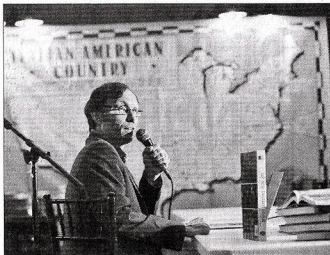


Italian Author Meets Distant Kinsmen During Tontitown Visit



STAFF PHOTO ANDY SHUPE

Paolo Battaglia, an Italian author, speaks Oct. 15 to Italian descendants in Tontitown. He discussed his book, "Explorers, Emigrants, Citizens," during an event sponsored by the Tontitown Historical Museum at the Willie James Event Hall.

By Laurinda Joenks
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The trip: 5,500 miles, 25 states, 35 days. Three Italian reporters set off across the United States to find Italy in Small Town, America. They stopped last week in Tontitown.

Paolo Battaglia addressed residents of Tontitown on Oct. 15 at the Willie James Event Center, at an event sponsored by the Tontitown Historical Museum. He spoke about his book, "Explorers, Emigrants, Citizens: A Visual History of the Italian American Experience," co-published by the Library of Congress (Anniversary Books, 2013).

The book includes more than 500 pictures of Italian

Americans from the Library of Congress' collections, including one from Tontitown never seen in the community before. The photo — on page 159 — shows three women making spaghetti. The caption reads "1930s: In the small rural town of Tontitown, Arkansas, the grape season is celebrated with spaghetti."

Bev Cortiana-McEwen, treasurer of the museum board, said the photograph made its rounds via email through the Tontitown community before Battaglia arrived, and two of the women were identified — Zelinda Bastianelli and Angela Lazzari — and consensus said the chore was for the annual Grape Festival.

FINDING AMERICA

The Italian title of the book, "Trovare l'America," translated means "Finding America." "I wanted to honor the people who came from Italy to the U.S. and fulfilled their dreams," Battaglia said. "It was my dream to work with the Library of Congress."

The first picture in the book features the Jefferson Building (main building) of the library, a beautiful setting mostly built by Italians from Tuscany renowned for their marble cutting, he said.

"When America needed to make a new monument, they brought over Italian craftspeople," Battaglia said. "The Italians also built roads and railroads. They were import-

ant to this country."

His book, co-authored by Linda Barrett Osborne, Mario Mignoni and Antonio Canovi, addresses Italian Americans from the explorer Christopher Columbus to Henri de Tonti, the Italian who helped Rene-Robert Cavellier, Sieur de La Salle, explore the Mississippi River and later founded Arkansas Post in 1686. It includes the earliest-known map (1536) to use the name "America." "(This country) was named by Italians," he pointed out.

Although most emigrants were farmers in Italy, their journeys brought them to large U.S. cities with factory work, Battaglia explained.