

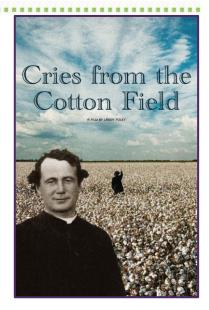
Tontitown Storia

Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM) A Department of the City of Tontitown Spring 2024, Vol. 19, No. 1



Ciao from the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM) Board members and Staff! We have exciting news to share with you. In the past year we have welcomed three new Board members: Allyson Bowen, Kara Jo Engle, and Chelsea Stewart; and two Junior Board members: Ashlyn Bowen and Torrie Pianalto. We are thrilled to have their expertise and energy join us!

THM has had a busy spring. Museum Manager, Emily Pianalto-Beshears, hosted Arkansas University student and Italian Studies major, Alessandro Palazzuoli-Bevilacqua, for an internship. Alessandro was tasked with curating his own small exhibit for the Veterans of Tontitown for the City Hall display case. On April 30th he presented his semester project to his professors and community members (page 4). Then, the World Premiere of highly anticipated "Cries from the Cotton Field," a documentary film by Dr. Larry Foley, was held at Har-Ber High School Marsha Jones Performing Arts Center on May 8th and was well received by all (page 2).



The THM Board said a sad good-bye, happy retirement, and "Grazie

Mille" to the lovely Pam Herron, after five years of passionate and caring work. We also recently welcomed Juli Sallings as our new Museum Assistant. THM continues to get updates from new display cases, new artifacts and photos, and a new exciting exhibit that will be unveiled at *Tontitown Heritage Day* on June 2nd. Features at Heritage Day will include a new Queen Concordia photo and a recreations of the 1969 Whiskers Club photo, learning to dance the Italian Tarantella and how to play Lawn Bocce, and so much more (page 3)!

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"Cries from the Cotton Field" A Triumph for Dr. Foley and for Tontitown!

Film Review by Emily Pianalto-Beshears

The buzz has been growing around the newly released documentary "Cries from the Cotton Field," a film by Dr. Larry Foley, which tells the story of the Italians who were, in a sense, conned into working for American businessman Austin Corbin at his Sunnyside Cotton Plantation. The World Premiere at Har-Ber High School Marsha Jones Performing Arts Center was May 8th. The evening began with Har-Ber High School choir, led by Clint Pianalto, a descendant of Pietro Pianalto who was Tontitown's first blacksmith. Mr. Pianalto's choir sang two songs, one that was featured during the credits of

the film and the second was a love song written by a gentleman of Valli del Pasubio which, to our knowledge, has not been heard outside the town until now. As Dr. Foley was introducing the film, a man dressed in a familiar black suit with a priest's collar walked across the stage; then the curtain opened, and the audience settled in for the long-awaited film.

The documentary took viewers all the way back to these Italians' humble beginnings in Italy, primarily in the

North and Central regions, with visually stunning captures of the country that had not been kind to the Italians. Along the way the audience heard from experts who have studied this journey and experience on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as from descendants of the men and women who took the leap of faith and signed the contracts that Austin Corbin and his other business partners put together to attract Italians at laborers. Dr. Foley and his team took care to tell the story in full, not just focusing on the Italians who were able to escape from Sunnyside to form their own towns in Northwest Arkansas (Tontitown) and in Missouri (Rosati). The audience was taken back to Sunnyside to see what happened to those Italians who stayed and the fallout legally that the plantation faced. The story of how Tontitown came to be founded was detailed through the words of descendants, with shots of local restaurants (Mama Z's and Venesian Inn), the Tontitown Winery, the Morsani family homestead, the Ranalli grape vineyard, and St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Not only did the film shoot outside the church but within. One scene was recreated using historic vestments owned by Father Pietro Bandini and the second of a Mass held last year.

During the premiere a strong storm cell was moving through the area. It stormed the entire showing, but as the lights came on the storm passed. The audience was greeted with a rainbow and the sky full of mammatus clouds that looked like a field full of cotton. While many don't believe in signs, it was as if the Italians were looking down on the group gathered to say, "Thank you for remembering our lives and our struggle for the American Dream." Audiences local to Tontitown will see familiar faces, and those descendants of these original families who have moved away will hear the names of their ancestors or perhaps see a photo they had no idea existed. Dr. Foley and his production team are to be congratulated for their work on this film. We hope everyone will have an opportunity to view the film at one of the many showings this year or on Arkansas PBS this September.



Dr. Larry Foley

with Director Clint Pianalto

Pou're Invited to

Tontitown Heritage Day!

Sunday, June 2nd — Noon to 2:00 p.m.

Arthur Penzo Pavilion in Harry Sbanotto Park and Tontitown Historical Museum 235 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard, next to Tontitown City Hall

Join us for a fun-filled celebration of 125 years of Tontitown!

- Live music by Rumours!
- BBQ Lunch \$5.00 Amici Members and Children under 13 Eat FREE
 - Tontitown Red Door Bar & Grill BBQ;
 sides by Venesian Inn and the THM Board
 - Ranalli Farms Produce Cookies
 - Tontitown Winery Grape Ice Cream
- Fun park activities Cornhole, Jenga, Hula Hoops,
 Face Painting, Sidewalk Chalk
- Learn to play Lawn Bocce and to dance the Italian Tarantella with THM Board members
- 4th Annual Baked Goods Silent Auction
- A Taste of Tontitown Raffle Basket
- NEW Exhibit Updates at the Museum –
 Women of Tontitown: 1898-Present and more
- Taking a new group Queens Concordia photo and recreating the 1969 Whiskers Club photo
- Visit with old friends ~ Make new friends! ©



Photos by Brenda Pianalto







Grazie Mille to our Food Donors!!

- Ranalli Farms
 Produce
- ★ Tontitown Red Door Bar & Grill
- ★ Tontitown Winery
- * Venesian Inn

Hosted by Tontitown Historical Museum (THM). Call 479-361-9800 with questions. Proceeds benefit THM Building Fund. Event is weather permitting. Rain date to be determined.

Meet THM Intern Alessandro Palazzuoli-Bevilacqua

by Emily Pianalto-Beshears

Tontitown Historical Museum was invited to host a research intern from the University of Arkansas Italian Studies Program. We were blessed to get Alessandro Palazzuoli-Bevilacqua, or Alex as he sometimes goes by. While we know what you are probably thinking, those are some long European sounding names. Well, you are correct. Alessandro is of Italian and Sicilian parentage, and was born in southern Switzerland before immigrating to America with his family as a child. Alessandro has been working since February at the Tontitown Historical Museum researching the Italian-American men who served in the United States military. He focused primarily on World War I and World War II due to time constraints, but was able to include the story of our fallen Vietnam boy, Robert "Bobby" Sabatini. Alessandro created a visually stunning exhibit, where the artifacts, photos and documents are the star of the show. Limited text is used to allow for the audience to have a moment in time with the exhibit to view the items our men took to war. Some items, like Riley Tessaro's grandfather's World War I shaving mirror would have been used daily to keep up with the army standards, and others, like Giacinto Pianalto's gas mask, were only used in life threatening conflicts. The community of Tontitown truly came together to ensure Alessandro had more than enough information, artifacts and photos to curate this truly wonderful exhibit, which will be on display through Spring 2025.

Museum Manager, Emily Pianalto-Beshears, asked Alessandro the following questions after his internship finished about his time in Tontitown:

Tell us about your life growing up?

Growing up was a rollercoaster of emotions. From living in a beautiful small town in Origlio, Switzerland to moving to a large city in Austin, Texas was a big change for me and my family. Adjusting was hard but I was able to overcome it. I never dealt with extreme bullying or prejudice but it wasn't hard to tell that people viewed me differently coming from another country.



Whose story or person inspired you the most from your research in Tontitown?

The incredible story of Father Bandini standing outside the church with a shotgun waiting for the men who tried to burn down the town's church (which was the little schoolhouse at the time).

What is your favorite artifact or photo that you got to handle and display?

My favorite artifact was the gas mask because of a few factors: the story it came from, the delicate process of removing it from its bag, and the fun Emily and I had from the experience.

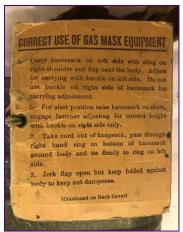
Left: Alessandro and his parents.

Right: Alessandro handling the gas mask donated by Giacinto Pianalto's family.

Photos by Emily Pianalto-Beshears









Above: Instruction on proper use of a WWI standard issue gas mask, still attached to the mask when Alessandro and Emily took it out of the canvas bag it was stored in.

Left: A haunting photo taken by Alessandro of the gas mask that saved Giacinto Pianalto's life when he was gassed on October 18, 1919.

How has this internship impacted you?

Connected me to a bigger community, met so many lovely people and had amazing food.

What was your favorite dish you got to eat in Tontitown?

Besides Jersey Mikes, Bryce special, the Baked Rigatoni at Venesian Inn is a must try!

How did you conceptualize the exhibit?

I wanted to use the small physical space as an advantage by utilizing the hallway. I made it a dual view perspective where it looks different from either way you walk from.

On April 30 in the Tontitown City Council Chambers, Alessandro presented his semester project to his professors and then unveiled his hallway exhibit to the crowd that came out to support him. Pictured after the presentation: Emily Pianalto-Beshears, Alessandro and his major professor Dr. Ryan Calabretta-Sajder.



*If you missed getting your loved one included in this exhibit, don't worry as Museum Staff has plans for a larger exhibit for our Veterans of Tontitown in 2026. Please consider donating or loaning items for the future exhibit. Contact museum@tontitownar.gov for more information and be on the lookout for more news on what will appear next in our Tontitown City Hall exhibit.



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Veterans of Tontitown Exhibit

New Exhibit! Women of Tontitown: 1898 - Present









Come see this new exhibit that will tell the inspirational stories of the women who helped build Tontitown as original settlers and their descendants. Museum staff has taken a deep dive into the lives of these women to learn how they worked in and outside of the home to make Tontitown the success that it is today. Each generation of women played some part in making Tontitown unique and without their determination and constancy we would not be here today!

Here's to our Mothers, Nonas, Great-Nonas and the women who became part of our families through their kindness and open hearts!









Junior Board Members Spotlight

- What is your hometown?
 - Springdale, Arkansas.
- How long have you been living in Northwest Arkansas? All 16 years of my life.
- What is your role at the Tontitown Historical Museum? Junior Board Member.
- What are your hobbies?

I enjoy reading and photography.

What makes you the happiest?

Being with my family and friends.

What made you interested in getting involved with THM?

Learning more about the history of Tontitown.

What do you hope to contribute during your time at THM?

> I hope to bring fresh ideas for events for the community and share my love of our history.

What do you plan on studying when you get out of high school?

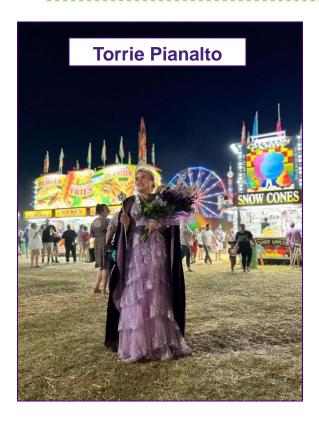
Undecided.

In three words/phrases, how would you describe the mission and work of THM?

Community, Education, and Preservation.



Ashlyn Bowen



What is your hometown?

Tontitown, Arkansas.

How long have you been living in NWA?

Almost 18 years.

What is your role at THM?

Junior Board Member.

What are your hobbies?

Volunteering, spending time with friends and family.

What makes you happiest?

Making other people happy.

What made you interested in getting involved with THM?

> My aunt runs the museum and I've always had an interest in history, especially local.

What do you hope to contribute during your time at THM?

A younger perspective to history.

What do you plan on studying when you get out of high school?

Criminology and psychology.

In three words how would you describe the mission and work of THM?

Making Tontitown Known.



Thank you, Amici members, for your 2024 (marked with an asterisk) and 2023 memberships! Your support means the world to us. A membership form to renew your membership 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)

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

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Tontitown Historical Museum Board Members and Staff, 2024

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Emily Pianalto-Beshears, Museum Manager Juli Sallings, Museum Assistant

Open Wednesday and Thursday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm
Friday and Saturday 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

2024 Museum and Community Events

Date	Event
August 6-10	125 th Tontitown Grape Festival
Saturday, September 14	Tontitown Annual Car & Truck Show – Bocce Tournament & Pickleball Tournament
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+

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

Yes!