



Tontitown Storie

Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical
Museum (THM)
A Department of the City of Tontitown
Fall 2024, Vol. 19, No. 2



Ciao from the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM) board members and staff! We have exciting news to share with you. This year we unveiled a new exhibition, *Women of Tontitown 1898-Present*, which will be on display through 2025. Be sure to stop by the museum to learn more about the women who helped build Tontitown.

THM had a busy summer! Museum Manager, Emily, went on the road to Lake Village, Arkansas to share the history of Tontitown at *A Sense of Place: Architecture, Culture, and History in the Arkansas Delta*. She taught teachers from the region about the Italian experience in the Delta. Emily and Juli, Museum Assistant, went off-site to Washington County Historical Society's Heritage School, hosting one day of the five-day camp. Local youth learned about Tontitown grape culture, cuisine, and bocce! Back at the museum a comprehensive arrangement and description project has been in full swing as staff and an intern worked to record what is known and is yet to be learned about photos and artifacts in the archives. This project continues. Consider yourself called upon to identify places and people associated with our collection that will enrich the stories we share on social media and in exhibits.

The amazing Dr. Rebecca Howard is hoping to connect with members of the community who have worked in the various agricultural industries throughout Tontitown's history; she is working on a large-scale project and needs as many stories and photos as we can collect (pg. 2-3). Please consider sharing your family's history to enrich her research! We are also excited to share a new opportunity to learn Italian and to further your knowledge on Tontitown culture with Dr. Enrica Ardemagni (pg. 5-6).

THM and Tontitown lost a great friend and supporter earlier this year with the passing of James Riley Tessaro; we remember his service to our nation and to our town (pg. 7). Meet our newest staff member, Juli Sallings (pg. 8). and don't forget to stop by Tontitown Historical Museum or our online gift shop to purchase your DVD of the *Cries from the Cotton Field* documentary! We hope to see you all November 3rd for the Tontitown Reunion & Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear (flyer on pg. 4). Don't forget you can renew your Amici Membership for 2025 early at the Tontitown Reunion and enjoy savings on our growing gift shop!

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Tontitown Agriculture: The Disappearing History **By Dr. Rebecca Howard**

If you have had the opportunity to see *Cries from the Cotton Field* you know that Tontitown's origins are rooted in agriculture. Even when the experiment at Sunnyside Plantation failed, rather than join many of their countrymen in urban spaces, survivors sought new agricultural opportunities. We need your help in telling the next part of this agricultural history of our community.

There is substantial evidence that the Italians seeking to escape from Sunnyside Plantation were drawn to northwest Arkansas specifically because the region was conducive to grape production for wine, as well as already supporting lucrative industries focused on ground fruits like strawberries, which could reach full production by their second season, as well as orchard products like apples and peaches. In fact, one of the handful of items saved from when community members of what would become Tontitown were exploring their options is a circular published out of Rogers that highlighted all of these crops to possible settlers.

Upon founding Tontitown, every family embarked on a plan to plant both quick producing crops like strawberries as well as invest in the future with apple and peach trees and grape vines, which, depending on the varieties planted, could come into production in as little as three years. Far from ignorant or isolated, the community sought advice from the University of Arkansas, and, likely, the state wine inspector and author of an article about wine in the above-mentioned circular, Carl Starck of the Vinola Wine Ranch, east of Rogers. They planted varieties of these fruits recommended by the most learned agricultural experts of the area. By 1906, led by Felix Ardemagni, members of the community published their own advertisement titled *L'Avvenire* (The Future) to entice people to come to Tontitown specifically. The publication highlighted a vibrant agriculture community, especially wine production that had started as early as 1900 from grape vines planted as soon as the Italians had arrived.



Memo Morsani eats a hard-earned strawberry
Courtesy of Dr. Rebecca Howard

Alas, this was the worst time in American history in which to attempt to root a wine industry. While a national ban on the production and sale of alcohol would not go into effect until January 16, 1920, Arkansas had a much longer history of both prohibiting alcohol production locally and using such laws to target immigrants. German immigrants in the Arkansas River Valley had experienced such harassment as early as the 1880s, so when Tontitown began to make wine, legislators already had a template to follow. Starting in 1907, Tontitown had to fight state level legislation aimed at shutting down wine production in Tontitown, as well as scrutiny of local officials. Far from country bumpkins or unaware, unassimilated immigrants, valiant efforts were made to fight this treatment in the courts, but pragmatic community leaders like Ardemagni must have seen the writing on the wall. The community began to shift to production of juice grapes even before Arkansas went dry on January 1, 1916. Tontitown farmers began to top graft Concords onto their existing wine grape vines, and sold their grapes to Welch, at first by shipping the grapes out, and by the 1920s, enticing the company to open a bottling factory in Springdale. Once again, the Italians had turned what looked like a failing endeavor into something lucrative.

In the late 1930s and into the 1940s, the Italians at Tontitown would also become pioneers of another agricultural endeavor in the Ozarks—chickens. Some of the first growers for Brown, Tyson, George, and others were Italians from Tontitown. As the economy of northwest Arkansas changed in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, the addition of chicken production allowed many Tontitown families to continue to find productive use for their land, even as some family members sought work in the emerging trucking industry, and even corporate jobs as the local agricultural companies became international. By the 80s and 90s, however, land prices began to push both grape and chicken producers off the land, and the agricultural story of Tontitown began to wind down.



Barbara Sabatini, Larry Sabatini, Delmo Sabatini, Shirley Sabatini, Bill Martin (Tyson Field Service Rep.)
Courtsey of Dwain Pianalto



Isadore "Buck" Brunetti, Gabriel Pianalto, Genevieve Ceola, Julia Ceola Brunetti, Loretta M. Brunetti (baby), Cecelia "Celia" Ceola, Victoria Ceola Rose
Courtsey of Loretta M. Brunetti



Gemma "Gem" Mantegani Bersi
Courtsey of Dorothy Bersi Kever



Johnny Pellin
Courtsey of Denise Pellin

Does your family have stories or pictures from these agricultural endeavors? Do you have old pictures of vineyards, chicken houses, or old farmhouses? It was not just grapes and chickens, either. Did your dad plant potatoes on St. Patrick's Day and make you finish digging them before you could go swim at Lake Wedington on the 4th of July? Tontitown families raised hogs, grew peaches even after apples died out due to blight, planted large kitchen gardens, and ran cattle. At the Polenta Smear this year, these stories and photos are especially welcome. Help us preserve Tontitown's agricultural history before it disappears!

22nd Annual Tontitown Reunion & Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear

Sunday, November 3rd – 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
 With**

Guest Speaker Dr. Rebecca Howard, Lone Star College

Lunch: \$5.00 – Card, Cash & Check accepted
 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
- **Tontitown Winery's** Tiramisu and other Italian Desserts
- Gluten-free and Vegetarian Options



2023 Polenta Smear - Photo by Brenda Pinalto

Amici Membership Drive:

Are you a "friend" of Tontitown Historical Museum? Renew your membership for 2025 or join during the event and save on the entrance fee!

Historic Tontitown Map:

The museum is wanting to create a Historic Tontitown map that includes businesses, homes, and farm from the early Tontitown-present, to show the growth and changes in Tontitown through the years!

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 local sponsors!



Introduction to Tontitown Language Center LLC.

The Tontitown Language Center (TLC) opened in 2024, inspired by the deep cultural heritage of Tontitown where its founder and CEO, Enrica J. Ardemagni, PhD grew up. The mission of this center is to foster cultural and linguistic connections through curated language and culture studies, actively engaging the community in heritage and language preservation.

From Tontitown Language Center:

Guided by our mission, our vision is one of vibrant cultural exchange and lifelong learning. We envision a future where we:

- Empower individuals to embrace their cultural heritage through immersive language and culture programs or enter into a new language and culture to broaden their global understanding.
- Cultivate a vibrant community where language preservation is a shared priority.
- Inspire lifelong learners to appreciate the richness of diversity through experiential education.
- Serve as a hub for intergenerational exchange.
- Strive to lead in innovative language acquisition and preservation methods, promoting cultural sensitivity and opening gateways to cross-cultural understanding.



Enrica Ardemagni, Brenda Pianalto, Richard Ardemagni
Grape Festival 2024

Dr. Ardemagni graduated from the University of Arkansas with a BA and MA in Spanish, and she completed her doctoral degree in Spanish and Historical Linguistics from the University of Wisconsin. She is currently Professor Emerita from Indiana University Indianapolis, where her contributions to education were recognized with sixteen teaching awards and a Congressional Recognition for her community engagement in education. In 1998, she was honored with the University of Arkansas Distinguished Alumna award from the Department of Foreign Languages where she was inducted into the Fulbright College Academy. She is a certified court interpreter and a certified healthcare interpreter.



TONTITOWN LANGUAGE CENTER

CURATED LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Tontitown Language Center offers an array of language and culture classes, workshops and webinars. These include Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Levels of General Language Courses in English, Italian and Spanish, and specialized language courses, such as translation and interpretation, and languages for the professions, such as Business, Medical, and Legal. Specialized language courses are well-suited to address the linguistic challenges of globalization.

Studying one's heritage language is a powerful tool for deepening cultural understanding and preserving traditions. By immersing oneself in the intricacies of a native tongue, individuals gain a unique perspective into their ancestors' worldview, values, and experiences. This linguistic exploration fosters a connection to the past, allowing individuals to appreciate the rich tapestry of their heritage. Furthermore, speaking a heritage language helps to sustain cultural identity in the face of globalization and contributes to the preservation of diverse linguistic traditions for future generations.

Most of the courses are offered online. Professor Ardemagni holds a Certificate in Online Education and has focused on the needs of the community. Online and corporate onsite immersion language courses are also available.

Dr. Ardemagni states, "As an Italian American, being able to offer language and culture classes holds profound personal significance. It's more than just teaching a language; it's a way to connect with our ancestors, to maintain the culture, and to ensure that the language and traditions thrive." The goal of the Tontitown Language Center is to inspire others to appreciate the beauty and value of their heritage, preserving it for generations to come.

Visit the Tontitown Language Center website for all course listings and descriptions and take time to enjoy the pictures and images, almost all taken or created by Dr. Ardemagni. They were carefully chosen to serve as a visual gateway into the diverse cultures represented by the languages offered. Join our listserv where you can stay abreast of events and activities by filling out the Contact Us information through our website. We're excited to help you embark on your language journey.

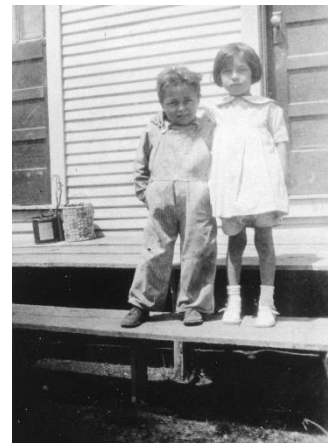
Contact Dr. Enrica Ardemagni for lessons or more information at:
tontitownlanguagecenter@outlook.com
317-313-6605

<https://tontitownlanguagecenter.com>



James Riley Tessaro and Marie Hawkins
Tessaro Wedding

Remembering James Riley Tessaro July 24, 1930 – June 22, 2024



James Riley Tessaro and Francis Rosalie
Tessaro

James Riley Tessaro was born July 24, 1930 to Domenico Tessaro and Mary Fiori Tessaro. From an early age everyone knew James as Riley. Riley's upbringing was overseen by his beloved Uncle Pete and Aunt Mary Brandellero Tessaro, who later became his next-door neighbors. Riley was a graduate from Subiaco Academy and joined the Air Force after graduating. He served during two wars (Korea and Vietnam) before retiring after 21 years of service.

He married his sweetheart, Marie Hawkins on October 24, 1953, and they shared 56 years of wedded bliss until Marie's passing in 2009. The couple had four children: Kenny, Janice, Tim, and Mike. The Tessaro family moved back to Tontitown after Riley retired as a Master Sergeant from the Air Force and he first worked in small local businesses, including the Mercantile with his Uncle Pete. He eventually found a good job with P.A.M Transport, as a safety director in Tontitown, and retired from this job at 65.

Riley not only worked a day job, raised his children and was a loving husband, but also dedicated most of his post- Air Force life to serving as a volunteer firefighter in Tontitown for 42 years. He was among the founders of the TAFD organization in 1979 and only retired in 2022, and you got it right, he was 92 when he turned in his radio! He was always ready to help out around St. Joseph's, especially during the Grape Festival, where he could be found trying to sell last minute raffle tickets to visitors. And lastly, but just as important as the rest, Riley served Tontitown Historical Museum as volunteer board member for 18 years. He joined the board in 2006 and was Vice President from 2007-2011. After that point he remained a constant figurehead for questions about Tontitown and its traditions. He was always eager to make the polenta for the Tontitown Reunion & Old-Fashioned Polenta Smears, and of course he would take home whatever extras there were. Food, especially good Italian food, never went to waste with Riley!

We will miss you dearly, Riley-- Thank you for your service and your dedication to Tontitown!



Marie and James Riley Tessaro



L-R (Adults) Pete Tessaro, James Riley Tessaro,
Mary Tessaro (children) James "Kenny" Tessaro,
Janice Della Rosa, Mike Tessaro



James Riley Tessaro

Museum Staff Spotlight

Juli Sallings: Museum Assistant



- What is your hometown?
 - ❖ I grew up mostly in Eureka Springs, Arkansas but now live in Johnson.
- How long have you been living in Northwest Arkansas?
 - ❖ Since moving here as a child 36 years ago, I've called Northwest Arkansas home. Besides attending college in the West and spending a few years in Texas for my husband's PhD program, I've been here in the best place on earth!
- What are some of your hobbies?
 - ❖ I enjoy walking, reading and writing, sewing, cooking, community service, family history research, and rearranging spaces in my house.
- What is your role at Tontitown Historical Museum?
 - ❖ I'm an assistant, which means I help in many ways: I give tours, create social media content surrounding the many events THM hosts, and work on cataloging our collection of artifacts, photos, and more. Recently I've been working to create a guide for the cataloging process so that it can be used by anyone that comes to help in the future. I'm always searching for ways to organize so that Tontitown's history can be shared more easily and more broadly!
- What brings you joy?
 - ❖ My favorite times are when my whole family is together just chilling.
- What drew you to Tontitown Historical Museum?
 - ❖ The historic house hunt that many of the local museums participated in brought me in with my kids last summer. I was fascinated by the history of the settling of Tontitown and how its effects are evident even now. I got to meet Emily Pianalto-Beshears, whose way of sharing the local story hooked me, and eventually I was able to join the team!
- What are some of your favorite items in the THM collection?
 - ❖ I like the pale blue steamer trunk and also the long wooden *mattarello*. These pieces get me imagining the trip over as well as the home life of the early settlers and all the experiences people had alongside them.



Thank you, Amici members, for your 2024 membership! Your support means the world to us. A membership form to renew your membership for 2025 or to become a new member is at the end of this newsletter. Use our new QR code to join or renew easily online. ***Grazie Mille, Amici!***

Bandini (Formerly Heritage) Family of Frank & Evelyn Maestri	Family of Joe & Theresa Moore	
Heritage (Formerly Concordia) Richard & Bernadette Ardemagni Jeff & Kay Franco	Kris & Stacey Hanby Janette Ceola Rogers	Pete & Elaine Sbanotto Gary & Sheryl Shores
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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 Pianalto McGinnis
Mike & Loyce Ardemagni	Annabelle Lee Pozza Miller
Gene Baker	Amerigo Morsani
Gloria Mae Bariola	Frank & Carol Morsani (H)
Leo Baudino	Helen Crane Morsani
Don & Philomene Ardemagni Begnel	Denise Pellin
Kathleen Brock	Andrew Floyd Penzo
Kenneth Brock	Arthur Penzo (H)
C.J. and Olivia Pianalto Cigainero	Ed & Adele Bariola Penzo
Cel & Mary Ceola Cortiana	The Perona Family
Gilbert & Lucia "Shortie" Cortiana	Leo A. "Junior" & Claudine Penzo Pianalto
Gordon & Imogene Ardemagni Cortiana	Edward W. Pianalto
Rudy Costa	Frank & Clara Fiori Pianalto
Candida Morsani Crane	Gabriel & Elsie Mae Fiori Pianalto
Lynda Cross	George (Giacinto) & Clara Pianalto
Albina Ranalli Dalla Rosa	Leo & Lucy Ceola Pianalto
Angelo & Irene Gaiche Dalla Rosa	Pete & Lucy "Lou" Franco Pianalto
James & Dominica Dalla Rosa	Ronald Pete (Ronnie) Pianalto
Barbara Ann Verucchi Faraci	Charlotte Piazza
Bill & Fern Haney Fiori	Henry Piazza (H)
Pete & Mary Cortiana Fiori	John Hugo "J.H." Pozza
Frances Verucchi Franco	Nancy Jean Roso Robbins
Joseph Angelo "Andy" Franco	Lizabeth Roso
Chuck & Mary Fucci	Margaret Taldo Roso
Emelio & Caterina Piazza Gaiche	Gloria Mae Maestri Sallis
Rita Taldo Gillis	Harry & Dorothy Fiori Sbanotto
Lillian Cortiana Granata	Agatha Morsani Smith
Tommy Granata	Lillian Pianalto Smith
Russell Greenlee	Ernesto & Norina Mantegani Stolfi
Phyllis Brunetti Hale	Bert & Katherine Hess Taldo
Clementine Morsani Haney	Max & Kay Taldo's 60th Anniversary (H)
Betty Hinshaw (H)	Riley & Marie Tessaro
Anita "Sunny" Hinshaw	Raymond & Juanita Toler
Lee Wana Keck	Bruce Vaughan
Anna Morsani Kitchell	Daniel "Danny" Ray Watson
Michael & Dawn Hinshaw Latham family (H)	Nova Jean Fiori Watson
Albano & Agnes Pierce Maestri	James & Luellen Penzo Weiss
Aldo & Mary Maestri	Elizabeth Morsani Williams
	Leon & Sally Verucchi Zulpo

Tontitown Historical Museum Board Members and Staff, 2024

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

<p>Board Members: Misty Piazza, President Kara Jo Engle, Vice President Allyson Bowen, Secretary Megan Taldo McAfee, Treasurer Bev Cortiana-McEuen Heather Ranalli Peachee Dax Peachee Torie Pianalto Chelsea Stewart</p>	<p>Junior Board Members: Ashlyn Bowen</p> <p>Staff: Emily Pianalto-Beshears, Museum Manager Juli Sallings, Museum Assistant</p>
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<p>Open Wednesdays and Thursdays 9:00 am – 1:00 pm Fridays and Saturdays 1:00 – 4:00 pm Call or email to schedule a special visit.</p>	
<p>Contact us: (479) 361-9800 museum@tontitownar.gov</p>	<p>251 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard P.O. Box 144 Tontitown, AR 72770</p>

2024 Museum and Community Events	
Date	Event
Friday, October 11	Arkansas Symbols Day at Shiloh Museum of Ozark History
Thursday, October 31	Tontitown Halloween in the Park
Sunday, November 3	22nd Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear



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
- Receive 10% discount on Museum purchases
- Free admission to Museum events

To pay your tax-deductible membership, scan the QR code or mail this form with a check to:

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

Annual *Amici* Membership Levels

- Individual – \$20
- Family – \$30
- Senior Individual – \$10
- Senior Family – \$15
- Concordia – \$50 to \$249
- Heritage – \$250 to \$499
- Bandini – \$500+

**Renew or
Join Today!**



NAME _____

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