

# Pioneer Place Preserver

*The Annual Newsletter of the  
Marilla Historical Society*

Spring 2024

Marillahistory.org



## Bursting with Stories to Tell

When traveling through an area, one may take note of the scenery including hills, deep valleys, lush forests, and winding streams. There may be an interesting sign or two, beautiful buildings, an amazing display of spring's gift of glowing wild Trilliums, various wildlife, and humans going about their lives in their surroundings. If one had a way of knowing what is beneath that scenic layer, a whole new world would burst with stories to tell.

Take Marilla Township for instance. If you were driving in Marilla Township on a lovely day at the present time, you are likely to approach Bigge Road directly across from the Marilla Community Complex on Marilla Road. This many faceted meandering dirt road consisting of hills, valleys, and surprise curves also has interesting stories to tell. If you appreciate the benefits of social security or look forward to it in the future, you can thank Mr. George Bigge, dean of the Economics Department at Brown University, who was one of three men chosen by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help develop the new social security system that is now enjoyed. George grew up on the Bigge Family farm on Bigge Rd.

In the archives at the Main Museum in Marilla, there is a metal tag with the name Thure Litzen etched on it. This tag had been attached to a metal cream or milk can indicting that it came from a dairy farm managed by the Litzen family. The dairy product was shipped to market by M. & N. E. Railroad from a rail stop in Marilla. The road the Litzen family lived on is named Litzen Road. If you travel on that road, you will pass a barn with the large letters "Fairvale Farm. It bears indication of a once thriving farm. There have been several dairies in Marilla through the years including Howes, Russell, Cilman, Reitz, and Grossnickle and now there are none. On Hulls Road, there is an ancient square house still standing tall like a sentinel watching over its surroundings. The windows and doors are gone, and it is now host to all types of critters that find welcome refuge there. However, if you had grown up in the 1920's or so, it would have been known as the Old Britton House. Andrew Britton was one among other Civil War veterans who settled in Marilla Township. The Britton name pops up in many different capacities in the

township archives. As time went on other families lived there. I'll save those stories for another time. Or better yet, visit Marilla Museum & Pioneer Place where you can feel history come alive!

## 2024 Events Calendar

### "Souper" Fridays

Each Friday in April the MHS will host a gather with homemade soup, salad, bread and dessert. Our goal is to connect people in the community and 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 \$10.00.

### Pioneer Holiday "JoyFest" Dinner

Last year we had to cancel due to complications with the ongoing lives of board members. So, this year, we are excited to be back on with our bi-annual "JoyFest" Dinner. The event will be **Saturday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 6:00-9:00 p.m.**

This very special seated dinner is a favorite of those who have attended in the past. The evening includes exhibits and activities focusing on the celebration of the holiday season by early Marilla Pioneers.

Tickets are required as seating is limited. Suggested free will donation minimum is \$50.00.

Tickets will be available October 1<sup>st</sup>. Contact Jan Thomas: janbobthomas2021@gmail.com

**Explore Local History**

Open hours begin **May 4, 2024, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.** and run through October 26<sup>th</sup>.

[Year-round Open Hours: Tuesdays 1-4]

## Strategic Planning 2024

The MHS Board and other volunteers met in February to discuss and plan for the long-term viability of the Marilla Museum & Pioneer Place. As the base membership of our beloved museum have been aging and passing, we are looking at ways to maintain and expand our funding and involvement and engagement with our museum.

The board looked at current membership enrollment, marketing, event planning and maintenance needs ongoing and upcoming. Website improvements and collections management process and systems were also discussed. Want to share an idea? Let us know if you wish to get involved to help us be relevant and connected to keep our local history living.

How do we connect? As the board investigates ways to connect with members and potential members, and looking at printing and mailing costs, we would like you to let us know whether you'd prefer your newsletter mailed or emailed to you? Do we have your email? Please let us know on your membership form whether you would prefer email or the so-called snail mail moving forward.

## Director's Report:

Bob and I will be retiring from our leadership positions by June of 2025 after 25 or more years of service to Marilla Historical Society in their preservation efforts. What an exciting project to be involved in! Everything that is contained within our museum spaces has been touched or used in some manner by people who have built this community. Together it all constitutes a huge puzzle with interlocking pieces that represent the formation of a community. Our community story could be the story of many American communities. MHS has "birthed" a fine representation of rural America's story with the development of Marilla Museum & Pioneer Place. I work every Tuesday at the museum as well as many hours outside of that in my role as director. I look forward to my "Tuesday" work. I develop and improve exhibits, file the many items into our "Family Heritage Boxes", plan and coordinate event programs, monitor the museum spaces, and find myself raking, tending gardens, sewing curtains, repairing artifacts, and sometimes with a hammer in my hand. Greeting visitors has always been a highlight and the positive energy gained from them encourages us to do our best. The support that donors, guests, volunteers and

members who serve on the Marilla Historical Society Board has given made this worthy project possible.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

*Jan Thomas, Director*

**"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?"**

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

## President's report:

Hello folks,

Around the spring of 1999, I happened by the 1870's Pioneer Log House to talk with Art Wilbur. I found him quietly working alone installing a wood floor so I pitched in and joined him. I've been serving the Marilla Historic Society ever since in one capacity or another. Through the combined efforts of many volunteers, the result has been impressive. The fully restored Main Museum, Pioneer Barn, Pioneer House, and Nels Johnson Cabin offer visitors an opportunity to "bring history alive. I have served the Marilla Historical Society as president following the service of Terry Cholette. I will be stepping down from that responsibility when my present term is completed. I will help with the transition and serve as a volunteer when able.

It is my sincere wish that the Marilla Historical Society thrives and continues in its quest to preserve and interpret history for future generations. To honor the tireless efforts of the many volunteers since 1980, my plea is that you become a new member, continue with your support, and/or share a talent, become involved with a project, or serve on the governing board. Your effort large or small will make a difference. Can you step up and serve? Preservation of Marilla Township's history is for the people of this township, but also tells a broader story that anyone can appreciate. Just remember, you are who you are because of where you were when.

*Bob Thomas, President of MHS*

## Upcoming Improvement Projects:

Maintaining the museum and pioneer place is solely the responsibility of the MHS and rising costs have certainly meant challenges in keeping up with capital improvements. For example, the flooring in the original west room of the basement section of the museum is more than 41 years old and needs to be replaced. We estimate that the costs will be between \$1600 and \$2000. Are you able to send an additional donation to cover the costs? Please earmark your special donation for this project.

## What is Planned Giving?

Planned giving is when you make the generous memorial gift in your will or living trust to the Marilla Historical Society. The attorney handling the writing of

your will can make this happen. If you have questions about wishing to include our historical society as a part of your legacy, feel free to contact Douglas Glick, MHS Board Vice President at 757.813.0311 or [douglasglick@icloud.com](mailto:douglasglick@icloud.com)

## What is Memorial Giving?

When someone you love passes away, you may consider naming the Marilla Historical Society as a memorial fund recipient. The MHS will engrave their name on the brass plaque in the museum to forever recognize gifts in honor of your loved one's life.

## Your 2024 Membership Dues

When you use the enclosed envelope to send your 2024 annual dues, please consider that membership is only a *very small portion* of our operating budget each year and with the passing of many long-time supporters each year, this creates the need for increased membership and dues.

## What's in Our Budget?

Projected Income Sources 2024	
Open Hours	\$350
Membership Dues and Donations	\$3,500
Events and Fundraising	\$1,200
Book Sales	\$500
Other Sale Items (prints, etc.)	\$200
Total	\$5,750
Projected Expenses 2024	
Supplies – General	\$500
Supplies – Office/Archival	\$500
Maintenance and Repairs	\$1,500
Grounds	\$100
Cleaning	\$2,200
Custom Hire (musicians, speakers fees, etc.)	\$500
Education/Workshops	\$350
Printing Costs	\$500
Events	\$500
ACA Dues	\$50
Licensing Dues	\$20
Michigan Historical Society Dues	\$50
Lease with Township	\$10
Insurance	\$350
PO Box	\$60
Website/Collections Management	\$450
Membership	
Total	\$7,640

## Explaining the shortfall:

Currently we are finding increases in the cost of doing things going up for all and this means our MHS needs to rely more on increased membership dues and to look for and find new sources of funding. If you have ideas on how you might help further the mission of the MHS, please contact MHS Board Vice President, Douglas Glick [douglasglick@icloud.com](mailto:douglasglick@icloud.com) to get involved. Help

with events, website maintenance, collections management and other needed skills are most welcome!

## Marilla Literary Society c.1905-1917

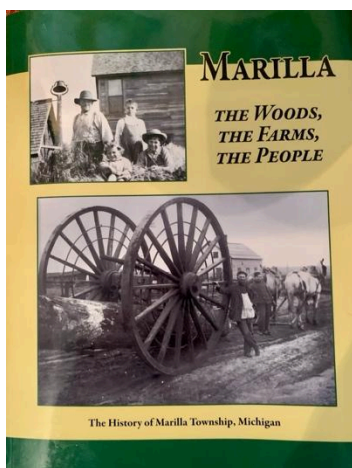
**Literature is the art of discovering something extraordinary about ordinary people and saying with ordinary words something extraordinary.**

*Boris Pasternak*

In 1905 up to 50 souls gathered on a bi-weekly basis to participate in a “self-improvement” group called the Marilla Literary Society. Songs opened and closed each meeting, often of a patriotic nature. The society members read poetry, prose and social commentary and conducted debates and performed recitations, plays and spelling matches. These bi-weekly meetings took place after the day was over starting as early as 8:00 and as late as 9:30 in the summer and harvest months to accommodate the life of the local farmer. Songs might include “The Holy City” composed around 1892 with music by Michael Maybrick writing under the alias Stephen Adams, with lyrics by Frederic Weatherly and it was one of the most popular religious songs in English with themes of universal peace and brotherhood. Plays included Shakespeare’s “All’s Well That Ends Well” or “A Slight Misunderstanding” by Adrian Dale, which is set in a church hall for the meeting of a local women’s guild and confusion and some hilarity is said to ensue. Debates took on some thoughtful topics such as women’s right to vote, the treatment of “The American Indian” or “Resolved That the United States Has More to be Ashamed of Than Proud Of” debated on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1905.

In her book “Marilla: The Woods, The Farms, The People”, author Jan Thomas writes “I believe that culture was never so celebrated in Marilla as when the Literary Society met. This gathering was the pride of Marilla and deservedly so. That effort by the community deserves a gold star and much applause.” Want to learn more? Purchase a copy of this wonderful book that exemplifies the Pasternak quote as the ordinary lives of the residents of Marilla are made extraordinary.

In it, you can read about the earliest footprints of Native Americans, the formation of the township in 1870, the lives of the lumbermen and other early European-American pioneers and their families and what it took to farm and worship and create community in this place of beauty.



Marilla’s population from its founding in 1870 to today has fluctuated in the numbers of school-aged children and education itself has come a long way in the past nearly 150 years. These early schools were simply built but well-constructed buildings that gathered the young from the farms surrounding them to provide for education by a single schoolmaster or schoolmarm.

Being a farming community, agricultural issues showed up in the minutes of the school board in interesting ways. Between 1915 and 1923 there are mentions in the minutes of “Potato Vacations” noting that students may miss school to help with aspects of local potato farming. Many times, children were absented from school during times of planting and harvest, particularly during the early years of the township.

*“July 1923 ‘moved by Howes and supported by Grossnickle that the school have a potato vacation in Oct. of one week. The week was to be decided by the Dist. Board. Motion carried.’”*

Advances in farming machinery eventually made these “vacations” mostly infrequent and then obsolete. (gleaned from Jan Thomas’s book, *ibid*)

## Marilla Historical Society Board

Bob Thomas, President  
Douglas A. Glick, Vice President & Clerk  
Alissa Aparicio, Treasurer  
Terry Howes, Trustee  
Lynda O’Shea, Trustee  
Sonny Rewerts, Trustee  
Jan Thomas, Director & Trustee

## The Power of Education

Education breeds  
Confidence.  
Confidence breeds  
Hope.  
Hope breeds  
Peace.

*Confucious*



The Gilson School, pictured above, was one of four, one-room schoolhouses in Marilla prior to 1899. The others were the Evens School, Clark School and Marilla School. All but the Marilla School were named after founding families of Marilla Township.

Public education has been a part of the fabric of our country since early days. A law enacted in Michigan in 1827 provided that “Every township shall employ a schoolmaster of good morals to teach children to read and write, and to instruct them in the English and French languages, as well as in arithmetic, orthography, and decent behavior.” (from information from the Michigan Historical Commission). In order to educate all children, townships were given the levying power for taxation to provide a sound education for all children, regardless of family income. Prior to this, most families that educated their children did so only if they could afford to send their children to private schools.

What was lifelike for early teachers in Marilla? Hard work would likely be an understatement as they had to teach broadly across multiple subjects to multiple ages and manage social interactions, maintain the fires – literally — in the schoolhouses in winter, and to prepare young people to be constructive citizens. The pay was not extraordinary, and this career was one that was one that was becoming one in which women were allowed to increasingly be leaders in their communities. Recognizing some of these early women teachers from the Clark School, they were: Marian Marsh, Mrs. Marrie Stiver, Evelyn Woodhead, Mrs. Bernice Evens, Ina Sprague, Doris Shideler, Rosa Ream, Mary Winters, Inez Field, Vera Grossnickle, Eviline Sturdevant, Eveiline Ritchie, Martha Robertson, Grace Merritt Violet Dye and Mrs. Katie Pence.

Have you thanked one of your teachers lately?

## Cook's Corner

You can purchase your copy of the Country Cookbook online or by calling Jan Thomas 231.362.3430. They are discounted to only \$5.00 + shipping.

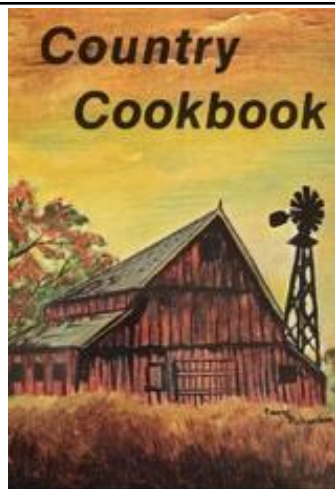
Summer is coming and folks often find they have too many zucchini on their hands. Here's a creative way to serve them.

### Tuna Zucchini Suisse

2 C. shredded zucchini  
(roughly 3 large zucchini)  
¼ t. salt, divided  
4 eggs  
1 ½ C. milk  
2 (6 ½ oz.) cans tuna, drained  
and flaked  
1 C. shredded Swiss cheese  
½ C. finely chopped onion  
1 T. lemon juice  
¼ t. pepper  
¼ t. dried dill weed  
2 T. packaged dry bread crumbs

Mix zucchini with ½ t. salt and let stand 15 minutes (in a colander) and then pat dry. Combine prepared zucchini mixture with remaining ¼ t. salt and all other ingredients (except bread crumbs). Mix thoroughly. Sprinkle 9" pie pan with bread crumbs. Turn mixture into dish; bake at 350° for 40 minutes (until knife comes out clean). Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

*Diane Danville*



Marilla Historical Society  
Marilla Township Improvement Association

### Zucchini Provencal

2 T. butter  
½ chopped onion  
1 clove garlic  
4 zucchini  
2 tomatoes, peeled and chopped  
1 t. salt  
1/8 t. pepper  
¼ t. dried oregano leaf

In large skillet melt butter; add onion and garlic and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Add zucchini and remaining ingredients; mix well. Cover and cook over moderately low heat for 10-15 minutes or until zucchini is crisp/tender. Makes 4 servings.

*Candace Williams Weaver*