PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-37

Two Quaker records of the Bonines of Penn Township, Michigan: Robert Lindsey's visit of January 1850, and James E. Bonine's death in February 1897

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SUMMARY

The Bonine House at Vandalia, Michigan, built for James E. Bonine, is known chiefly from the county histories and modern Underground Railroad accounts, which give no date for his death and no early visitor's description of the family. Two Quaker sources supply both. The English minister Robert Lindsey, crossing Michigan in deep snow, wrote on 2 January 1850 that "it was eight o'clock in the evening when we arrived at our friend Isaac Bonine's, of Prairie Grove," and described Young's Prairie, on which Isaac Bonine was located, as "only from two to three miles across," with "a rich black earth of a good depth." And the Quaker weekly *The American Friend* printed James E. Bonine's obituary: he "Died at his home in Niles, Michigan, Second month 18th, 1897 ... in the eighty-first year of his age," after a last illness "of four months' duration," having built "principally one house for worship" and helped in the erection of three others. A 1906 Berrien County history and a syndicated newspaper piece of 1908 give his death as 1898.

THE RECORD

1. **Robert and Sarah Lindsey, *Travels of Robert and Sarah Lindsey* (London, 1886), pp. 42–43, entry of "2nd 1st mo., 1850"**

   > *"it was eight o'clock in the evening when we arrived at our friend Isaac Bonine's, of Prairie Grove. … The Pigeon Prairie is from eight to ten miles square, but Young's, upon which our friend Isaac Bonine is located, is only from two to three miles across. The soil is a rich black earth of a good depth, which produces large crops, particularly of Indian corn."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/travelsofroberts00lind)

2. **"Died: Bonine," *The American Friend* (Richmond, Ind.), vol. 4 (1897), p. 308**

   > *"Died at his home in Niles, Michigan, Second month 18th, 1897, James E. Bonine, in the eighty-first year of his age. He was a life-long member of the Society of Friends, and for many years an elder. … even building principally one house for worship, and greatly assisting in the erection of three others. … His last illness of four months' duration, while severe, was patiently borne."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/americanfriendvo00five_0)

WHAT IT CHANGES

James E. Bonine's death is dated to 18 February 1897, at Niles, a year earlier than the 1898 of later printed sources; and the earliest visitor's account yet found of the Bonine household is dated to 2 January 1850.

LIMITS

Lindsey describes Isaac Bonine's farm, not James E.'s, and says nothing of fugitives. The obituary does not name the meeting houses Bonine built. The 1898 date in the

Berrien history of 1906 and the 1908 piece is reported from the article.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The Underground Railroad Society of Cass County's pages and timelines; the Leader and Niles Daily Star articles of 2009–2025; the Clio entries; the Cass County driving tour; Wikipedia; Find a Grave (a bot check stopped us) and Geni; Internet Archive full-text searches for "Isaac Bonine" and for James E. Bonine with died, funeral and 1897; the Friends of Silverbrook obituaries; Glover's necrology (October 2026).

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

Project Scroll is independent research and does not speak for the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County. Its name is used here only to identify it; the history on this page is drawn from the published record cited below.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, "The Bonine House," *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/the-bonine-house/
2. *History of Cass County, Michigan* (Chicago: Waterman, Watkins & Co., 1882), pp. 250–251, 258. https://archive.org/details/historyofcasscou00wate

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The Bonine House at Vandalia (projectscroll.com/news/the-bonine-house/). In the discoveries register:

- `bonine-lindsey-1850` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#bonine-lindsey-1850)
- `bonine-death-1897` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#bonine-death-1897)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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