# Tontitown Storia



The Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum

Spring 2017, Vol. 13, No. 1

### Saluti from the Board

When driving through Tontitown on Highway 412 today, there are two buildings that stand out as pillars of Tontitown history. One is the white, concrete block St. Joseph Catholic Church on the 412/Barrington Road corner and the other is the large, white concrete block Tontitown School Building just to the east.

As Tontitown grew and the St. Joseph community outgrew the corner church, a new church was built to its northeast. Sadly now, the old church on the corner has deteriorated beyond repair and will likely be torn down sometime soon. Final plans include saving its history and memories in some commemorative way. So many families remember baptisms, marriages, funerals, and hours of visiting on church steps and in the yard. Memories are deep and vivid as if they were yesterday.

The other building marking Tontitown's history is the Tontitown School Building, built in the 1920's. In the beginning, the county paid the Sisters of Mercy nuns to teach area-wide children in grades 1-9. In 1967, the 7th and 8th grades moved to Springdale Junior High. Tontitown Elementary became a wing school of the Springdale School district. The school closed in 1988 when the cost for leasing the building plus needed improvements by North Central accreditation were too expensive to continue operation. Students from Tontitown transferred to the new Springdale Walker Elementary on South 40th Street. It was a loss for the Tontitown community. The church continued to use the school building for weekly religious classes until 2010, when the new Father Bandini Parish Education Center opened. We are at another crossroad. What is the future of the Tontitown School Building?



What is my future?
Tontitown School Building
National Register of Historic Places - 1992

Photo by Bev Cortiana-McEuen on April 7, 2017

The good news is that unlike the old church, the school building is still in good shape, though needing repair and renovation for a new life. The Tontitown Historical Museum Board, with the goal to preserve our city's history, hopes that a new use for the church-owned old school will emerge, with the funds to renovate it. What are your ideas for the old school? Are you willing to work to garner funds for its renovation? Think about it, talk about it, and share your ideas with a Museum Board member ... perhaps at our annual Tontitown Heritage Day on May 21 in the park. We'll work to make your ideas heard.

### In This Issue

That's La Morra, 2
Collections Corner - Diamond Dyes, 3
Family Focus, Peter "Pietro" Pianalto, 4-5
Tontitown Heritage Day and Amici Member List, insert
Honoring Our Ancestors, 6
Mark Your Calendars, THM Board and more, 7

Two men kneel with outstretched hands and pointed fingers, their faces lit with intense eagerness. There is intermittent shouting, and, in the end, one will walk away with bragging rights. What is this game that causes so much excitement? "It's called *La Morra*," answers Tontitown native, Riley Tessaro, in that expressive, almost musical tone characteristic of Italians.

The game of Morra is a simple one requiring nothing more than two players and a spirit of sportsmanship. The contestants flash their fingers, displaying whatever number of digits they choose, each shouting aloud their guess of how many fingers total will be extended. The player having guessed the correct total number scores a point, the winner having achieved the highest number of points, generally five points. If both guess the correct number, neither scores the point.



Standing: Lawrence Pianalto.
On ground, L-R: Gabriel Pianalto, Gordon Cortiana,
Premo Franco, Lawrence "Buster" Granata, Guy Bariola,
Virgil Verucchi, Buck Brunetti, Cel Cortiana, and
Leonard Pianalto, photographer

Photo courtesy Christine Pianalto Martinez Tontitown Historical Museum, S-2004-36-31

"The right hand is for throwing and the left hand for keeping score," offers Riley. "There used to be a luncheonette across from Venesian Inn. It had two bocce courts. After a game of bocce, some of the men would play Morra. There was a lot of shouting and some cursing, too." Morra may be played kneeling close to the ground, while seated at a table, or just standing. "You can play it anywhere, even on an airplane," says Tessaro.

Tontitown native, Loretta Brunetti, agrees that Morra was often enjoyed after a game of bocce, but also at picnics, or even if two friends just happened to be chatting outside of the grocery store. "The game wasn't planned. People played it spontaneously, just about any time, mostly in groups of two but sometimes three. I remember Cel Cortiana, Premo Franco and my dad playing it. They'd try to trick each other, then they'd laugh their heads off!"

Loretta remembers the intensity displayed by the players. Even so, the losers bore their defeat with good humor, harboring no resentment afterward. "We Italians may feel upset with each other for just a moment or two, then we are friends again. I'm very proud of the fact that we don't hold grudges."

How many generations have played Morra? The number is considerable, as it is said to be as old as the ancient Egyptians. Proof of this fact can be found among the ruins of the city of Thebes, in which there are drawings depicting people playing the game.

Morra may also be played for noble reasons in which case the winnings are monetary and given to charity. It may be engaged in for the purpose of decision making as well, providing an unbiased method of making a tough choice, such as who will go first, or what job one will perform.

Similar to this is a practice recorded in the scriptures, that of casting or throwing lots, which was, for those times, a legitimate way of settling disputes or assigning tasks. By shaking together small bits of stone or pebbles, and then rolling one out, duties could be assigned fairly, and troubling conflicts resolved.

### That's La Morra ... continued

Unlike the practice of throwing lots, however, Morra requires no object at all other than the fingers of the human hand. Henry Piazza, second generation descendant of the original Tontitown settlers, comments, "it was something we could play...there weren't any horseshoes." He adds, "We would throw out our fingers and this one might call out **tre!** and that one might call out **quattro!** or **cinque!**"

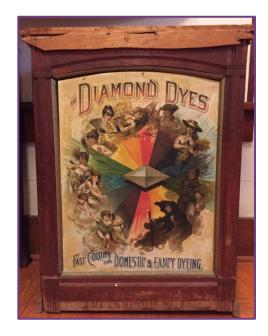
In our modern electronic times, personal interactive games are perhaps not so common among friends and families as they once were, and so it is nice to reminisce with those who remember when they were. Come on out to Harry Sbanotto Park on Sunday, May 21<sup>st</sup> for Tontitown Heritage Day. You might just see a game of *La Morra* in action!

### Collections Corner - Diamond Dyes

by Rachel Bellamy, Museum Assistant

This colorful wooden cabinet lives on the south wall of the Everyday Life room in the Tontitown Historical Museum. In its prime, however, its home was in Mr. Frank Baudino's General Merchandise Store, an important part of daily life in Tontitown many years ago. As the cabinet cover proclaims, it was once a dispensary for *The Diamond Dyes* used for domestic and fancy dyeing. On its backside is a set of sliding doors that open to reveal a series of pigeon holes which once served as tidy stashes for an array of colorful dyes.

Unlike today's somewhat disposable society in which a faded shirt is easily replaced by a quick trip to a department store, families of long ago stretched the life of their garments by patching, reinforcing, and dyeing their clothing and household linens. Dye would have come in handy for the housewife wishing to brighten the fading color of the living room drapes or to bring life back into a pair of her husband's old slacks.



If this pretty little cabinet could talk, many a listener would lend an eager ear to hear a recounting of its original home's general manager, Mr. John Mollar. Though the mercantile was owned by his brother-in-law, Frank Baudino, it was Mr. Mollar who eventually operated the establishment, knew the ins-and-outs of its inventory, and developed within it an intricate lighting system by which he could pull one of a number of strings and instantly light up the customer's desired product purchase.

One would be hard pressed to uncover a negative word regarding Mr. Mollar, the store clerk, pianist and occasional family physician who was beloved by all in the community. Ample testimony of his kind nature is found throughout Tontitown's autobiographical collection *Memories I Can't Let Go Of* in which more than a few of its interviewees expressed their regard and affection for the mild-mannered store clerk who bound wounds, generously doled out candy, and taught piano to the town's schoolchildren.

Tontitown Historical Museum volunteer Dorothy Bersi Kever remembers well the mercantile and its kind-hearted manager. Dorothy recalls, "the store was located just a little way down on South Barrington. My friends and I would walk there after school. Mr. Mollar always had candy for us."

Mr. Mollar has long passed away and the store no longer stands, but museum visitors can enjoy viewing the brightly painted cabinet that once stood inside an establishment whose storekeeper both filled the needs – *and delighted the hearts* – of many Tontitown earlier residents.

### Family Focus ... Peter "Pietro" Pianalto

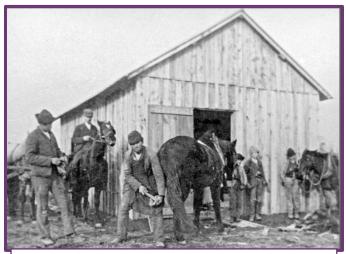
Blacksmith, Carpenter, Mason

by Great-Granddaughter Kathy Pianalto Miller

### Peter's Family ~ At-a-Glance

- Peter was born June 3, 1856 in Valli dei Signori (renamed Valli del Pasubio), Vicenza, Italy. He died December 27, 1948 at his home in Tontitown.
- Married Maria Teresa Marigo in 1886 in Vicenza, Italy. Maria Teresa was born on August 22, 1856 and died October 19, 1933.
- Peter and Maria Teresa had three boys: Joe, Geno, and Alfonso.
  - Joe married Annie Cigainero in 1910.
  - Geno married Mary Morsani in 1923.
  - Alfonso married Lucia Fantinel in 1919.

Peter and his family are buried in St. Joseph Cemetery.



Peter "Pietro" Pianalto, Tontitown's first blacksmith

Tontitown Historical Museum, Bastianelli Collection

It is hard to write this story about Peter. With only one grandson left, namesake Pete Pianalto, we know so little. From all the stories, Peter was deemed a quiet man. A man who never learned the English language. A man who would get upset with his children for not teaching his grandchildren the Italian language so he could talk with them.

As quoted in his obituary, Peter was one of three men to help "spy out" a site for Tontitown. Peter, his older brother Domenico Pianalto, who brought along his 8-year-old son Leo, and Felix Ardemagni set out from Sunnyside alongside Father Bandini to search for more fertile land.

Although Peter was not a farmer at heart, he purchased two farms in Tontitown. His passions and skills back in Vicenza, Italy were carpentry and masonry. He later became Tontitown's first blacksmith.



Peter "Pietro" Pianalto with grandchildren - 1931 (Children of Joe and Annie) L-R: Louis, Josephine, Pete, Gile, and Phillip

Photo courtesy Pete Pianalto Tontitown Historical Museum, S-2005-62-3



### Family Focus, Peter "Pietro" Pianalto ... continued

Peter was known for forging his own tools. As word got around about his blacksmithing skills, he had patrons throughout the state who came to purchase his tools. Richard Roso shared a story about a grafting tool Peter had made. He designed this tool to graft trees and grapes. One day a man came to try out the tool and ended up copying the design and creating a patent on it.

Even into his nineties, Peter would walk four miles each Sunday to early Mass from his home. Peter would also walk 16 miles each week to work as a mason and carpenter on buildings at the University of Arkansas. He helped work on the old Courthouse and the Baptist Church in Fayetteville, and alongside many other men and women helped build St. Joseph's Church in Tontitown. Some of his other jobs included working in the lime kilns in the Johnson and Farmington areas.

Peter lived on the first homestead he purchased in Tontitown with Joe and Annie Pianalto. Annie said he was not a fussy eater and whatever she made he would eat. Gile and Ester took over the homeplace in later years to take care of the family.

Gile remembers his grandfather telling him "don't get married in the month of July because it is too hot that month." While Gile and Ester moved back to Pennsylvania for a short time, Louis and Helene Pianalto moved in, in order to help out.

Helene remembered Peter lost his eye sight in the later years. One afternoon she was walking through the kitchen and Peter, who was upset with granddaughter Josephine at the time, mistakenly hit her in the legs with his cane. Helene said he was very upset with himself for the mistake and continued to apologize repeatedly. Helene also recalls he would kneel by a metal chair on the front porch each morning to say his Rosary.

Peter "Pietro" Pianalto was a simple man, with simple ways.





Peter with son Gino - ca 1943

Photo courtesy Veronica Pianalto Keith
Tontitown Historical Museum, S-2006-44-2



Peter prayed the Rosary on his porch - ca 1946

Photo courtesy Pete Pianalto

Tontitown Historical Museum, S-2005-62-2

### ~ Honoring Our Ancestors ~

This "Number of Days Worked" list was recovered from the cornerstone of St. Joseph's Catholic Church before moving to its nearby larger location in 1994. The men and women listed worked tirelessly to rebuild St. Joseph's Catholic Church after the 1934 tornado. The handmade concrete block church may soon be gone. But the workers' determination and dedication to their faith, their church family, and their Tontitown community will live forever in our memories, our hearts, and our history.

### **Building of St. Joseph's Catholic Church** Tontitown, Arkansas

Number of Days Worked



35.5

15.5



Zita Mantegani Greenlee stands in front of church with cornerstone visible. 1951 S-2003-129-44

R. V. Morsani, Steel Beam Albano Maestri, Supervisor

Springdale Monument Co., Corner Stone Added per family documentation:

Cesare Mantegani, Handmade Concrete Blocks

Reprinted with permission: 109th Tontitown Grape Festival Program, 2007, page 72.

Joe Franco

Dick Tessaro

Ernest Zulpo Silvio Pianalto

Victor Ceola

✓ Mark Your Calendar 2017 Museum Events	
Date	<b>Event</b>
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 21, 2017	2017 Tontitown Heritage Day at Harry Sbanotto Park Music ~ Refreshments ~ La Morra 1 – 4 pm Supporting Arkansas Heritage Month A State of War: Arkansas Remembers World War I
August 1 – 5, 2017	119 <sup>th</sup> Tontitown Grape Festival, It's About Tradition Tontitown Historical Museum, Special Hours Thursday, August 3 3 – 7 pm Friday, August 4 1 – 7 pm Saturday, August 5 10 am – 7 pm
TRD	16 <sup>th</sup> Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear

St. Joseph's Parish Hall

### ~ Numeri Italiani ~

**TBD** 

Below are the numeri Italiani – Italian numbers – from 1 to 10. Memorize these to help you have a feisty game of Morra at Tontitown Heritage Day!

> 1 uno 2 due 3 tre 4 quattro 5 cinque 6 sei 7 sette 8 otto 9 nove 10 dieci

### Polenta Smear Survey

The Tontitown Historical Museum needs your help. We invite you to participate in a survey about our annual "Tontitown Reunion and Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear" event typically held on a Sunday afternoon in early November. Watch for the survey in your email or find it on our Facebook page. Your anonymous answers will help us improve the event for the future.

### Go Green with Email!

If you prefer to receive this newsletter by email only, please email your request to:

tontitownhistoricalmuseum@gmail.com

### Tontitown Historical Museum 2017 Board of Directors

Heather Ranalli Peachee, President, 479-685-4793 Jennifer DeMartino, Vice-President, 479-435-6320 Annette Pianalto Drake, Secretary, 479-422-7788 Bev Cortiana-McEuen, Treasurer, 479-361-2609 Carol Walker, Membership, 479-361-2363 Ashlee Bailey, 563-380-0792 Caroline Franco, 479-200-9980 Roger Pianalto, 479-361-2207 Riley Tessaro, 479-361-2607 Kyle Young, 479-619-8733

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 email bcortiana@cox.net.



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

### You're invited to Tontitown Heritage Day! Sunday, May 21 ~ 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 an encore gathering of Pickin' in the Park music, in memory and in honor of Don Allen. This year we'll also bring back a fun Italian hand game that many of our parents and grandparents played – La Morra! Watch some pros play, and then try your hand at it. The museum will be open and there's always playground fun for kids. We'll have hot dogs and yummy Ranalli cookie treats. Bring your lawn chair, and be ready for an Italian good time! We look forward to seeing you!

2016 May photos by Brenda Pianalto





Tontitown Storia
Spring 2017, Vol. 13, No. 1
insert follows



## Tontitown Heritage Day! Sunday — May 21, 2017 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Harry Sbanotto Park & Tontitown Historical Museum

- Pickin' in the Park ~ Bring your instruments
- Museum open ~ Playground fun
- La Morra ~ game at 2:00 p.m.
- Hot Dogs & chips ~ Ranalli's cookies ~ Drinks
- Visit with old friends ~ Make new friends! ②



A lively game of La Morra in Leo & Lucy Ceola Pianalto's front yard - 1950s

Tontitown Historical Museum, Photos courtesy Christine Pianalto Martinez, S-2004-36-35 and S-2004-36-21



## Grazie Mille – Many Thanks to our sponsors!

Tontitown Winery
Bryan L. McEuen,
Benton County Farm Bureau



### **Supporting Arkansas Heritage Month**



### Grazie Mille to Amici (Friends) Members



Thank you, Amici members! Your support means the world to us, and your tax-deductible memberships continue to grow our Building Fund for future expansion. Please use the membership envelope enclosed in this newsletter to renew an expired or current membership, or to become a new member. Grazie Mille, Amici!

### Lifetime (Level Retired in 2014)

Lovce Ardemaani Richard & Bernadette Ardemagni Kenneth Brock Mike & Bernadette Pianalto Collins Genevieve (Genny) Della Rosa

Leona Della Rosa Kasting Paul & Dolores Maestri Stolfi Dicks Allyn Lord Frank & Evelyn Maestri Lawrence McGlone Frank & Carol Morsani Art & Jovce Penzo Clint Penzo Shawn & Letty Penzo Henry & Charlotte Piazza Robert Serio

Dennis & Evelyn Shaw Mary Costa Wersky-Colombero

Mike & Toni Zulpo

### Concordia

Jeff & Kay Franco

Carolyn G. Page

Cindy Pianalto

**Amici** Bill Ardemagni Richard & Bernadette Ardemagni Dennis & Billie Bariola Rachelle Bariola Thom & Rose Benton Robert & Roberta Bonham Jim & Sheila Canup Janette Ceola-Rogers Holly Childs Brvan & Bev Cortiana-McEuen Mario D. DeGiuli Eric & Julie den Boer Don & Rhonda Doudna Mike & Carolyn Fincher Mark & Melissa Franco Adrianne Morsani Graham Michael Hartman **Betty Hinshaw** Leland & Mary Cortiana Lawrenz M&M Tile Company James McConnell Bill & Marilyn Mussino David Oskev

Ben & Loretta Pianalto Pappani

Andrew & Peggy Penzo

Vincent & Sandy Pianalto R-N Builders, Ralph Pendergraft

Chris & Leslie Ranalli

### Amici (cont'd)

Norbert & Judy Ranalli Shiloh Museum of Ozark History Philip & Mary Ann Taldo Tontitown Winery Mary Maestri Vaughan Bill & Dolores Scamardo Wilson

Gilbert & Geraldine Alvis Jim Bersi Carolyn & Forest Bowen, Jr. Jennifer DeMartino Mark & Annette Pianalto Drake Raymond & Pauline Franco Marjorie A. Pianalto Horinek Karla McKinley Jim & Kathy Pianalto Miller Michael Miller Danny & Pat Pellin Bernard & Sherry Pianalto Rodney & Margie Pianalto Phillip & Margaret Piazza David & Heather Ranalli-Peachee Danica Roso Rogers Gary & Deanna Shackelford Family of Bruno Stolfi Jim & Janice Pianalto Swearingen Tim & Melissa Tessaro Joseph & Mary Vitali

### Individual

Celia Cigainero-Stigall Laura Faraci Andrea Penzo Hale Eugenia Hartman Brenda Pianalto Roger Pianalto Ruth Fiori Povner Vicki Brock Sargent Gloria Silacci Patricia Simoni

# TONTITOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

### **Senior Family**

Ken Bailev Bob & Patty Besom Robert & Ida Taldo Brady Lenor & Betty Brunetti Rick & Kathy Brunetti Denis & Maraie Ceola **Ernest & Norma Deines** Robert & Linda Elia Roy & Jettie Franco Carla Gourley Clyde & Patsy Taldo Graham Ken & Deloris Green Tommy & Zita Greenlee Dale & Darlene Johnston Jerry & Dorothy Kever Leslie H. Maestri Ron & Toni Maestri-Wirts Jana Mayfield Larry & Carmelita Franco Newquist Evelyn Pellin Mike & Rhonda Pellin Claude & Agatha Penzo Husk & Rita Penzo Leonard & Evelyn Pianalto Pete & Lou Pianalto Richard & Antoinette Pianalto Joe & Marlene Piazza Fred & Ruth Ann Roso Ritchie Larry & Cindy Sabatini Deborah Shouse & Ron Zoglin Truman & Dolores Stamps Frank & Thresa Thompson Frank & Dolores Verucchi Norman & Carol Walker Nova Jean Fiori Watson

### **Senior Individual**

Paul A. Bariola Ahmad H. Bayyari Loretta Brunetti Jeanette Burditt Jim Cortiana, Sr. Victor DallaRosa Nelda Bariola Duplissie Helen George John P. McGlone Mary Catherine Neil Elizabeth Pianalto Martha Pianalto Sarah Russell Gina Stolfi-Criman Marty Taldo