



Tontitown Storia

Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM)

A Department of the City of Tontitown

Fall 2023, Vol. 18, No. 2



Ciao from the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM) Board members. We have exciting news to share with you. Our team is still growing! We are excited to announce we have added two new board members, Megan Taldo McAfee and Olivia Ward.

We had a busy spring this year at THM. On May 21st, we hosted **Tontitown Heritage Day** connecting with members of our community. We were so happy that many people came out to celebrate our town's heritage. This was our third annual silent auction with baked goods from many bakers in our community. Michael Pianalto filled the park with song and laughter while the kids got to participate in a scavenger hunt throughout the museum and the park. Overall we had so many community members come together. Thank you to everyone who attended and participated in making this event such a success.

THM also got to participate in the Historic House Hunt this year from June 1st to August 31st. Thank you to Shiloh Museum of Ozark History for putting the event together with other historic homes in Washington County! Visitors were able to step back in time and experience these houses and the history that goes along with them. We had so many families stop by the museum to learn more about Tontitown. In June we also had some special visitors from Italy, whose relatives were some of the first to travel to Tontitown. They shared their exciting history with Emily Pianalto-Beshears, and Emily showed them our amazing museum. Then in August, we shared our museum experience with the attendees of the 124th Tontitown Grape Festival. Please join us on November 5th for our **21st Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-fashioned Polenta Smear** featuring a Taste of Tontitown lunch and more. See details on page 5.

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Italian-American Voices Come Home

by Megan Taldo McAfee

In June 2023, Clint Pianalto and Michael Baker-Brown led a group of choir students from Har-Ber High School to Northern Italy. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of these choir directors, students enjoyed the trip of a lifetime with an exciting, jam-packed itinerary. In a particularly special stop, the group performed in the Valli del Pasubio, reconnecting generations of Italians through the gift of music.



**Har-Ber High School Choir members surround the Emigrant Statue
in Valli del Pasubio, Italy ~ June 2023**

Photos of Italy trip courtesy Clint Pianalto

Question & Answer with Clint Pianalto

Q: Tell us a little bit about your history and connection to Valli del Pasubio.

A: My descendants are Giuseppe Pianalto (1824-1893), Pietro Pianalto (1856-1948), and his son, Joseph Pianalto (1887-1955). All were born in Valli del Pasubio, but Pietro and Joseph died in Tontitown. We were told that Joseph went first to America, and Pietro came later.

Q: How did this idea of taking a choir of students to Italy come about?

A: Mr. Brown and I made it a goal to take the students on a trip abroad. We had both gone on choir tours of Italy, and we thought it would be best for us to start from those trips. We made the itinerary to focus on some of our favorite places in Northern Italy.

Q: How many students were of Italian descent, specifically Tontitown? How was their experience compared to other students?

A: Olivia McAfee and Connor Pianalto had to have an overwhelming sense of pride the entire time they were in this town. All of the students treated the place with a sense of reverence because they knew how important it was for me. I saw both students at times just staring out into the giant church on top of the hill and trying to breathe in their history. It was a very cool sight!

Q: What areas did you travel to, and where did the choir perform?

A: Our first performance was in Venice, Lido di Jesolo. We flew into Venice and then transferred to the beaches of Lido di Jesolo (located a little east of Venice). The coastal town of Lido di Jesolo features a 15 km stretch of golden sand, bordered by the azure waters of the Adriatic. We spent the first day touring Venice and St. Mark's Basilica, where the composer Monteverdi wrote one of the songs we sang on this tour called Cante Domino published in 1620. Students were able to see the birthplace of the music that they were singing. We then visited the walled city of Padua where students had the ability to see the tomb of St. Anthony in the 13 century Basilica of St. Anthony. The old town streets house the University of Padua established in 1222. Our next stop was Valli del Pasubio, the birthplace of many descendants of Tontitown. (I will go in depth in the next question.) We then traveled to the city of Verona and saw the Romeo and Juliet balcony. Students took a guided tour of the city and had the opportunity to sing in the famed Roman amphitheater, the Arena di Verona, that was created in 30 A.D. We got to see Sirmione in the Lake Garda region. We also saw the famed cities of Florence, Siena, and San Gimignano and performed in the ancient city of Estes. Siena is also known for The Palio di Siena, the annual traditional horse race dating back to the 16th century held in the main piazza. (Ten horses and riders, bareback and dressed in the appropriate colors, representing their districts). On our way back to Florence we discovered the hilltop village of San Gimignano, one of the most picturesque places in Tuscany. We performed lastly in the city of Montecatini.



Har-Ber High School Choir on stairs in front of Chiesa di Santa Maria in Valli del Pasubio

Q: Was your family's connection to the area a driving force to get your students to perform in that particular cathedral?

A: Absolutely. I wanted to bring the ancestors of the church back to sing. Couldn't think of something cooler. I hoped we could form connections not only for my family but for other Italians from Tontitown that would like to seek out their roots.

Q: What challenges did you face while traveling?

A: We almost didn't get to sing in Valli del Pasubio. At first, we were told no! They didn't really understand our request, and they said that they were not interested. However, after explaining what we were doing and why and seeing some of our videos on YouTube of our concerts, they invited us and two other choirs from the area to sing. We made some friends for life!



Choir Director Clint Pianalto by the Emigrant Statue in Valli del Pasubio

Q: You were able to meet with the mayor and/or other dignitaries. What were their thoughts of Tontitown and the fact that you have brought students who are from families who originated in that area of Northern Italy?

A: Everyone we met said things like "Thank you for seeking out your roots!" I really feel like I understand my family better after this third trip to Italy. They looked at me with tears in their eyes and thanked us for coming all this way to share our music.

Q: The sound was lovely from the videos we were able to see. Which place was your favorite and why?

A: The experience at Valli was the best of course. It was our best performance by far. But the city of Estes was the most unique acoustics that we had the chance to sing in. That town had a priest and a nun that so loved our performance of the Ave Maria that they demanded an encore. We sang to a beautiful ancient picture of the Maria that the church is famous for. When an Italian nun tells you to sing the Ave Maria again, you sing it again.

Q: Best part of the experience?

A: Watching so many young people forming memories of a lifetime through the power of song. Priceless.

To view the choir's performance in Valli del Pasubio, Italy, scan the QR code to the right. Many thanks to Nancy Bunch for the video!



21st Annual Tontitown Reunion & Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear

Sunday, November 5th – 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

St. Joseph's Church Parish Hall
192 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard

Featuring: A Taste of Tontitown lunch and
Guest Speaker Dr. Larry Foley will discuss his upcoming documentary
"Cries from the Cotton Field"

Lunch: \$5.00 – Cash or Check;
Amici members & Children under 13 Eat Free

- Traditional Polenta and **Venesian Inn's** Umido
- Tasting portions of:
 - **Guido's** Spaghetti with Meat Sauce
 - **Mama Z's** Lasagna
 - **Red Door's** Macaroni & Cheese and Italian Sausage
 - Salad with Italian Dressing
 - Homemade Bread by **Ryan Pianalto**
- **Tontitown Winery's** Tiramisu and other Italian Desserts
- Gluten-free and Vegetarian Options

Amici Membership Drive:

Are you a "friend" of Tontitown Historical Museum? Renew your membership or join during the event.

Identification Station:

The museum has several group photos that are not fully identified. See a face you know? Leave us a name!

Add to the Archives:

Don't forget to bring your Tontitown family photos and documents to be copied and added to our collection.

😊 **RAFFLE ~ DOOR PRIZES!!** 😊

Hosted by Tontitown Historical Museum



Thank You to our food sponsors!



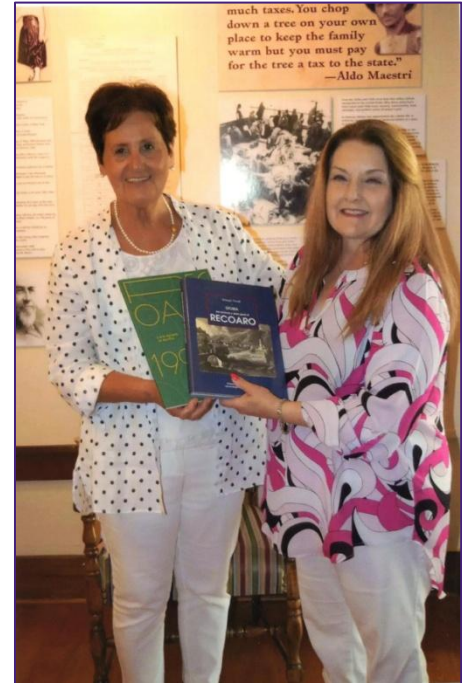
Little Town Visits

by Emily Pianalto-Beshears

Tontitown welcomed a small group from Valli del Pasubio, Italy on June 3, 2023. Among the group was Franca Celli, former vice-mayor of Recoaro, who on behalf of the mayor met with Tontitown Mayor Angela Russell to present gifts.

When asked where Franca was born, she proudly stated that she was raised in a village called Pianalto, which can be found on the other side of a mountainous range of Valli del Pasubio. She and her cousin, Luciano Pierobon, spoke lovingly of their time in Pianalto which as many have probably connected is where the Pianalto clan of Tontitown was originally from before their ancestors made the journey to Genoa and then to America.

Luciano spoke of his own immigration, first to Canada, as a young man of sixteen and a half. He had joined his father in Canada only to be orphaned a month later and left to figure out life on this side of the world. He worked during the day and went to school at night to gain his certificates that would allow him to work in the field he had apprenticed in back in Italy. He said he was not allowed to touch the machines he had mastered working on until he was eighteen, and so he had to instruct the men who were old enough on how to fix things. Luciano was eventually able to move to America where he flourished. He spoke highly of the Italians of Tontitown. Their courage and determination were, for many, the story they needed to make their own journeys to America to realize their own dreams of success.



**L-R: Franca Celli and
Tontitown Mayor Angela Russell**

Photo by Brenda Pianalto

Franca spoke proudly of Recoaro's own festival, called Chiamata di Marzo, held the last Sunday of February in an even numbered year. This festival encompasses all members of the community. A parade through the main street shows different groups celebrating all industries in the area. Franca's group each year represents the Immigrants. She, her friends, and even their children, dress in clothing of a similar style to what those boarding the Chateau Yquem ship would have worn. Some carry knapsacks or luggage as they march down the street. It is an honor to know that our ancestors are still recognized and celebrated for their courage in leaving home, even to this day. The small reception at the Tontitown Historical Museum lasted a couple of hours, with stories shared as we looked through the belongings of some of the first settlers. Enrica Ardemagni (granddaughter of Felix and Enrica Ardemagni) acted as translator for the group as there was still a slight language barrier. As the conversations became more animated it was easy to see what the first immigrants experiences with communication would have been like. You find yourself using your hands more as an Italian to make sure your words are emphasized!

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Franca's husband, Zoilo Storti, was a man of few words as he spoke very little English, but he was happy to document the trip through photography. Enrica was gracious enough to host the group as they moved through the town. The first stop of their trip was of course to the Tontitown Winery to enjoy the best vino in Northwest Arkansas. They also paid their respects to those who have passed, stopping at the St. Joseph's Catholic Cemetery to view the headstones and read the names of the original families who settled here. The Museum Board was so happy that Brenda Pianalto could come document the visit as our official museum photographer. Brenda has been part of so many special moments in the museum.



Front, L-R: Franca Celli, Enrica Ardemagni, Mayor Angela Russell
Back, L-R: Zoili Storti, Luciano Pierobon, Emily Pianalto-Beshears, Pamela Herron

Photo by Brenda Pianalto

Learning of the area's history we found out that the Northern section of Italy was a resort area for many Europeans to vacation. The spring fed waters have been a natural draw for relaxation and healing. As such the area has become home to a diverse group of people and foods. As Luciano said, "Valli del Pasubio has the best people and the best food in the world!"

The visit ended with hopes of future visits between the two communities. The Grape Festival is still on their list of things to experience in Tontitown, while visiting Recoaro for Chiamata di Marzo is now on our list! Stop by the museum to view the gifted books and postcards to get a glimpse of where our founders first lived and how they are celebrated today.

Tontitown Historical Museum OPEN HOURS

Wednesday 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

Friday, Saturday and Sunday 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Call or email to schedule a special visit.

Contact us:

(479) 361-9800

museum@tontitownar.gov

251 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard

P.O. Box 144

Tontitown, AR 72770



Thank you, Amici members, for your 2023 (marked with an asterisk) and 2022 memberships! Your support means the world to us and helps us continue to preserve our history. A membership form to renew your membership or to become a new member is at the end of this newsletter. ***Grazie Mille, Amici!***

Heritage

Family of Frank & Evelyn Maestri*

Family of Joe & Theresa Moore*

Concordia

Richard & Bernadette Ardemagni*
Jeff & Kay Franco*
Kris & Stacey Hanby
Janette Ceola Rogers*

Pete & Elaine Sbanotto*
Shiloh Museum of Ozark History*
Gary & Sheryl Shores*

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Blake & Caroline Ceola*
Holly Childs
Bryan & Bev Cortiana-McEuen*
Jennifer De Martino*
Eric & Julie den Boer*
Genevieve (Genny) Della Rosa Deutsch
Nancy Dornan*
Don & Rhonda Doudna*
Mark & Annette Pianalto Drake*
Paul & Janet Falcone*
Laura Faraci*
Vic Faraci*
Mark & Melissa Franco*
Raymond & Pauline Franco*
Amanda Frazier*
Bill & Janet Gaiche*
Craig & Carla Gourley*
Adrienne Morsani Graham
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Betty Hinshaw*

Becky Howard
Leona Della Rosa Kasting
Gina Criman Lankston (Bruno Stolfi family)*
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Evelyn Pellin
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Peggy Penzo
Chris & Annette Pianalto*
Cindy Pianalto
Sharon Pianalto*
Vince & Sandy Pianalto*
Matthew "Dean" & Misty Piazza*
Rachael Piazza*
Philip & Mary Ann Taldo*
Ranalli Farms*
Tim & Melissa Tessaro
Tontitown Flea Market* (Jim & Kathy Miller)
Tontitown Winery
Mark & Paula Zulpo*

Family

Kurt & Penny Anderson*
Bernice Bariola
Pauline Bariola*
Bill & Penny Baskin
Bob & Patty Besom*
Forest & Carolyn Bowen, Jr.*
Robert & Ida Taldo Brady*
Sandy Christopherson*
Clint & Kara Jo Engle*
Vic Faraci
D. Claud Fields, Jr.*
Rep. Charlotte Fite
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David & Heather Ranalli Peachee
Mike & Denise Pearce*
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Vince Pianalto
Celia Cigainero Stigall
Jim & Janice Pianalto Swearingen*
Max & Kay Taldo
Leticia "Tish" Ceola Wilson*

Amici Members

Individual

Charles Clark*
Lea Ann Maestri Crisp*
Norma Deines*
Eugenia Hartman*

Marjorie A. Pianalto Horinek
Sharon Maestri
Roger Pianalto*
Margi Maestri Tucker

Senior Family

Frank Ardemagni family*
Loyce & Mary Ardemagni*
Rick & Kathy Brunetti*
Doyle & Jeanette Burditt*
Denis & Margie Ceola*
Robert & Linda Elia*
Jettie Franco*
Bill & Marty Green*
Tommy & Zita Greenlee*
Dale & Darlene Johnston
Jerry & Dorothy Kever*
Phill & Kathy Bariola Laursen*
Mary Catherine Neil*
Danny & Pat Pellin*
Michael & Rhonda Pellin*
Claude & Agatha Penzo*

Husk & Rita Penzo*
Patricia Perona
Cindy Pianalto & Geri Lalley*
Richard & Antoinette Pianalto*
Margaret Piazza*
Tom & Deborah Pianalto Pierce*
Ron & Ruth Fiori Poynor*
Norbert & Judy Ranalli
Ruth Ann Roso Ritchie*
Larry & Cindy Sabatini
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Norman & Carol Walker*
Ron & Toni Maestri Wirts*
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Senior Individual

Enrica Ardemagni*
Ahmad H. Bayyari*
Loretta Brunetti*
Jim Cortiana*
Ellen Verucchi Goff*
Patsy Taldo Phillips Graham
Joyce Pianalto Guphill*
Carmelita Franco Newquist

Marion Pellin*
Brenda Pianalto*
Elizabeth Pianalto*
Martha Pianalto
Patricia Pianalto Simoni
Riley Tessaro*
Mary Frances Maestri Vaughan*
Dolores J. Wilson

Lifetime (Level Retired in 2014)

Loyce & Mary Ardemagni
Richard & Bernadette Ardemagni
Kenneth Brock
Mike & Bernadette Pianalto Collins
Genevieve (Genny) Della Rosa Deutsch
Paul & Dolores Maestri Stolfi Dicks
Leona Della Rosa Kasting
Allyn Lord
Frank & Evelyn Maestri
Lawrence McGlone

Frank & Carol Morsani
Art & Joyce Penzo
Clint Penzo
Shawn & Letty Penzo
Henry & Charlotte Piazza
Robert Serio
Dennis & Evelyn Shaw
Mary Costa Wersky-Colombero
Mike & Toni Zulpo



BECOME AN AMICI MEMBER TODAY!

Join by completing and mailing the form on the back of this newsletter or by going to our website at www.tontitown.com/museum. Renew annual memberships in January or at the Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear.

~ 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	Frank Maestri
Cathy Ardemagni	Lynn Maestri
Cecil Ardemagni	Paul & Judy Maestri's 50th Anniversary
Gene & Irma Taldo Ardemagni	Helen Pinalto McGinnis
Mike & Loyce Ardemagni	Annabelle Lee Pozza Miller
Gene Baker	Amerigo Morsani
Leo Baudino	Frank & Carol Morsani (H)
Don & Philomene Ardemagni Begnel	Helen Crane Morsani
Kathleen Brock	Denise Pellin
Kenneth Brock	Andrew Floyd Penzo
C.J. and Olivia Pinalto Cigainero	Arthur Penzo (H)
Cel & Mary Ceola Cortiana	Ed & Adele Bariola Penzo
Gilbert & Lucia "Shortie" Cortiana	The Perona Family
Gordon & Imogene Ardemagni Cortiana	Claudine Penzo Pinalto
Rudy Costa	Frank & Clara Fiori Pinalto
Candida Morsani Crane	Gabriel & Elsie Mae Fiori Pinalto
Lynda Cross	George (Giacinto) & Clara Pinalto
Albina Ranalli Dalla Rosa	Leo & Lucy Ceola Pinalto
Angelo & Irene Gaiche Dalla Rosa	Pete & Lucy "Lou" Franco Pinalto
James & Dominica Dalla Rosa	Ronald Pete (Ronnie) Pinalto
Barbara Ann Verucchi Faraci	Charlotte Piazza
Bill & Fern Haney Fiori	Henry Piazza (H)
Pete & Mary Cortiana Fiori	John Hugo "J.H." Pozza
Joseph Angelo "Andy" Franco	Nancy Jean Roso Robbins
Chuck & Mary Fucci	Lizabeth Roso
Emelio & Caterina Piazza Gaiche	Margaret Taldo Roso
Rita Taldo Gillis	Gloria Mae Maestri Sallis
Lillian Cortiana Granata	Harry & Dorothy Fiori Sbanotto
Tommy Granata	Agatha Morsani Smith
Russell Greenlee	Lillian Pinalto Smith
Phyllis Brunetti Hale	Marie Tessaro
Clementine Morsani Haney	Raymond & Juanita Toler
Betty Hinshaw (H)	Bruce Vaughan
Anita "Sunny" Hinshaw	Daniel "Danny" Ray Watson
Lee Wana Keck	Nova Jean Fiori Watson
Anna Morsani Kitchell	James & Luellen Penzo Weiss
Michael & Dawn Hinshaw Latham family (H)	Elizabeth Morsani Williams
Albano & Agnes Pierce Maestri	Leon & Sally Verucchi Zulpo
Aldo & Mary Maestri	

Board Member Spotlight

With Olivia Ward

- **What is your hometown?**
Bentonville
- **How long have you been living in Northwest Arkansas?**
I've lived most of my life in NWA.
- **What is your role at the Tontitown Historical Museum?**
I'm a board member and the new Secretary.
- **What are your hobbies?**
When I'm not working at the Amazeum or at college, I enjoy crocheting, canning and baking, or doing Mixed Martial Arts (Karate).
- **What makes you the happiest?**
Having a positive impact on the people I am around.
- **What made you interested in getting involved in the THM?**
I grew up learning about my Italian heritage but as I've gotten older I wanted to learn more about the wider community culture. I also want to work in museums long term so being a part of a museum that is about people like me is really important.
- **What aspect of your role do you enjoy the most?**
I enjoy learning and becoming a part of this community.
- **In three words/phrases, how would you describe the mission and work of THM?**
Community, Preservation, Celebration.



Tontitown Historical Museum Board Members, 2023

Tontitown Storia is published by the Tontitown Historical Museum Board. Please submit story ideas or comments to Olivia Ward at museum@tontitownar.gov.

Misty Piazza, President
Jennifer De Martino, Vice President
Olivia Ward, Secretary
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Caroline Franco-Ceola
Megan Taldo McAfee
Heather Ranalli-Peachee
Riley Tessaro

Dax Peachee, Junior Member



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



*"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
- Free admission to Museum events

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!**

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