayor Fredie Taldo received the letter below from the "Committee for the statue of the emigrant" in Valli del Pasubio in 1992, which inspired our Italian Immigrant statue at Tontitown City Hall in 1998.

Valli del Pasubio – Vicenza, Italy
11th May 1992

To the Mayor of Tontitown, Arkansas USA

Dear Sir,

In behalf of the "Committee for the statue to the emigrant" I would like to inform you and your fellow citizens of Italian origin that here in the piazza of Valli Del Pasubio, where from they emigrated at the turn of the last century, first in the Venetian Region we have erected a bronze statue to the emigrants, so to remember and honor the thousand of our people who in search of better living conditions in the past until few years left these mountains valleys and emigrated all over the world. Init we remember also Tontitown as somebody from there years ago wrote making inquiries by our municipality in the parish registers about the origins of some of your founding Italian families. We still keep the pictures and some other printed material they have sent us in that occasion.



Sure that this will be of high historical interest for your community and for your little historical museum, we are sending 2 posters we had printed in occasion of the unveiling of the monument. This took place on the 1st of May 1992. In this occasion we had a silent thought also for your fellow citizens who with untold labour and courage many years ago left Valli Del Pasubio and through many vicissitudes and tribulations with pioneer spirit helped in the founding of the fortunes of Tontitown. With this bronze we will remember them.

With deep regards and best wishes for your town and for you all.

In behalf of Paolo Busellato,
President of the Committee

Dario Puo ...
Communal bibliotek
36030 Valli Del Pasubio (VI) Italy