



TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION  
OFFICE OF THE  
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O'ODHAM HA-WE:HEJED

*"For the People"*

**PRESS RELEASE**

Monday, Apr. 4, 2016

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Matt Smith, (530) 321-1111

**STATEMENT ON THE PASSING OF BERNARD "BUNNY" FONTANA**

SELLS, Ariz. – The Tohono O'odham Nation was saddened to learn of the passing of Bernard "Bunny" Fontana, renowned scholar, writer, and co-founder of Patronato San Xavier, the nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring Mission San Xavier del Bac. He is survived by his son, Nicholas Anthony Fontana, and his daughter, Francesca Ann Fontana.

Born in Oakland, California, in 1931, Bunny Fontana developed his interest in anthropology while attending the University of California at Berkeley. In 1955, Bunny and his wife Hazel moved to a home on Mission Road just outside the Nation's San Xavier District while he pursued his graduate degree in anthropology at the University of Arizona. San Xavier became their regular church, and his experiences there spurred Bunny's lifelong interest in the history of both the Mission and the Tohono O'odham.

In one of his earliest anthropological endeavors, Bunny prepared a comprehensive compilation of research and first-person accounts of O'odham history and culture. This was just one of many projects he undertook to preserve and share the stories of our people over a career spanning six decades.

In 1978, Bunny was one of the six original founders of Patronato San Xavier, with the purpose of restoring and preserving the historical Mission. After raising funds and assembling a team, Bunny helped the Patronato launch its first five-year restoration project. Bunny continued to work with the Patronato on maintaining the church until his retirement in 2013.

On behalf of the Tohono O'odham Nation, we offer our deepest condolences to Bunny's family and friends. He will be greatly missed.

Edward D. Manuel  
Chairman, Tohono O'odham Nation

Verlon M. Jose  
Vice Chairman, Tohono O'odham Nation

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