

# Pioneer Place Preserver

Annual Newsletter of the Marilla Historical Society ~ SPRING 2026

Marillahistory.org • 9991 Marilla Road, Copemish, MI



## Greetings from Marilla Historical Society!

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, welcome! The Marilla Museum and Pioneer Place exists to preserve and share the fascinating history of Marilla, Michigan. We are a small non-profit organization, staffed by volunteers and supported entirely by donations.

## 2026 Events Calendar



Friday, April 17<sup>th</sup> the MHS will host a gather with **homemade** soup, salad, bread and dessert. Our goal is to connect people in the community, to raise some funds for the MHS mission and have a little Marilla history as a side dish. Please join us at the Marilla Township Hall at 9991 Marilla Road from 5:00-7:00 p.m. Suggested free will donation minimum is \$15. [Souper Friday details here.](#)

### The Menu:

- Creamy Tortellini, Tomato & Spinach Soup
- Corn & Bacon Chowder
- Roasted Squash & Spinach Salad
- Everything Bagel Dinner Rolls
- Pineapple Upside Down Cake w/ Whipped Cream

### Annual Road Clean-up Day: April 25, 10:00 a.m.

Each year volunteers help clean up the roadsides of sections of Marilla Road and Beers Road in the township. Join us!

## Museum & Pioneer Place Summer Hours

Saturday open hours begin May 2, 2026,

1:00 - 4:00 p.m. and run through October 31st.

Year-round Open Hours: Tuesdays 1-4

[Main Museum Only]

## Did you know?

Marilla Township was named after the daughter of a county official who drew up the Township's organizational papers in 1870. He agreed to complete the process providing that the Township be named Marilla for his daughter.

The "Pioneer House" was built by Aaron Pepple, originally from Ohio, in the late 1870's at Yates Corner. It was moved to its current home in the 1990's through the generosity of Terry and Phyllis Cholette and countless volunteers and donors.

*"Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." Sherry Anderson*

## New Quilt Acquisition

Last fall Brenda Nyquist contacted us regarding a quilt she had inherited from the **Taylor** family of Cleon Township. Archivist Jan Thomas met with her and researched the provenance of the quilt, which appears to have been sewn at an annual conference of the Michigan Church of the Brethren around 1915. Jan recorded **425** hand-stitched names from the quilt including several families that attended both the Harlan Church of the Brethren and the Marilla Church of the Brethren. Did you know that the Marilla Church was originally formed as an off shoot of the Harlan Church? The Marilla Church became independent February 7, 1919.



## President's Report:

Greetings from Marilla and Happy 2026!

Hard to imagine the bright spring day pictured in our new masthead above as we are having a real old-school winter here with a great deal of snow and cold.

Recently, we were asked, "What is the story of the founding of the Marilla Historical Society?"

The MHS was organized and founded June 3, 1980, after a request from the Marilla Township Board for the purpose of preserving artifacts and records relating to the history of the township.

There were 220 Charter members at its inception, and these are recorded on a wall plaque in the stairwell basement of the Marilla Township (Schoolhouse) Community Center.

Mary Esther (**Grossnickle**) **Brooks**, Betty (**Varnado**) **Buda-Joy**, Grace (**Bahr**) **Fisk**, Geraldine (**Dilling**) **Howes** and Reta Mae (**Howes**) **Russell**, were founding MHS Board members. So many volunteers from the community were vital in creating the museum we have today.

They soon got to work, converting the 1920 historic schoolhouse's west room in the basement into a museum full of local artifacts in 1980. When the museum outgrew that space, the east room in the basement was converted.

In 1992, MHS volunteers moved the Pioneer house from Yates Corner, below left, to its current location behind the Township Hall & Community Center, below right. It was dismantled log by log and meticulously reconstructed on a new foundation and furnished with donations of artifacts from the archives collected.



The large, circa 1900 mortise and tenon "Wagon Barn" was moved from the property next door after being donated in 2001. A wagon barn was built with drive-through bays so that wagons and other farm equipment could pull in or through and out of inclement weather.

Trapper and lumberman, Nels Johnson, lived in a tiny cabin at the edge of the Manistee National Forest. In 2002 the remnants of his cabin were salvaged and added to in recreating this trapper's cabin complete with traps and pelts that would have been in keeping with his work.

Our grateful thanks go to the families who donated these structures to be preserved. Visit the Museum to view photos of the reconstructions.



**Worker Bees Needed:** Sadly, so many of these founding members and volunteers have passed on and we are always in need of new volunteers and board members to keep our mission alive. If you are interested in becoming a worker bee, please contact Douglas Glick [douglas-glick@icloud.com](mailto:douglas-glick@icloud.com) to get buzzing!

*"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

In other news, the MHS Board and Marilla Township signed a new operating agreement leasing our space for the next ten years. We had a bit of an increase in "rent", but we feel it is a solid commitment from the township, and we are very grateful for our partnership.

*Douglas A. Glick, MHS Board President*

## What's in Our 2026 Budget?

### INCOME

Visitor Donations (open hours)	600
Events	1500
Gift Shop Sales	1000
Memorial Donations	100
Membership Dues	<u>3500</u>
	\$6700

### EXPENSES

Annual Filing	20
Rent	50
PO Box	68
Cleaning	3100
Maintenance	1000
Supplies	700
CatalogIt (archival storage)	600
Newsletter	500
Insurance	400
Membership Dues	100
Pest Control	350
Computer/Software	100
Website/Hosting	<u>500</u>
	\$7488

*"I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver."*

*Maya Angelou*

## History Lesson 2026

(From the Jan Thomas book, Marilla: The Woods, The Farms, The People **available in our gift store.**)

“In 1880, free delivery of mail was only available to those communities of 10,000 or more. This definitely did not include remote rural areas such as Marilla. Farmers began to protest. They felt that they were being discriminated against, paid their taxes like everyone else and deserved to have more efficient means of mail delivery. They also felt strongly that their needs were even greater because of their distance away from populated communities. President Harrison’s dynamic postmaster general, John Wannamaker, began to strongly advocate for extension of services to these underserved areas of the nation. It paid off and his idea came to fruition October 1, 1896. RFD (Rural Free Delivery) routes as they were known were established in West Virginia. Still in the experimental stages, in December of that year Michigan mail carriers, commissioned from a general store post office near Kalamazoo, started using horse drawn carts to deliver to rural areas. Other communities clamored for the same service. In 1904, Wexford County and other northern Lower Michigan counties citizen petitions were circulated that successfully resulted in rural free delivery extending its boundaries to less populated and more remote outposts that were gaining significance in the state of Michigan.

*\*As Michigan’s rural free delivery services grew, patrons began looking around their homes and farms for anything they could find to use for a suitable mailbox. As a result, most rural letter carriers found themselves face-to-face with a hodgepodge of homemade, semi-functional contraptions. Old coal oil, syrup and food containers were dragged out of storage – sometimes with sticky remains of the original contents pooled inside the box – and slapped on top of poles set out along the road.\**

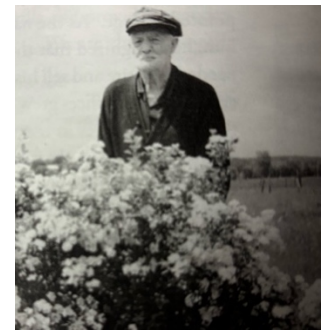
\*[Original source from March/April 2006 issue of Michigan History magazine]

As one can imagine, this caused many problems for the mail carriers so that it became necessary to take steps to improve the situation that had gotten out of hand. In time, the state required that those patrons who wished to receive mail must purchase a standard mailbox from a selected list of manufactures.”

There grew a symbiotic relationship with general stores and the rural post office. Prior to delivery to people’s homes, folks congregated at places like Brimmer’s Store here in Marilla. Neighbors would gather by an old wood stove, hear about community members – gossip – and purchase items for home. Located right beside the old rail line, it was a conduit for creating community connections and connections with the outside world. As people began to receive mail in their own boxes, trips to the general store were less and there was also mail-order delivery which further led to the demise of the general stores.



The actual post box (c. 1900) from the Marilla Post Office, housed at the Brimmer Store, was built by **Hershel Brimmer**, pictured below left. His brother **George Brimmer**, below right, was Postmaster for 62 years, from 1873 until it closed June 29, 1935.



## What’s New in Our Store!

We have printed new Manistee County plat map books from the **1898 version** below, available in both color and greyscale. This fascinating 57-page book has maps of the City of Manistee as well as all other townships, villages and cities as of 1898. Key people in each community are featured.

Visit our giftshop: [marillahistory.org/shop](http://marillahistory.org/shop)



Check out this remarkable time capsule and buy a copy to support our mission! MHS thanks James Russell, Jr., son of MHS Founder Reta Russell, for the donation of the original book, which we are preserving.

## From the Archives

News of the Weird? Perhaps. You never know what you might find in the archives of the Marilla Historical Society. This article, taken from *The Copemish Progress*, dated February 20, 1919, captured the curiosity of MHS Board Vice President, Lynda O'Shea while serving as docent one Saturday. This weekly paper captured news of the community of Copemish (established in 1891) and the surrounding areas, including Marilla. It was published by R.H. beginning around 1901 and it isn't clear when it stopped being published, per an internet search. Does anyone out there know?



Copemish was a burgeoning little railroad town around 1908 when this photo was taken.

## What Does AI Say About Marilla?

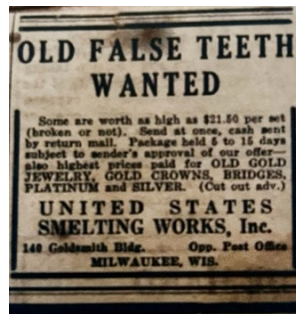
In more modern ways of seeking information about the world, a search on the web turns up the following:

Marilla, Michigan, is an unincorporated ghost town in Manistee County, located east of Kaleva. Once a bustling 1870s logging settlement and rail stop, it declined after its post office closed in 1935. Today, little remains, though the Marilla Museum and Pioneer Place preserves its history.

## Marilla & Nearby Ghost Town Highlights:

- **Marilla (Township):** Settled in 1866, it was a hub with a blacksmith, store, and train station on the Manistee & North Eastern Railroad.
- **Yates/Lemon Lake:** A former rural post office and railroad station in the northwest part of Marilla township that operated from 1884 to 1904.
- **Baxter:** Another nearby logging settlement that folded after the timber boom.
- **Marilla Museum:** Located at 9991 Marilla Road, this museum (housed in an old school-house) features a log house from Yates, a town hall, and historical exhibits about the area.

Visitors can still spot remnants of old buildings, and the nearby Marilla Museum and Pioneer Place provides a deep look into the rural life of this former lumbering community.



## Maple Upside Down Cake

(from Sweet Maple by James M. Lawrence & Rux Martin, reprinted in Marilla: The Woods, The Farms, The People)

- 7 T. butter, softened
- ½ C. maple syrup
- 2 apples cored, unpeeled and sliced
- 1½ C. flour
- 2 t. baking powder
- 1 t. salt
- ¾ C. sugar
- 2 eggs, separated
- ½ C. milk

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Melt 3 T. butter in an 8" or 9" square baking pan. Pour maple syrup over butter and remove from heat. Arrange apples in the pan. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Cream remaining 4 T. butter with half cup of sugar and egg yolks. Add dry ingredients to the creamed mixture while alternating with the milk. Beat egg whites until stiff and add remaining ¼ sugar. Fold whites gently into batter and pour over apples placed in the pan. Bake 40-50 minutes. Immediately remove cake by turning upside down on a serving plate. Good served with whipped cream.

*"A party without cake  
is just a meeting."*

*Julia Child*

## Marilla Historical Society Board

Douglas A. Glick, President  
Lynda O'Shea, Vice President & Clerk  
Alissa Aparicio, Treasurer  
Maureen Carlson, Trustee  
TJ Howes, Trustee  
Susan Vegter, Trustee  
Jan Thomas, Archivist



## Emeritus Board

Mary Esther (Grossnickle) Brooks	Betty (Varnado) Buda-Joy
Terry & Phyllis Cholette	Grace (Bahr) Fisk
Reta Mae (Howes) Russell	Geraldine (Dilling) Howes
Dixie Howes	Sonny Rewerts
Robert Thomas	Art Wilbur

## Contact Us

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- ⇒ Physical Address:  
9991 Marilla Road, Copemish, MI 49625
- ⇒ Mailing Address:  
PO BOX 234, Kaleva, MI 49645

## Become a Historical Society Member

Begin or renew your membership here:

[marillahistory.org/membership](http://marillahistory.org/membership)

Thank you for your support!