



# Italian Historical Society of America Newsletter

MARCH 2019

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VOLUME 15, NUMBER 03

## **Tutto Italiano Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano***

In 1915, five families of Italian immigrants – attracted by a newspaper advertisement for farmland – traveled from Illinois and Michigan to settle near the Ouachita Mountains in Arkansas. For the Italian settlers, the mountains of Arkansas brought memories of the villages in their native land, and the land was cleared to plant grapevines. Within a decade, more Italian families joined the small community, tripling its size.

Located about 30 miles northwest of Little Rock, and initially named Alta Villa, the early settlers changed the town's name to [Little Italy](#) "to accommodate the growing town as it strived to become more Americanized."

As Prohibition started in 1920, the wine industry in the community was gaining momentum through "four bonded wineries." Throughout Prohibition, many growers sold grapes by the bushel instead of by the gallon. After Prohibition "hundreds of acres of vineyards were in full production," but in the early 1940s, diseased grapes caused the industry to decline.

The Italian community is located between two towns and divided by two counties. On its 100th anniversary in 2015, the residents sought to [incorporate the town](#) for several reasons: improve its infrastructure, increase town services, give the residents a "collective voice," and preserve its Italian heritage. The court's decision in 2016 and appeal in 2018 ruled against the petition, but "The effort remains in process and the descendants and residents of Little Italy will never give up on their dream to become an official town recognized by the great state of Arkansas."

[Little Italy \(Pulaski and Perry Counties\)](#) The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture

[Little Italy loses bid for status as a town](#) (*Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, November 29, 2018)

[Little Italy hopes to become official town in Arkansas](#) (August 6, 2014)

[The Story of Dal Santo](#): As Little Italy, a century-old community in the far western reaches of Pulaski County, fights for township, one man remembers the life that led him there. (*Arkansas Life*, September 8, 2015)

About 140 miles northwest of Little Italy – in the corner of Arkansas near its western border with Oklahoma and its northern border with Missouri – another town was founded by [Father Pietro Bandini](#) and Italian immigrants. Father Bandini named the new settlement [Tontitown](#), in honor of Enrico Tonti, who was in the French army and is generally known in American history as [Henri de Tonti](#).

Tonti was born in Italy – in [Gaeta](#), a small town between Rome and Naples – and moved with his family to France when he was a child. In his late 20s, he traveled to America with René-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, and explored the Great Lakes and the land along the Mississippi River. In 1686, Tonti led the establishment of

Arkansas's first permanent trading post, [Arkansas Post](#) (where the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers meet), and earned the title of "Father of Arkansas."

Father Bandini, born in Forli (region of Emilia-Romagna), was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1877, and traveled to America in the early 1880s as a missionary. He returned to Italy and traveled back to America to assist Italian immigrants. By the early 1900s, Tontitown was incorporated and noted as "a perfect example of colonization." Both Father Bandini and Tonti established positive relationships with Native Americans.

[Italian Immigration in Arkansas](#)

[Enrico Tonti: The Most Powerful Man in America](#)

[The "de Tonti page"](#) (Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery, Louisiana)

[Henri de Tonti](#) (Texas State Historical Association)

[The Tontitown Story](#)

[Interview: Charlotte Piazza, Curator of the Tontitown Historical Museum](#) (We the Italians, February 26, 2016)

### **An Italian Genius**

In memory of his death on May 2, 1519, celebrations throughout the world will honor the life and work of Leonardo da Vinci. Plans for the commemorations began several years ago, and started last year with a world preview of [Celebrando Leonardo](#) in Verona. The program includes a pavilion to "showcase Leonardo's art and inventions through Italian brands" and "a display of Leonardo's dreams implemented in a number of fields namely, science and technology as well as industry and handicraft."

On May 2nd, "the official start of the celebrations is to be marked by the toll of the bell dedicated to Leonardo, by the President of the Italian Republic." The event takes place at the [Quirinale Palace](#) in Rome.

Starting this month, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science features the exhibit, [Leonardo da Vinci: 500 Years of Genius](#). It includes "nearly 70 of Leonardo's machine inventions, built using detailed concepts from his famous codices (notebooks), including a helicopter, airplane, automobile, submarine, and military tank" and "The Secrets of Mona Lisa, an analysis of the iconic painting conducted at the Louvre ...". The exhibit ends August 25, 2019.

[2019: Florence Celebrates Leonardo da Vinci](#)

[Celebrating the 500th Anniversary of Leonardo](#) (The New York Times, February 12, 2019)

[Where to Celebrate Leonardo da Vinci in 2019](#)

[The Seven da Vincian Principles](#)

[The Secrets of the Mona Lisa](#) (YouTube Video; Full Documentary, The Discovery Channel)

[The Quirinale Palace, Home of Italy's President](#) (Italy Magazine, January 19, 2015)

### **Italian American Heritage Project**

In writing *Tutto Italiano* since 2004, I've visited thousands of websites as I search and research for the topics in each newsletter. During my online explorations, I always find other topics about Italy or Italian American history, heritage, and culture, not only for this newsletter but also for my other Italian-related endeavors, the newest being the

Italian American Heritage Project (IAHP).

I'm an avid researcher; and that means I spend hours seeking the most appropriate relevant information as the foundation of anything I write and publish. It also means I usually have questions about the topics I write about and have to do research on those topics to find the answers before I can complete the article. It may be so for many topics of research, but it seems that a majority of the information I find on almost any Italian-related topic has conflicting facts that I have to research even further.

As the amount of information online has expanded, and as my search for the most accurate details widens, I'm spending even more time researching. In 2004 when I started writing *Tutto Italiano*, my list of website resources was three pages long. Last year, it was 15 pages.

Last year, with initial funding from the [Italian Historical Society of America](#), the IAHP was created to utilize my research in educating everyone – those of Italian heritage and those of other nationalities – about the importance of our Italian heritage and, even more so, the importance of Italian American history, heritage, and culture.

Some may question why this is important, and to some (or many?), it isn't; but if they have even a distant connection to Italy, they should know – and care – about how they are part of the legacy of their ancestors. Some may argue that those of Italian heritage are too ingrained in America and don't need to call attention to their accomplishments. Do those of English, French, German, Irish, or Scottish heritage have to defend their ethnicity? No, and that is the problem, because those of Italian heritage do.

Why? For numerous reasons that I've written about over the years, but the most compelling are the attacks on Christopher Columbus, the lack of knowledge about Italian American history, and the continued negative stereotypes that erode Italian American ethnicity.

In this world of GoFundMe; where just about every website has numerous pop-up advertisements, or requires paid memberships or subscriptions; where huge corporations seek major tax and other financial benefits; and where so many businesses and charitable organizations consistently solicit donations, add the IAHP – asking for your support to continue my research and work.

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, and see the resources I've used in my work. Future plans include an analysis of the link between the lack of education in Italian American history and negative stereotypes of Italian Americans, and lesson plans on Italian immigration and being Italian American.

Donate for a cause – preserving Italian American culture through education. Go to the [IAHP website](#) and click on the Donate button.

Donate any amount and (at your option) have your name listed on the Contributor's Page.

Donate \$25.00 to \$50.00: name and state listed

Donate \$51.00 to \$100.00: name, state, and city of Italian ancestry listed

Donate \$101.00 to \$200.00: name, state, city of Italian ancestry, and three sentences about donor's heritage

Donate over \$200.00: donor's artwork (subject to limitations) posted for six months

All donations are made through the IAHP website to the Italian Historical Society of America as the recipient, and are distributed by the IHSA to the IAHP. The Society is the Fiscal Sponsor for this project, providing a 501(c)3 non-profit status, that allows for tax-deductible contributions and a receipt for your donation.

### **From the Italian American Press**

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – children's, memoirs, art, history, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of

Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press.

#### **Featured Author**

**Donna Gestri:** [\*Sweet Figs, Bitter Greens\*](#)

Italian American life in the mid-twentieth century sets the scene for the lives of the Salvatori family – Maestro Rinaldo, his loving wife Guiliana, and their four children. The Maestro, an Italian immigrant, founded a small opera house and oversees its operation, while he deals with changing family ideals and the family secrets he left behind in Italy.

#### **[Featured Books](#)**

##### **Humor**

***Where's the Minestrone? An Italian American Explores Italy* by Peter S. Carusone**

A look at Italy through the eyes of an Italian American who thought he knew what it meant to be “Italian” –a fun and family narrative replete with sentimentality, cross-cultural comparisons and outrageous humor.

##### **Religion**

***Lord, I Am Not Worthy* by Lewis M. Elia**

The journey of a Roman soldier, stationed in Palestine during the time of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, and the conflicts he faces between his new religion and loyalty to his country.

***Sharing Meals Heals: An Italian 'Menu' For Inner Peace* by Father William Faiella**

Short reflections and Italian wisdom helping the reader to respond creatively to life's problems on the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels.

##### **Sports**

***Heart of the Hide* by Lou Petrucci**

Nicky loves baseball and dreams of reaching the big leagues; join him and his team, the Kelsey Avenue Crew, for a series of wild events that teach him about the power of truth.

##### **Travel**

***The Devils of Rome Made Me Do It* by Jackelin J Jarvis**

A collection of wisdom and life experience that will take the reader through a fascinating journey of Roman culture.

#### **[Out of Rushmore's Shadow](#) by Lou Del Bianco**

From the Luigi Del Bianco website: “When he was a small boy hanging around the wood carving shop of his father in Meduno, Pordenone province, men of the village used to say, “How curious the little one is!” Vincenzo Del Bianco became convinced that his son was interested in carving and had more than ordinary ability. He later took the 13 year old boy to Austria to study under a skilled stone carver. After 3 years in Austria, Luigi studied in Venice. In 1910, when Luigi was 18 years old, he boarded the La Touraine out of Le Harvre, France and headed for America.”

From Lou Del Bianco: “Thanks to the people of Pordenone, my book about my Nonno is now in Italian!” *Fuori dall'ombra del Rushmore: La storia di Luigi Del Bianco*

#### **Italian American News**

From Bill Cerruti, Chair, California Italian-American Task Force:

“I would like to report to all of you who have shown an interest in the campaign to Save Columbus Day as an Italian-American Holiday that the City of Santa Barbara has officially declared the Second Monday in October as Italian Heritage Day. The City passed Resolution No. 18-084 on October 31, 2018 declaring The Second Monday both Indigenous Peoples Day and Italian Heritage Day. It should be noted that the City of Santa Barbara did not recognize Columbus Day going into this



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