

Tontitown Storia



The Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum

Spring 2016, Vol. 12, No. 1

Saluti from the Board

Earlier this year, the Tontitown Historical Museum Board received wonderful news from the Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District (NWAEDD). We were awarded a \$4,500 General Improvement Fund (GIF) community development grant to purchase a new outside sign and lighting. In case you haven't noticed, our sign in front of the museum is showing its age, with weather and tree limb damage. We had plans to purchase a new sign with memorial monies from our dear friend and supporter, Sunny Hinshaw. We discovered outdoor signs were more expensive than we realized, and searched for more resources. Our Arkansas state legislators came to the rescue! We sincerely thank Senator Jon Woods, Representative Robin Lundstrum, and Representative Lance Eads for granting this GIF award and for their support. Be on the lookout for a new sign—closer to the road, with a marquee for notices, and a memorial for Sunny.

As we continue to work on museum projects, we find ourselves also searching for more help. We have Museum Board vacancies, as well as volunteer opportunities, and welcome interested folks to talk with any Board member about our efforts. We sadly said goodbye to two valued and highly contributing 2015 Board members, Jana Mayfield and Brenda Pianalto. Both will always be in our corner, and Brenda will continue to be our photographer.

On this note, we recently had the good fortune of welcoming one new Museum Board member. Kyle Young joined our team, with lots of energy and new ideas. He will graduate from the University of Arkansas in May with a degree in history, and aspires to be a museum curator. We're very excited he's working with us.



Join Our Board or Be a Volunteer, and Have Fun!

2015 Museum Board members enjoying last year's Tontitown Heritage Day. Front row, L-R: Becky Howard, Riley Tessaro, Treasurer Bev Cortiana-McEuen; Back row, L-R: Secretary Annette Pianalto Drake, Roger Pianalto, Brenda Pianalto, Curator Charlotte Piazza, Membership Carol Walker, Michael Hartman, Jennifer DeMartino, and President Heather Ranalli-Peachee. (Not pictured, Vice-President Jana Mayfield)

Finally, we're celebrating a super special time in 2016—the 30th Anniversary of the opening of the Tontitown Historical Museum, which was on August 10, 1986. Mark your calendars for September 10, 2016 and watch for news about our 30th Anniversary Celebration dinner and fancy doin's! It will be at the Tontitown Winery and sure to be a fantastic time!

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Collections Corner

by Rachel Bellamy, Museum Assistant

A bit of mystery surrounds a Tontitown Historical Museum recently acquired treasure. Although a mere three inches in height, the tiny brass bell is tall on charm and grace. This bell, generously donated by Carmelita Franco Newquist, is in the form of a refined, bonnet-clad lady whose flouncing skirt flows about her tiny waist. While the five-tiered skirt suggests an antebellum theme, the collar of her dress suggests the Quaker style. Perhaps the most intriguing feature of the bell is concealed within the folds of her skirt—the tiny clapper in the shape of the lady's dainty legs and feet. In her upraised hand she holds what appears to be a staff, hence the mystery ... Is she a stately Southern belle or a shepherdess preparing to gather her sheep? "Her clothing is of the 1840's style," offered Carolyn Reno, Collections Manager for Shiloh Museum of Ozark History.

Bells have been long used to summon and dismiss school children. Unlike the piercing siren-like sound of a modern-day electronic ringer, the handheld bell of long ago would have issued a more pleasing tone. "Yes, I remember handheld bells," states Lori Bolen, Administrative Assistant for the City of Tontitown and Arkansas native since 1977. "They were used in smaller parochial schools." While a definite conclusion cannot be drawn, the smallness of this lady bell suggests that she was used within a small classroom setting rather than an open, bustling schoolyard.

In 1927, Tontitown's St. Mary's Academy was tragically destroyed by fire. Carmelita's father, Premo Franco, then a teenager, retrieved the tiny bell from the ashes and it has remained in the family ever since. The academy was later rebuilt and became St. Joseph's School.

Though the most decorative, the little bell is not the first school bell acquired by the museum. The first in the museum's collection, somewhat larger in size, dates back to the early 1920's and was acquired just after St. Joseph's School closed in 1987. It too was found among the remains following the fire of 1927 that destroyed St. Mary's Academy. How many flush-faced children rushed in from recess at its ring—loud and bold? Countless dozens, or so we've been told!

Remember us as you spring clean or sort your old treasures. It is through your family donations that we can accomplish our mission to preserve Tontitown's rich Italian heritage!



Tiny 3-inch bell found by Premo Franco after fire destroyed St. Mary's Academy

Donated by Carmelita Franco Newquist



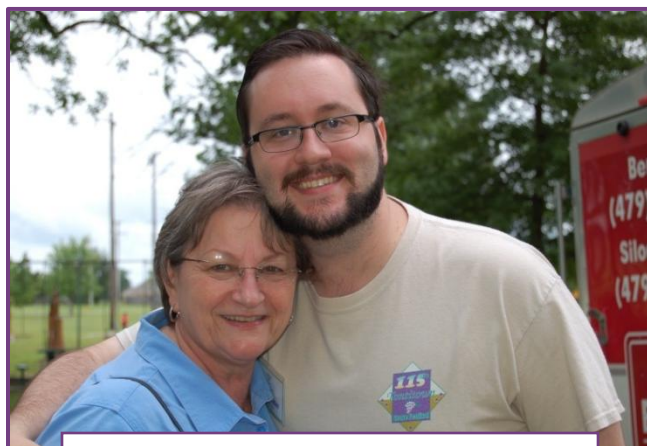
Hand-held school bell from St. Joseph's School

Acquired by Marlene Franco Piazza

Museum Board Member Spotlight

Michael Hartman joined the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM) Board as a non-voting Junior Member in October 2008 while still in high school, and then became a voting member in February 2011. He attended the University of Arkansas where he graduated with honors in Art History and German. While in college, Michael continued studying museums and collections, studied abroad in Germany, and spent a summer at the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton, Massachusetts.

In 2013, Michael moved to Dallas to work at the Dallas Museum of Art as a curatorial intern. There he had fun leading tours of the museum, writing for publications, curating exhibitions, and learning more about museums and how they function. While in Dallas, he stayed involved with the Tontitown Historical Museum via email and phone. Michael moved back home in 2014 when he took a job as a grant writer and corporate fundraiser at the Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville, where he has been for over two years.



**Michael and his mother, Gena Hartman,
at the 2015 Tontitown Heritage Day**

Photo by Brenda Pianalto

During his time at the Tontitown Historical Museum, Michael has helped with cataloging the collection, writing grants and fundraising, assisting with special exhibits and events, working as a member of the Strategic Planning Committee, and sitting at the museum during open hours on weekends. We are very grateful for Michael's continued dedication and many contributions to THM.

Sadly, Michael is moving away at the end of the summer to pursue his Masters in Art History at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. We will miss him on the Board, but we know that this is a great opportunity for someone else in the community to step in and join us! We are recruiting Board members and volunteers, and would love for you to be involved! Please ask any THM Board member how you can join us as we continue to preserve the history of Tontitown for generations to come.

THM Guestbook ~ August 10, 1986 ~ Opening Day, Page 1

Guests		
Date	Name	Address
Aug. 1986	Richard Pianalto	STREET CITY STATE Ark ZIP
	Florina Frou	STREET CITY STATE ZIP
	Mary Cahoon Peil	STREET CITY STATE ZIP
	Sina Franck	STREET CITY STATE ZIP
	Maehl Aaron	STREET CITY STATE ZIP
	Mildred Fredrick	STREET CITY Spdg STATE Ark ZIP

Family Focus ... Miss Bernadette Brady

Teacher, mentor, and friend to Tontitown Settler Families

by Dr. Rebecca A. Howard, Granddaughter of Allen and Helen Pianalto McGinnis

Miss Bernadette Brady is remembered as Tontitown's first teacher, a role that made her, in many ways, a part of every family in Tontitown. Recent research into her story has revealed new information about her connection to Tontitown, Sunnyside, and the Sisters of Mercy.

Father Bandini is remembered for the incredible impact he had on the lives of those who came to Tontitown, but for the children of the community, Miss Brady may have had an equally profound effect. When the Italians arrived, Brady, likely an orphan of both white and American Indian descent, was sixteen- or seventeen-years-old. Little is known about her early life, but she appeared in a picture that was taken in 1897 at Sunnyside (shown at right) with Bandini, three Sisters of Mercy, two unidentified girls, and a portrait of Austin Corbin.

Brady was a graduate of St. Mary's Academy in Little Rock (now known as Mount St. Mary), run by the Sisters of Mercy, and may have been taken in by the order. Barely older than many of the Italian children she was teaching, Brady would have been one of the few English-speaking American girls they would have had regular contact with in the first years of the venture. She was close enough in age to be both a mentor and a confidant. Simply put, for many of the young women of the community, Miss Brady was their first American friend. She taught them English and many other small but useful ways to navigate their new country.

As education was and remains a key mission of the Mercys, it is likely they trained Brady as a teacher. When the Sunnyside venture failed, Brady moved with the Italians to Tontitown and became the sole teacher in the community's first school. "A girl herself in the midst of girls and boys speaking another tongue, she learned from them as they learned from her through the intercourse of their mutual love and help, ties were formed and sympathies exchanged which make it impossible for the onlooker to judge whether Tontitown or Miss Brady loves the other more," was how Brady's early years with the community were described in 1911. She even learned Italian to better teach her pupils. Brady is noted in the Tontitown section of "Neighborhood News" in the *Springdale News* regularly between 1900 and 1914, even though she



Sunnyside Plantation, 1897

Bernadette Brady, far left, with Sisters of Mercy. Father Bandini stands in front of the tree, with Sunnyside Plantation owner Austin Corbin's portrait on the tree. Corbin died in 1896.

Tontitown Historical Museum, Bastianelli collection

appears to have only been a teacher in Tontitown until about 1904. Though she may not have been teaching in Tontitown, she did come back to help with special events in Tontitown. An admiring notation ran in the paper in 1909. "As announced in the *Springdale News*, a social and dance was held at the old School Hall on the evening of December 28th the proceeds of which were for the benefit of St. Joseph's Church. Miss Brady generously volunteered to play the music necessary and though she was ably assisted by Mrs. Leo Maestri, the major part of the piano playing fell to her lot. Though Miss Brady's musical talent is of a versatile order, yet it may be questioned if she has her equal in dance and rag-time rhythms." Brady spent the Christmas holiday in Tontitown that year with Leo and Josephine Maestri. She and Josephine (née Pantaleone) were quite close, and appear in more than one photograph together (see next page).

On October 9, 1908, "Luna," a Tontitown correspondent for the *Springdale News* noted, "Miss Bernadette Brady was in Tontitown last week. All who meet Miss Brady are always charmed with her genial personality while those who know her will think there is no one else so whole souled and so lovable. She is always a

Family Focus, Miss Bernadette Brady ... continued



**Josephine Pantaleone Maestri (left) and
Bernadette Brady, ca 1905**

Tontitown Historical Museum, Bastianelli collection

welcome visitor at Tontitown where she is affectionately remembered by all.” Even for the exuberant Luna this was a flowery notation. While Brady’s friendship and expertise with English would have been invaluable to the community, it was her experience on the periphery of the massive apparatus of the Catholic Church in general, and the Sisters of Mercy in particular, that was especially helpful for the young women of the community.

Many in the generation who immigrated as children followed Old World marriage habits, meaning young couples delayed marriage until they were financially established. Few walked down the aisle before their late twenties or thirties. So what did a young woman in the 1910s in rural Arkansas do with an extra decade or so as a single woman? It was likely due to Brady’s example and her connections to the Mercys that young women like the Bastianelli sisters, Kate Pianalto (later Ceola), Nesia Pianalto (later Tomiello), Rose Neale, or Emily Papili (later Fialla) found ways to support themselves. Rose and Mary Bastianelli, Kate, Rose, and Emily were all teachers. Some of them taught with the Mercys when they opened the school in Tontitown in 1908, but they also taught at schools supported by the Mercys in mining communities in Oklahoma and small towns in Arkansas and Kansas. When Progressive reformers in Arkansas began to formalize requirements for teachers, Miss Brady returned in 1912 to Tontitown to offer a summer course for the teachers of the community. Kate and Nesia Pianalto were among the first graduates from St. Edward School of Nursing, another mission of the Sisters of Mercy.

Brady had a lifelong connection to the Catholic Church and the Sisters of Mercy. As a young woman also on her own, she set an example many of the young women of Tontitown followed.

As an orphan, and one of mixed ancestry in the early twentieth century, Brady may have found a unique sense of belonging and acceptance with the immigrants of Tontitown. She was often mentioned as spending Christmases in Tontitown in the early 1900s, even if it meant traveling from elsewhere. She was in a photograph of Tontitown’s young people in 1920 (on the next page), clearly as one of a close group of friends.

Unfortunately, little is known about Miss Brady’s later life. She was mentioned in a January 31, 1925 article in *The Guardian* (now known as *Arkansas Catholic*) as “now happily married in Arizona.” At some point in the 1960s, someone must have asked Mary Bastianelli to compile a list of friends and relatives and the dates they died. Still noted as “Miss Brady” even after all those years, Mary recorded her date of death as April 7, 1937. We do not know who Miss Brady married, or where she is buried, but she remains “affectionately remembered by all.”



**Miss Brady stands between
(l-r) Mary and Rose Bastianelli, ca 1912**

Tontitown Historical Museum, Bastianelli collection



Tontitown Picnic with Miss Brady

In this picnic photo dated August 7, 1920, Miss Bernadette Brady is kneeling in the back row. Kate Pianalto Ceola is to the right of her, Emily Papilli Fialla and her husband Sam are to the left. Rose Bastianelli Morsani is second from the left in the front row. All three of these young women were teachers at some point, just like Miss Brady.

Tontitown Historical Museum, Bastianelli collection

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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
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 Agatha Morsani Smith
 Lillian Pianalto Smith
 Marie Tessaro
 Bruce Vaughan
 Daniel "Danny" Ray Watson
 Elizabeth Morsani Williams
 Leon & Sally Verucchi Zulpo

✓ **Mark Your Calendar ...**

2016 Museum Events

Date	Event
Ongoing	Tontitown Historical Museum, Regular Hours Open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 1 – 4 pm or by special appointment, call 479-361-9800 or 479-685-4793
May 15, 2016	2016 Tontitown Heritage Day at Harry Sbanotto Park Music ~ Refreshments ~ Museum Tours 1 – 4 pm Supporting Arkansas Heritage Month <i>Arkansas Arts: Celebrating Our Creative Culture</i> 
August 9 – 13, 2016	118th Tontitown Grape Festival, It's About Tradition Tontitown Historical Museum, Special Hours Thursday, August 11 3 – 7 pm Friday, August 12 1 – 7 pm Saturday, August 13 10 am – 7 pm 
September 10, 2016	Tontitown Historical Museum 30th Anniversary Celebration!! Evening Event at the Tontitown Winery Sponsorships Available
November 6, 2016	15th Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear St. Joseph's Parish Hall 1:30 – 4 pm



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This Little
Museum"*

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- Amici window cling

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

(or give to any Museum Board member)

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

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or Join
Today!**

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ADDRESS _____

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STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

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E-MAIL _____

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

You're invited to Tontitown Heritage Day!
Sunday, May 15 ~ 1:00-4:00 p.m. ~ Harry Sbanotto Park



The Tontitown Historical Museum Board invites you to a fun afternoon of friendship, outdoor activities, and history! Come enjoy some great music – Pickin' in the Park style, and don't forget your instrument to join in! The museum will be open, with special children's tours. We'll have hot dogs and yummy Ranalli cookie treats. Bring your lawn chair, and be ready for a toe tappin' Italian good time! We look forward to seeing you there!



2015 May photos by Brenda Pianalto

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insert follows

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

Tontitown Heritage Day

Sunday - May 15, 2016

1:00 - 4:00 pm

Harry Sbanotto Park & Tontitown Museum

- Pickin' in the Park ~ Bring your instruments!
- Museum open ~ Special tours for children
- 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 ~*



*Tontitown Historical Museum
30th Anniversary Celebration*

Save the date

The Tontitown Winery

The evening of Saturday, September 10th, 2016

For sponsorship opportunities contact

Heather Ranalli-Peachee

(479) 361-8700

tontitownhistoricalmuseum@gmail.com