# Tontitown Storia



The Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM)

Spring 2018, Vol. 14, No. 1

## Saluti from the Board

Spring was slow to blossom this year, but finally we have warmth and beautiful flowers. We hope you get to stroll around Harry Sbanotto Park and the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM) sometime soon, as the grounds are looking especially lovely. Many thanks to Rhonda Doudna for beautifying the flower beds all around the museum and park! Thanks also to Annette Pianalto Drake for keeping the museum porch flower basket always so pretty!

Some readers may be unaware of the disheartening news about the old, concrete block St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Due to asbestos and the lack of funds for repairs, the "Old Church" was demolished in mid-December 2017. The insert of this newsletter includes the empathic editorial from the *Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. Fortunately the museum was able to acquire some church artifacts for our collections. Thanks to Joseph Pianalto, Rob Ceola, and Kathy Pianalto Miller for lending hands. An "Old Church Memorial Committee" is currently working to create a beautiful memorial to honor the church building, our ancestors who built it, and the faith that still thrives there.

Other very sad news was the passing of our charter THM Board President, Frank Maestri, in March. Frank was a gentle, wise, methodical, caring, and generous man. He loved and appreciated his Italian heritage. After retirement from Willis Shaw, Frank devoted countless hours of time and effort to the preservation of Tontitown history. He was often our "Go To" person for advice and support, and always in our corner. We are forever grateful for Frank. He will be missed beyond measure.

We do have some very good news to share. The THM Board is thrilled to welcome new board member Emily Pianalto-Beshears. And, we are excited to have Britni Pottridge join the city staff to work the museum on Sundays. Both Emily and Britni have degrees in history, and bring fresh new ideas and energy to help THM.



Hand-stenciled ceiling beam and confessional section from the "Old Church"

New additions to THM collections

Photo by Bev Cortiana-McEuen

This summer we are excited to expand THM's oral history collection with a video interview project. Scott Davis, an experienced broadcasting teacher at Rogers High School, will conduct the interviews. He completed similar oral history projects for Cane Hill, Prairie Grove, and Farmington. The video interviews will be available on YouTube, thus reaching a wide audience. Watch THM's Facebook page to learn more.

Finally, be sure to mark your calendar for our annual **Tontitown Heritage Day** on Sunday, May 20 from noon to 3:00 p.m. It's a fun, free afternoon for all the family. Check out the insert and back cover for details. We look forward to seeing you there!

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#### Collections Corner

#### Messaggio su una bottiglia ~ Message on a bottle

by Rachel Bellamy, Museum Assistant

The museum's newest treasure is as much a part of Tontitown's history as its first Italian settlers and the pasta that they rolled. *Vino*, *of course!* Still containing two-thirds of its original content, a clear glass, half-pint wine bottle has arrived at the museum courtesy of Robert and Sandy Pianalto. Its screw cap twists off to release the familiar scent of fragrant fermented alcohol. The slightly tattered red and yellow label reads *Del- A Ware Brand Arkansas Grape Wine*, *Produced and Bottled by Mantegani's Winery*. To the right of its title is a drawing of a pretty swimsuit-and-high-heel-clad pin-up model. Perched in her wavy hair is a fresh flower, giving her a Tiki bar look, like an island girl from a scene in *Blue Hawaii*.

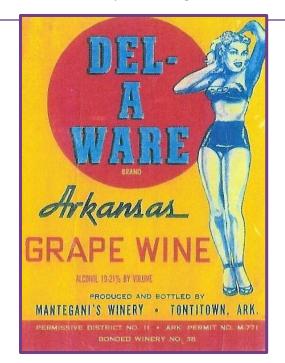
The *Mantegani Winery* was founded and bonded in 1935 by Cesare Mantegani. The *Wines & Vines Yearbook of the Wine Industry 1943-44* edition recorded its storage capacity as '70,000 gallons' with specialization in 'table and fruit wines.' After Cesare's passing, production was continued by his son, Gildo "Gill" Mantegani. Along with his sisters, Gill operated the winery while his wife, Eileen Angela (Cigainero) Mantegani, cooked meals for the hardworking family.

The discovery of this particular bottle could not be more exciting had it contained an S.O.S. message and been found washed ashore by a beachcomber. In this case, however, it could be said that the message is *on* the bottle, rather than inside of it. Produced in 1953, the label for the *Del- A Ware* brand was rejected for use by the U.S. Treasury Department because the lady on its front was considered too racy for the time. By the government department's reckoning, the label didn't exist.

"I'm surprised to see a bottle with the label attached to it," remarks Gill's youngest son, Irvin Mantegani, as he produces two original letters of rejection from the U.S. Treasury Department, the first dated March 12, 1953. Certain of approval, Gill had already purchased the *Del- A Ware* labels before receiving an answer from the Director of Alcohol & Tobacco Tax Division. Unfortunately, a second hopeful request for a favorable reply was also met with disappointment with the receipt of an additional letter dated July 24, 1953 again pronouncing the illustration of the lady to be "obscene and indecent." Gill accepted the decision and complied with the direction.

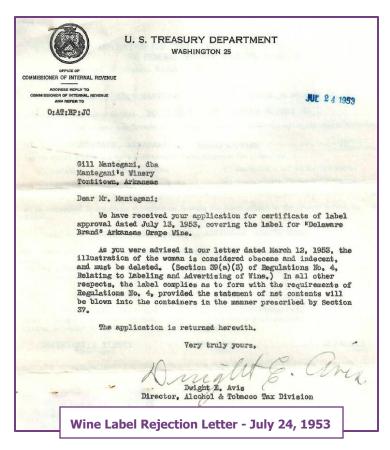


Above: **Del- A Ware Brand Arkansas Grape Wine**, bottle donated by Robert and Sandy Pianalto
Below: **Wine label image**,
courtesy Irvin Mantegani



#### Collections Corner ... continued

At the time of the label's rejection Gill Mantegani had as yet produced only a small amount of Del- A Ware wine, making the discovery of this bottle even more extraordinary. Noting the wane in the alcohol's color, Irvin explains, "It's lost pigmentation over time. The Delaware grape is pink with a sweet, fruity flavor like white zinfandel." Commenting on the specks of sediment floating at the bottle's base, Irvin continues, "A plate of diatomaceous earth was used as a filter, but over time particles of yeast, proteins and other materials settle to the bottom. It's normal. This stuff is close to 70 years old." As a youngster, Irvin occasionally helped to place tax stamps onto the bottles and notes that the stamp on this one is found beneath the label rather than clearly visible as was required. "The government would sell you stamps based on your production...and too bad if you lost them!" he explains.



What was Gill's inspiration for the label's saucy lady? "She was a figment of his imagination," reveals J.C. Mantegani, Irvin's older brother. "Her name was a play on the word Delaware, 'Del', a woman's name, and 'Ware' for the swimsuit she was wearing." While uncertain if his father was the artist behind the drawing, J.C. expressed that his dad possessed the talent to have done so. "He was good at a lot of things. He had an arrangement through a government agent buyer to sell *Liberty Bell* wine to military personnel during World War II." Produced from the Concord grape, the *Liberty Bell*'s half-pint bottle was easily carried by servicemen and allowed for 'medicinal purposes.' A benefit of the arrangement was that his father could buy a virtually unlimited supply of sugar for his wine production, a valuable provision during wartime when sugar was carefully rationed. "It came in 100-pound bags. He would go to the railroad station in Springdale and pick up his order off the rail cars," J.C. explains. After the war's end, Mr. Mantegani's ample sugar surplus was purchased by a *Seven-Up Bottling Company* for use in its soda production. What about the small amount of *Del- A Ware* wine itself? It was sold at roadside stands as well as through a local distributor in Fayetteville, AR using a simpler label without the pretty lady intended for it.

Sixty-five years later, the *Del- A Ware* lady and her sassy look will likely invite delight and curiosity instead of shock and offense. The museum happily welcomes her to join its existing collection of wine bottles from both the *Mantegani* and *Granata* wineries.

Treasures like these bring back happy memories for many including Janice Pianalto Swearingen and her sister, Annette Pianalto Drake, both of whom spent many childhood days in their great-grandfather, L.J. Granata's, winery. "Our mom (Martha Granata Pianalto), worked at the winery, so we were there often during the day, especially in summer," the ladies recall. The two remember racing past the huge barrels of wine in the back of the distillery. "We ran as fast as we could through there because that area was spooky!" Janice adds. The girls helped place labels onto the bottles and drank tiny samplings from the bottle caps. "There was no special occasion to get a capful of wine...we just wanted to taste it often!"

Do you have a small memento of Tontitown's past to help preserve our history? We'd like to see it. Please contact a THM Board member or leave a message at 479-361-9800. Grazie!!

# Family Focus...Miss Bernadette E. Brady, an update

Teacher, mentor, and friend to Tontitown Settler Families

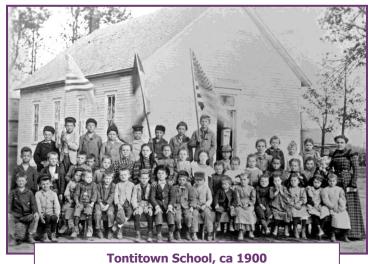
by Dr. Rebecca A. Howard, Granddaughter of Allen and Helen Pianalto McGinnis

Well amici, the unanswered questions about Miss Bernadette E. Brady from my 2016 newsletter article about her ended up frustrating me to no end. Eventually, unraveling the mystery of this woman, who seemed to virtually disappear after having such a significant impact on the formation of Tontitown, became one of my hobby research projects. I am delighted to give you an update!

First, a bit of a refresher about our Miss Brady. She is remembered as the first teacher in Tontitown. Brady appears in two photos from around this time. One taken in Sunnyside around 1897, and another from Tontitown around 1900 (shown right), where she stands in front of the original one-room schoolhouse with all fifty-plus of her charges. She taught at the school in Tontitown for a few years before handing off her responsibilities to Josephine Panteleone (who married Leo Maestri and eventually moved to Fort Smith). What this means, is that if your family arrived in Tontitown before 1902 or so, Miss Brady taught them English—not at all a minor contribution to the development of the community. After leaving Tontitown, a few sources over the next fifteen years, mainly from the Tontitown correspondent reports to the Springdale News, traced Miss Brady's life as a music teacher around the region; sometimes back in Sunnyside, sometimes in Oklahoma. There were only two sources that indicated anything about Miss Brady after 1920. One was an article from the January 31, 1925, issue of the Guardian (now the Arkansas Catholic) that mentioned she was "now happily married in Arizona." The other was a written list of death dates in Mary Bastianelli's hand that indicated Miss Brady passed away on April 7, 1937.

The first update about Miss Brady is that she was born on December 3, 1883, in Little Rock, to Mary Catherine and Alfred Ferdinand Brady. Her mother's maiden name was Hagler. Contradicting some sources, Miss Brady was likely not of mixed white and Native American ancestry. According to the census, both sides of her family were white, and in Arkansas since before the Civil War. As for being born at the end of 1883, this means she was only thirteen years old in the photo of her from Sunnyside that was taken in 1897. Since Tontitown was established in 1898, she may have been as young as fourteen when she started teaching in the community.

Miss Brady's mother likely died in childbirth, or shortly after she was born. Her father remarried quickly, with a notice of his impending nuptials running in the *Daily Arkansas Gazette* in Little Rock little more than a month after Miss Brady, or Birdie, as she was known in childhood, was born. For most of her early childhood, Birdie's family likely consisted of her father, her stepmother Lillian, her older brother, Frederick Clayton

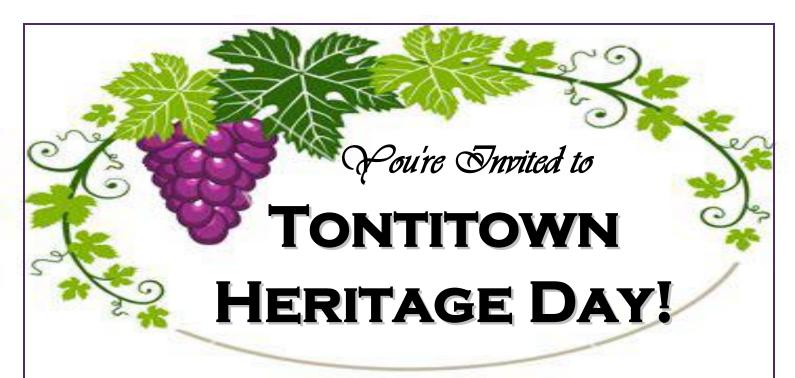


Teacher Bernadette Brady is standing at the far right.

Tontitown Historical Museum, Bastianelli collection

Brady, and, for a sadly brief eight months and ten days, a half-brother Alfred P., who was born only a year after Birdie, and died in August of 1885. In 1893, Birdie's father and the only mother she had likely ever known, filed for divorce. At some point in 1894, her father remarried again, this time to a woman who was also recently divorced and had children from a previous marriage. Miss Brady's new stepmother, Frances Allen, nee DeKressier, was a graduate of St. Mary's Academy, now known as Mount St. Mary's Academy. In September 1895, Miss Brady's father and her new stepmother had a daughter, whom they named Clara, and shortly after, the family moved to St. Louis. But Miss Brady did not go with them. In 1896, as was noted in the previous article, Miss Brady graduated from St. Mary's Academy, and then joined Father Bandini and the Italians in Sunnyside. She spent the next six years teaching the Italians in either Sunnyside or Tontitown.

Between 1902 and 1907, Miss Brady was likely teaching in Oklahoma or picking up terms in Tontitown. She may also have lived for a few years in St. Louis. During this time, the Tontitown correspondent reported to the *Springdale News* that Miss Brady either visited St. Louis, or was visiting *from* St. Louis. One note about a visit from St. Louis was in July 1906, only a few months before her father passed away of malaria while on a visit from St. Louis to Little Rock. At twenty-two, Miss Brady did become an orphan. She may have been in St. Louis for a year after her father's death, but her younger half-sister Clara, and only blood relation there, died of a ruptured appendix in 1912, at age seventeen.



# SUNDAY – MAY 20, 2018 Noon to 3:00 p.m.

Harry Sbanotto Park & Tontitown Historical Museum

- Live music by The Mountain Gypsies
- Fun activities for children
  - Make purple slime
  - Get temporary tattoo
- New to Bocce?
  - Learn to play with a Bocce Pro!
- Free Pizza, Hot dogs, Ranalli's cookies
- Museum open, Playground fun
- Peek at nearly-finishedTontitown City Hall building



The Mountain Gypsies

Photo by Brenda Pianalto



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**Supporting Arkansas Heritage Month** 

## The church is gone

#### Tontitown says goodbye to historic structure

NWA Democrat-Gazette

Historic preservation, like prayer, often does not produce immediate results.

In either case, the outcome relies a lot on what might be viewed as miraculous intervention.

In Tontitown the other day, the insatiable appetite of time consumed another beloved building. The "old church" on the St. Joseph Catholic Church property, which was consecrated for worship as World War II rumbled toward its close, has been a comforting presence for generations in Tontitown. It hasn't been used for services for more than 20 years, but many towns have structures that provide some reassurance just by their being. A building such as this anchors people, even those who moved away years ago, to the community, to their memories. People who cherish the old church because of a life-influencing moment in 1953 are connected to someone who had a similar experience in 1983.

Churches, perhaps more than any secular structure, lend themselves to such strong bonds. Men and women united in holy matrimony on that site. Births were celebrated. Baptism were performed. Petitions to God were made in supplication. Prayers of thanksgiving were offered. And the gift of life was recognized in funeral rites marking one's return to his or her Creator.

So when that church met the business end of a excavator's bucket the other day, it meant so much more to many of our neighbors than just bricks and wood crumbling into a pile. If a building can be a house of God, it can also be a vessel for personal hopes, spiritual awakenings and community connections. The old church in Tontitown served in that role for many, many years.

Time, however, marches on. Catholic leaders made the decision restoration would be cost-prohibitive. They plan to develop some sort of memorial on the site, reflective of the building's significance to the life of the church and the community.

Perhaps people of faith, especially, can appreciate that buildings come and buildings go, that what made them special wasn't the cinder blocks and lumber, but the spirit of the people and events within those sacred spaces. It would take far more than an excavator to destroy those. But from a community perspective, the loss of a structure so meaningful to a community is sad, indeed.

For 23 years, the building deteriorated. Buildings thrive most when they're used, and it's amazing how quickly they crumble once they're shuttered. This one was "beyond repair" and full of hazardous asbestos, Father John Connell said.

"The parish has been talking about what to do with this old church for 23 years," Connell said. "In the past, there was discussion about fixing up, restoring it and so forth, but years of inaction and age led to its demise."

Indecision can be calamitous when it comes to historic preservation.

Sometimes, historic preservation requires a great benefactor, someone of means who is less interested in whether it makes sense financially than emotionally. If that's not an option and the owner of a building has other priorities, it's hard for an old building to survive. Preservation takes intensive planning and considerable cash. Few buildings find one of those miraculous last-minute saviors.

And so another piece of history disappears. We know not every great structure of significance will be saved, but that doesn't diminish the sadness when their time with us comes to an end.

This editorial originally appeared in the Dec. 22, 2017, Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Reprinted with permission.

Note to *Tontitown Storia* readers: During February 2018, the St. Joseph's Old Church Memorial Committee gathered ideas from the congregation on how to create a memorial for the Old Church. St. Joseph members were encouraged to submit memorial design ideas with these considerations in mind: a reasonable budget; a reasonable timeframe; a memorial that will withstand weather; and a memorial that will be easily maintained. The Committee is working with a designer to consider the suggestions. They hope to have a design plan of what the memorial will look like to share in our fall newsletter. We are grateful for the Committee's work and look forward to a memorial that honors the specialness of that Old Church and our ancestors who built it.



Spring 2018, Tontitown Storia, insert

#### Family Focus, Miss Bernadette E. Brady ... continued

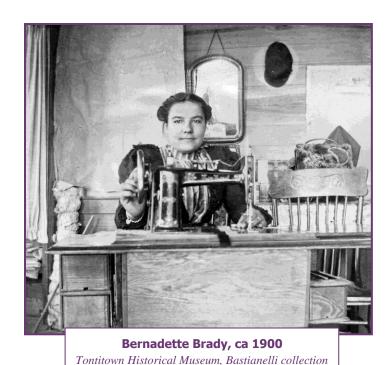
By 1920, her former stepmother had moved to Los Angeles, and Miss Brady appears to have had few connections to St. Louis after this. Miss Brady's location between 1907 and 1917 was probably in Chicot County, Arkansas, teaching at or around Lake Village (the community closest to the original Italian experiment at the Sunnyside plantation). Aside from Tontitown correspondent reports to the *Springdale News*, the only official record we have of Miss Brady's presence in Chicot County is a notation of her appointment as postmistress in the town of Readland. She served there until May 1917. After that, her trail goes quite cold.

There are many online sites these days that are digitizing old documents, newspapers, and government records. Recently, the Arkansas State Archives partnered with a site called newspapers.com to digitize a number of Arkansas's newspapers. Unfortunately, that addition failed to yield any new information about Miss Brady. I have no idea who the site worked with to obtain old Arizona newspapers, but about a year ago, they started coming available, fully searchable. Remember that note from 1925 about Miss Brady being happily married in Arizona? She had been there for a few years.

The earliest mentions of a "Miss Brady" in Arizona are pretty weak on proving they are our Miss Brady. A Miss Brady, with no first name, is on a list of schools, classrooms, and teachers for the district in Clifton, Arizona, a mining community in the southeast corner of the state, almost in Texas. One ran in November 1917, and the other in March 1918, in The Copper Era and Morenci Leader. Starting in 1919, and running often between 1922, a schoolteacher by the name of "B. Edna Brady" began to appear in the local news section of the Tombstone Weekly Epitaph. Strangely, because of the more formal relationship Miss Brady maintained with most people in Tontitown, we actually do not know what her friends called her. She probably outgrew "Birdie." Did she prefer "Edna" as an adult? Or switch to it for some reason when she moved to Arizona? She was listed as "Bernadette E. Brady" when she was recorded as a postmistress in Arkansas. But what makes it likely that the "B. Edna Brady" of these newspaper reports is the right woman, is that she also registered to vote in Cochise County, Arizona, home of Tombstone, in 1920—the first year women could vote in both state and national elections in American history. The County Recorder noted name, place of birth, height, weight, and gender for all voters. B. Edna Brady was the only person on the page to list Arkansas as her place of birth. She was 5'4" tall, which fits with some of the photographs we have of her, (as long as we remember that none of the Bastianellis came very close to five feet). And while it would be improper to list the weight of a lady in our publication, what is shown on her registration is also in line with extant photographs.

On June 2, 1923, Bernadette Brady married Anton Koch in Rapid City, Illinois, at St. John's Catholic Church. How they met is still a mystery. The last notice about Miss Brady in Tombstone ran in January 1923. Anton Koch appears in every census of his life as living in Illinois. Many people went to Tombstone seasonally for relief from respiratory issues in the early twentieth century. Perhaps Koch, or his daughter C. Amelia Koch (ten at the time of their marriage) had such an issue, and met there. Perhaps there was an old connection between the two from Miss Brady's earlier travels. However they met, they seem to have had a happy married life. Miss Brady was involved in her local church and sang and played piano for various causes and organizations in the area. Though Anton and Miss Brady had no children, she seemed to be an involved stepmother to Amelia Koch.

On April 22, 1937, a notice ran in the *Springdale News* that said, "The announcement that Mrs. Anton Koch, 53, died Wednesday afternoon, April 7, in a Moline, Ill hospital after a long illness might not mean much . . . but when it is known that the deceased was B. Edna Brady, the first teacher of the Tontitown school, it will refresh the memory of many." Her obituary in a Moline, Illinois, newspaper noted her teaching in Arkansas and Arizona as well as that she "possessed unusual ability as both a player of the piano and the pipe organ." Our Miss Brady is buried beside her husband and his first wife in St. Johns Cemetery, in Rapid City, Illinois.





Pictured above are the Charter Board of Directors for Tontitown Historical Museum with Frank Maestri as President, 2004. Grazie Mille to Frank, Andy, and Lynda for all you did for us! We miss you! L-R: Alderman Kenny Green, Kathy Pianalto Miller, Secretary Brenda Pianalto, Joyce Penzo, Curator Charlotte Piazza, Treasurer Nova Jean Fiori Watson, Mary Frances Maestri Vaughan, Ruth Ann Roso Ritchie, Lynda Cross, Bev Cortiana-McEuen, President Frank Maestri, Vice-President Andy Franco.

# Tontitown Historical Museum 2018 Board of Directors

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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.

#### ~ Donations in Memory and in Honor ~

It is with gratitude and pride that we display Memorial and Honorarium (H) donation plaques in the Tontitown Historical Museum.

Beato & Violet Haney Ardemagni Cathy Ardemagni Cecil Ardemagni Gene & Irma Taldo Ardemagni Mike & Loyce Ardemagni Gene Baker Leo Baudino Don & Philomene Ardemagni Begnel Kathleen Brock Kenneth Brock Cel & Mary Ceola Cortiana Gilbert & Lucia "Shortie" Cortiana Gordon & Imogene Ardemagni Cortiana Rudy Costa Candida Morsani Crane Lynda Cross Albina Ranalli Dalla Rosa Angelo & Irene Gaiche Dalla Rosa James & Dominica Dalla Rosa Bill & Fern Haney Fiori Pete & Mary Cortiana Fiori Joseph Angelo "Andy" Franco Chuck & Mary Fucci Emelio & Caterina Piazza Gaiche Rita Taldo Gillis Lillian Cortiana Granata Tommy Granata (H) Russell Greenlee Phyllis Brunetti Hale Clementine Morsani Haney Anita "Sunny" Hinshaw

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# ✓ Mark Your Calendar ...

#### 2018 Museum Events

Date	Event	
May 20, 2018	2018 Tontitown Heritage Day featuring <i>The Mountain Gypsies</i> band! Refreshments ~ Purple Slime ~ Temporary Tattoos ~ Bocce ~ Fun! Harry Sbanotto Park, Noon - 3:00 p.m. Event supports Arkansas Heritage Month, Off the Beaten Path: Explore and Enjoy Arkansas's Natural Heritage	
August 7-11, 2018	120 <sup>th</sup> Tontitown Grape Festival, It's About Tradition Tontitown Historical Museum, Special Hours Thursday, August 9 3 – 7 p.m. Friday, August 10 1 – 7 p.m. Saturday, August 11 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.	
September 15, 2018	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Bocce Ball Tournament,</b> sponsored by the City of Tontitown Harry Sbanotto Park, Prizes for 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> places, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.	
October 28, 2018	17 <sup>th</sup> Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear St. Joseph's Parish Hall, 11:00 am - 1:30 pm	



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or Join Today!

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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

# You're invited to Tontitown Heritage Day! Sunday, May 20 ~ Noon - 3:00 p.m. ~ Harry Sbanotto Park

The Tontitown Historical Museum Board invites you to a fun afternoon of friendship, outdoor play, and history! Come sing along with *The Mountain* Gypsies, and enjoy lots of activities for adults and kids – bocce for newbies, purple slime, temporary tattoos, yummy hotdogs, and delish Ranalli's cookies! The Museum will be open, and you can take a peek at the nearly complete new Tontitown City Hall! Join us to celebrate our Italian heritage and play together!

