PROJECT SCROLL · A SERIES IN THREE PARTS

The Cass County Pioneer Society

From the pioneers' museum of 1874 to the Pioneer Log Cabin of 1923 and the Cass County Historical Society today.

1. A museum before there was a museum
2. The cabin a county built
3. Keepers of the county

Research and reporting by Michael Urbanski · ORCID 0009-0006-8183-5828

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THE PIONEER SOCIETY · PART 1

A museum before there was a museum

DISCOVERY · 9 NEW FINDINGS › UPDATED SERIES · 1 OF 3 › GO SEE IT 34 MIN READ

Nearly fifty years before the Pioneer Log Cabin, Cass County already had a museum: a by-law, a committee and a room in the court house, kept by a society of pioneers whose June picnics drew crowds reported at ten thousand and more. Part 1 of the story of the Cass County Pioneer Society, 1873–1924.

LIVE RESEARCH DOCUMENT

This story is part of a series still being researched. The Pioneer Society's own papers have not yet turned up in the public collections we have searched, and new records are added as they are found.

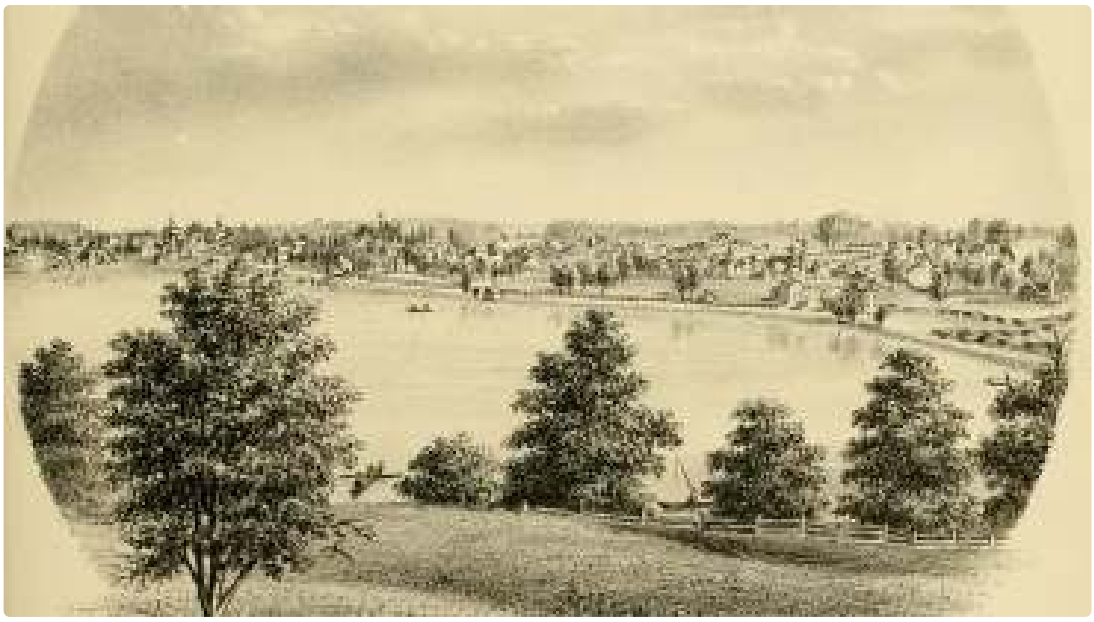
By Michael Urbanski · Project Scroll · First published 25 October 2026 · Updated 26 October 2026 · 34 min read

PUBLISHED RESEARCH

Research Note 2026-07 A museum before the museum: the Cass County Pioneer Society's collection, 1874–1899 (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-07/)

PDF (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-07/project-scroll-research-note-2026-07.pdf)

This story's key findings, each set out as a short, dated, citable note. All research notes › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/)



View of Cassopolis from the south side of Stone Lake, engraving, in Mathews, History of Cass County (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.

The short version

The Cass County Pioneer Society was founded at the Court House in Cassopolis in 1873. From the start it collected relics: a by-law of 1874 called for a published catalogue, a committee cared for "the specimens in the museum" by 1876, and the collection moved from a store into a Court House room on 17 May 1882.

Its June picnics drew crowds reported at ten thousand and more. In the 1910s it faded, until Charles O. Harmon revived it in 1923 around a new log cabin on Stone Lake, where a collection moved from the Court House lobby, probably the Society's old museum, was put on show in June 1924.

Read the whole story ›

✦ NEW FINDING 9 new findings in this story. **See what's new ›**

In June 1887 a newspaper reported that a drum had gone missing in Cass County. It was a bass drum "captured on a southern battle field," said to have been given to the county's pioneers in 1874, and its inscriptions were said to show it more than two centuries old, "with a record in Scotch regiments" that included the battle of Culloden. "For the last few years all trace of it has been lost," the paper said, "and the society is anxiously looking for it." We have found no report that it ever turned up.

The drum is not the only thing missing. The catalogues the society's by-laws ordered, its journal and its roll of 590 signatures have not been found either. Yet enough survives, in old county histories, reports and scattered newspaper lines, to show that the drum belonged to a museum few people now remember: one that was at work nearly fifty years before the Pioneer Log Cabin was built.

On Wednesday, 18 June 1879, the pioneers of Cass County held their picnic at the county seat, and the news went out across Michigan in a single line: "Ten thousand people attended the annual pioneers' picnic at Cassopolis, Wednesday. Levi Bishop of Detroit delivered the address." A paper in Grayling, in the pine country far to the north, printed it a week later.

Ten thousand was a guess, and probably a generous one. But it was a guess the papers made again and again in those years. Once a year the people who had cleared the county's farms in the 1830s and 1840s came back to the county seat, with their children and grandchildren, to eat, to hear a speech and to put their names on a roll.

And the Society had a museum. Within a year of that picnic it was in the care of the new assistant secretary, I. V. Sherman, at his store. It had a committee, a by-law and a plan for a printed catalogue, and it was nearly fifty years older than the Pioneer Log Cabin that holds the county's pioneer collection today.

This is the story of that museum, of the society that kept it (the Cass County Pioneer Society, founded in 1873), and of the clues they left behind. It is the first of three parts. Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) tells the story of the cabin, and Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) the story of the Cass County Historical Society.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE DOCUMENTED READING OPEN ✦ NEW FINDING

28 documented · 12 readings · 9 new

? What the marks mean

AT A GLANCE

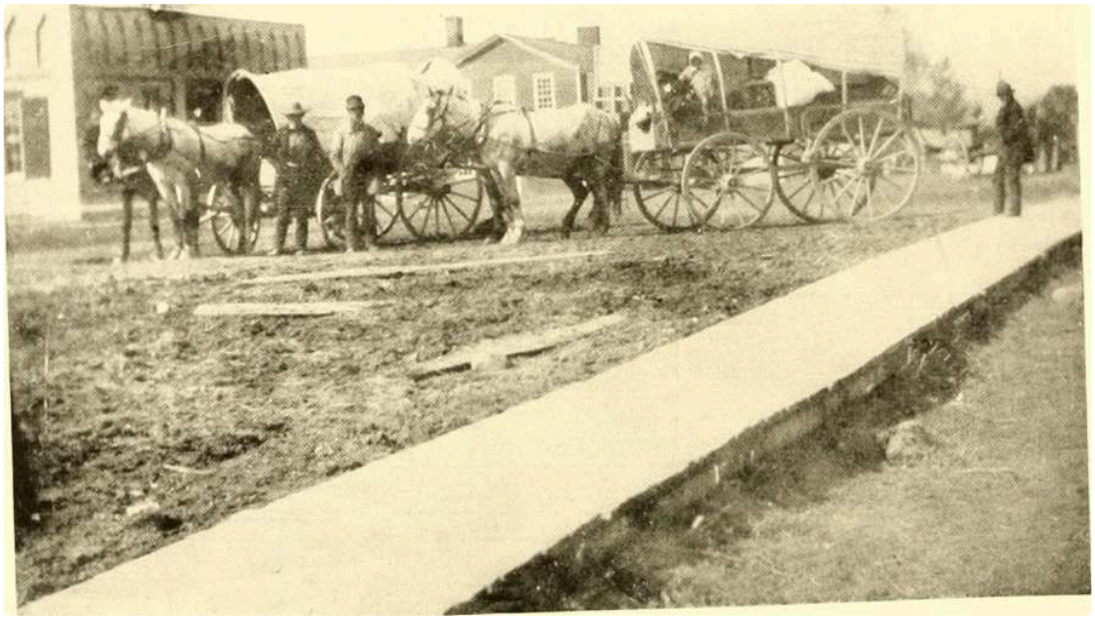
Founded	9 October 1873 (first meeting) and, by Mathews's account, 6 November 1873 (constitution), at the Court House, Cassopolis
First president	Uzziel Putnam Sr.
Names	"The Society of the Pioneers" (1873); the Cass County Pioneer Society or Pioneer Association (1870s to 1920s); the Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society (from 1923); the Cass County Historical Society (in print by April 1923, the usual name by 1942)
The museum's homes	Planned in the by-laws (1874); a committee caring for "the specimens in the museum" by 1876; I. V. Sherman's store (1879–80); a Court House room (from 17 May 1882); probably the Court House lobby, whose collection went into the Pioneer Log Cabin (from 18 June 1924)
The picnic	Usually the third Wednesday of June, from 1874 to at least 1910. Crowds were reported at ten thousand and more
Today	Two successors: the Cass County Historical Society (incorporated 1977) and the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum (incorporated 2012), whose cabin stands at 400 S. Broadway, Cassopolis

On this page

1. The call goes out, 1873
2. A museum from the start, 1874–1882
3. Ten thousand at the picnic
4. A drum, a sickle and a beaver's tail
5. The quiet years, about 1910–1922
6. The man with the postcards, 1922–1924
7. One society becomes two
8. Why it matters
9. How you can help
10. The presidents, 1873–1924
11. Who's who across the series
12. Timeline

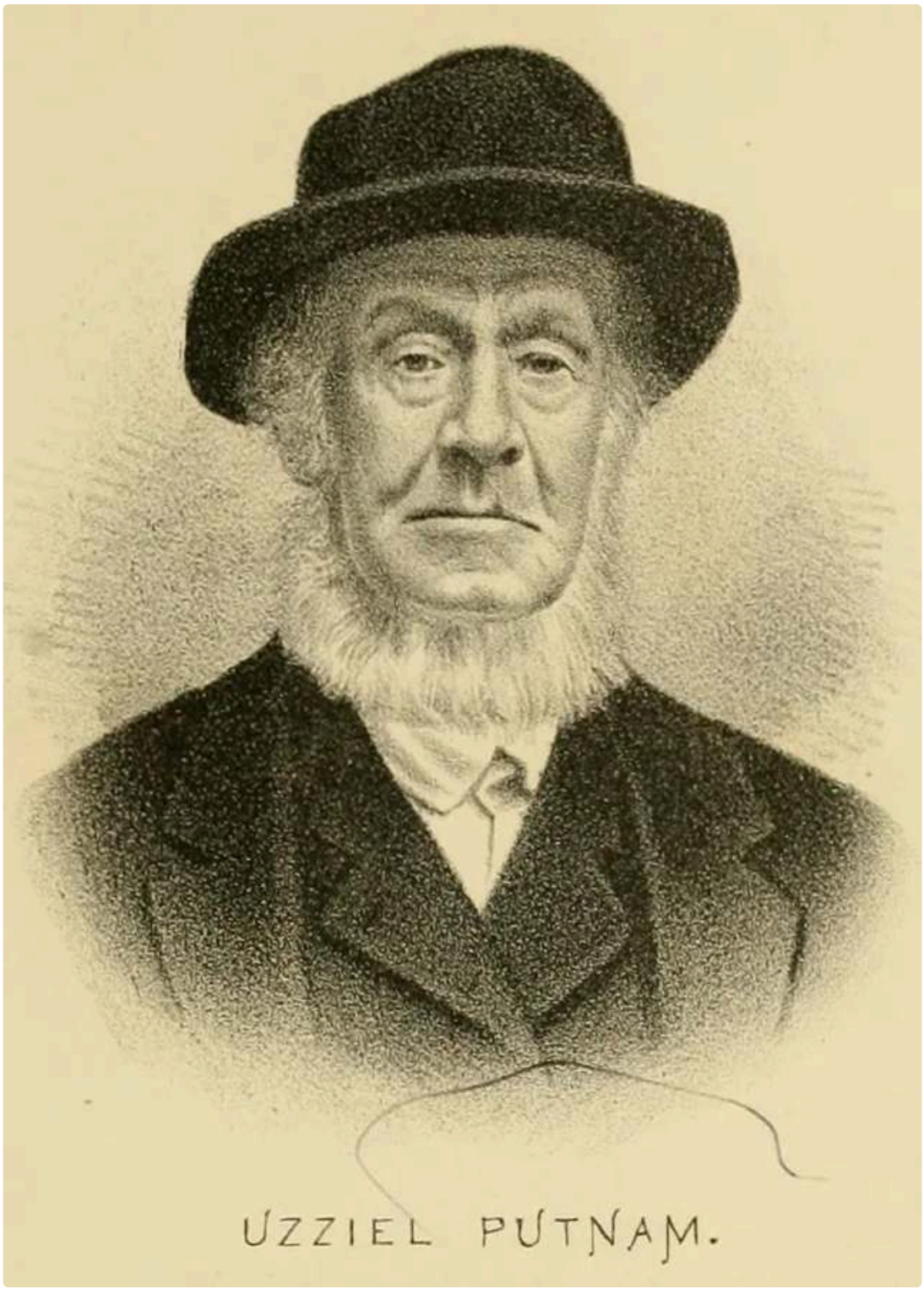
PART I

The call goes out, 1873



The public square, Cassopolis, in 1866, seven years before the pioneers met at the Court House. Photograph in Glover, *A Twentieth Century History of Cass County* (1906). Internet Archive. Public domain.

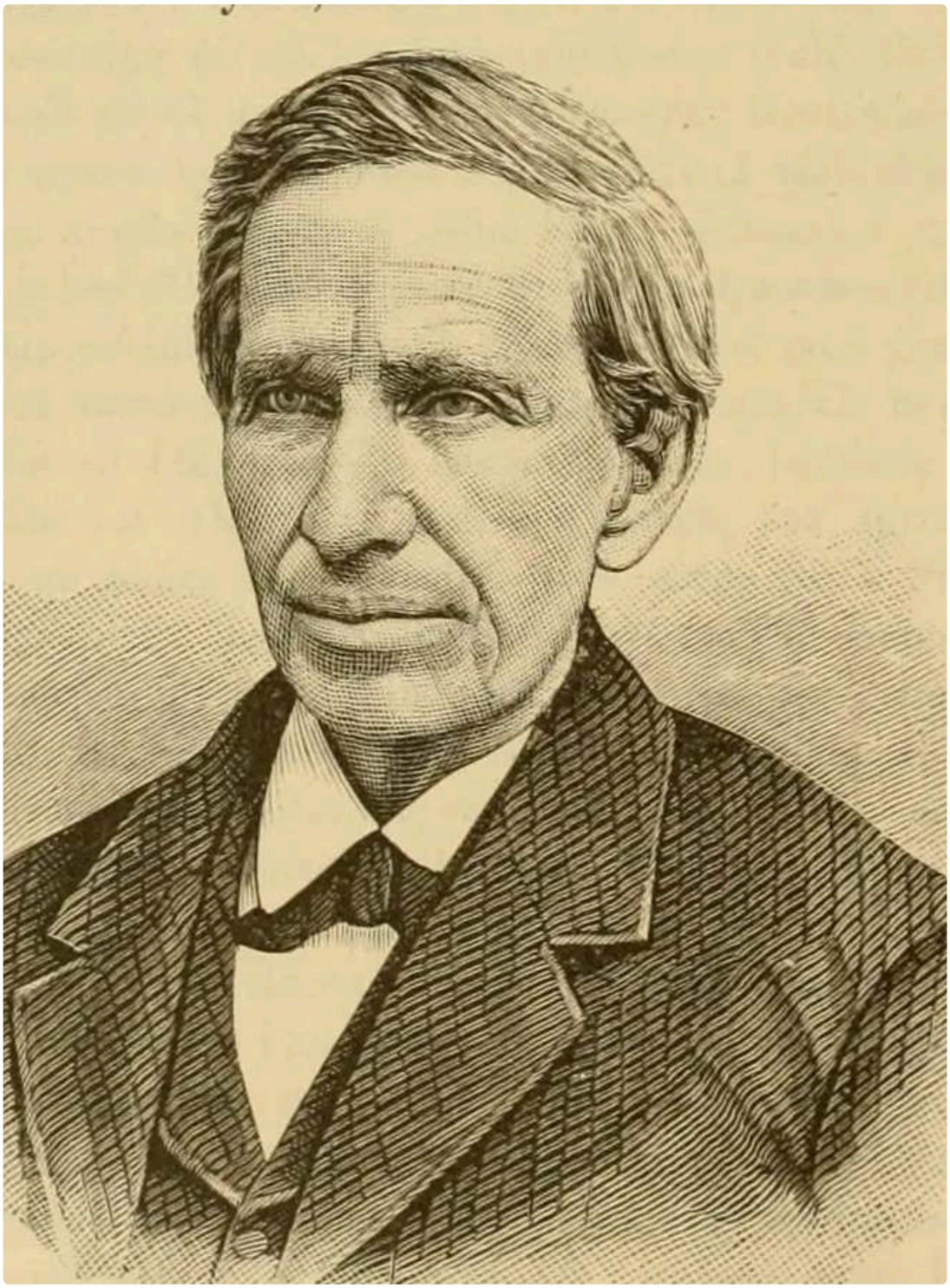
DOCUMENTED The call went out in the autumn of 1873, and about two hundred of the county's early settlers answered it. They met at the Court House in Cassopolis on 9 October. George Newton was temporary chairman for the morning, and Uzziel Putnam Sr. was chosen permanent chairman. Glover's county history says every township was represented except Howard; Mathews's says Marcellus, Milton and Howard were missing from the morning session. DOCUMENTED In a biography elsewhere in the same book, Mathews calls John Nixon of Penn Township the man who "may appropriately be called the father of the Cass County Pioneer Society, having made the initial movement for its establishment, and of which he has been President." OPEN Nixon is not on Glover's list of presidents, so either he presided in a year the list does not record or the biography stretched his title. What his "initial movement" was is not described. ✦ NEW FINDING His family stayed with the story: the last numbered log of the 1923 cabin was given "for Nixon Estate" by Arthur Nixon, his grandson (Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)).



Uzziel Putnam, engraved portrait, in Mathews, *History of Cass County* (1882). The plate does not say which Uzziel; the book's index lists it apart from his son's, so it is probably the first president. Internet Archive. Public domain.

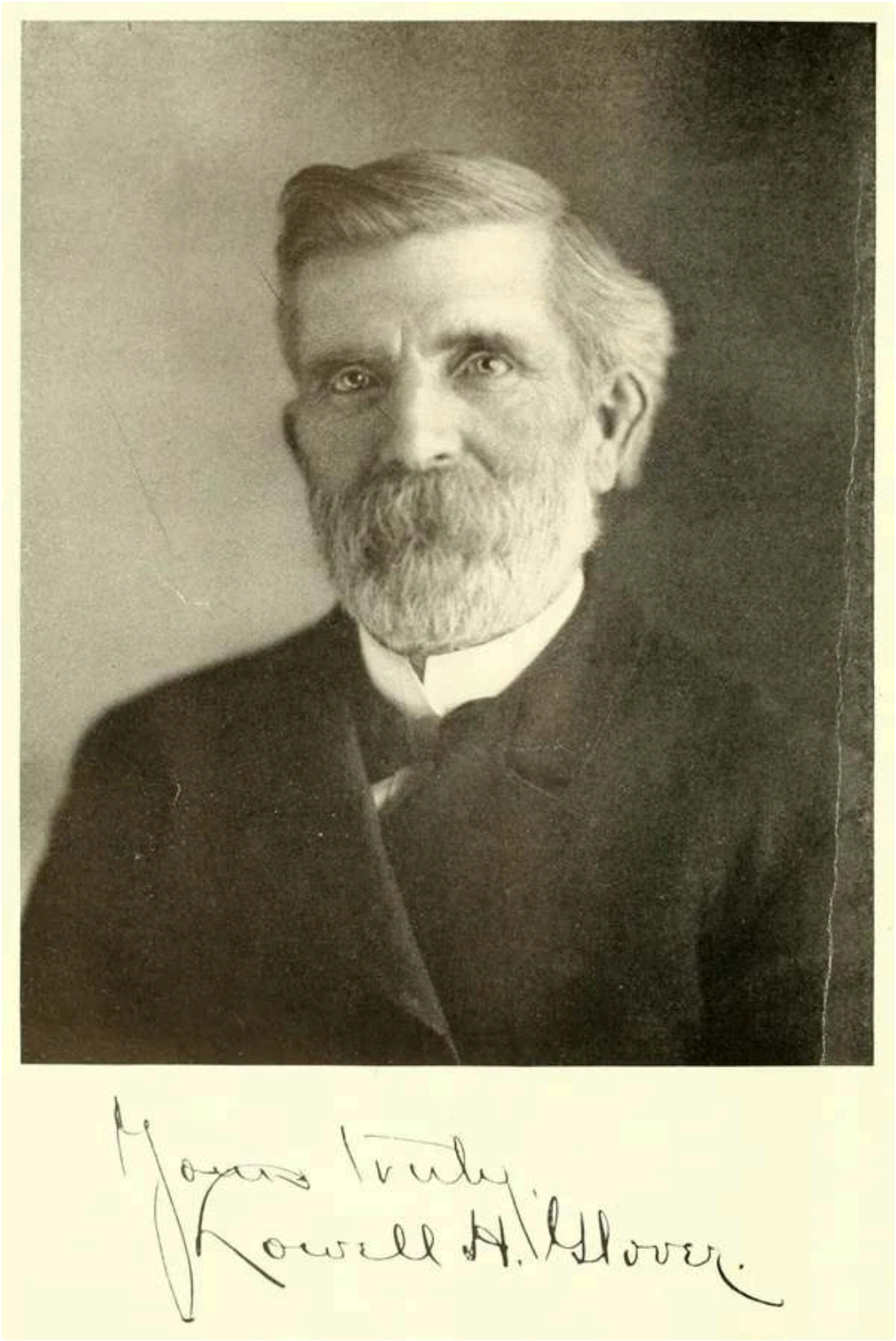
DOCUMENTED At an adjourned meeting on 6 November, Mathews says, they adopted a constitution for "The Society of the Pioneers" and elected their first officers: Putnam as president, George Meacham as vice-president, A. B. Copley as secretary with John Tietsort as his assistant, and Joseph Smith as treasurer. Glover puts the constitution, the officers and the first forty-one signatures at the first meeting, on 9 October. Membership was open to anyone who had lived in the county before 1850, for twenty-five cents.

DOCUMENTED Three of the men named that autumn reach forward into this story. George Newton of Volinia, the morning's chairman, lived in the farmhouse near Decatur that the Cass County Historical Society keeps today (Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)). ✦ NEW FINDING The treasurer, Joseph Smith, was almost certainly the county's Major Joseph Smith (1809–1880): the founders' list gives him as a Cassopolis-area man, where the Major had lived since 1855, and "Maj. Joseph Smith" spoke at the Society's reunion of 1878. And fifty years later the cabin's first log was cut "from the Major Smith Homestead" and given by his granddaughter (Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)). The assistant secretary, John Tietsort, was the eldest son of Abram Tietsort Jr., who in 1830 had built a log cabin on the east bank of Stone Lake, and John's widow, Addie, was in the crowd when the new cabin's first wall log was laid beside the same lake in May 1923.



A. B. Copley, the Society's first secretary. Engraving in Mathews, *History of Cass County* (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED Lowell H. Glover, who signed the constitution seventy-second and was the Society's secretary in most years from 1877 to 1906, wrote in 1906 that it was "older by one year than the State society." By 1880 the constitution carried 517 signatures, and by 1882, 590.



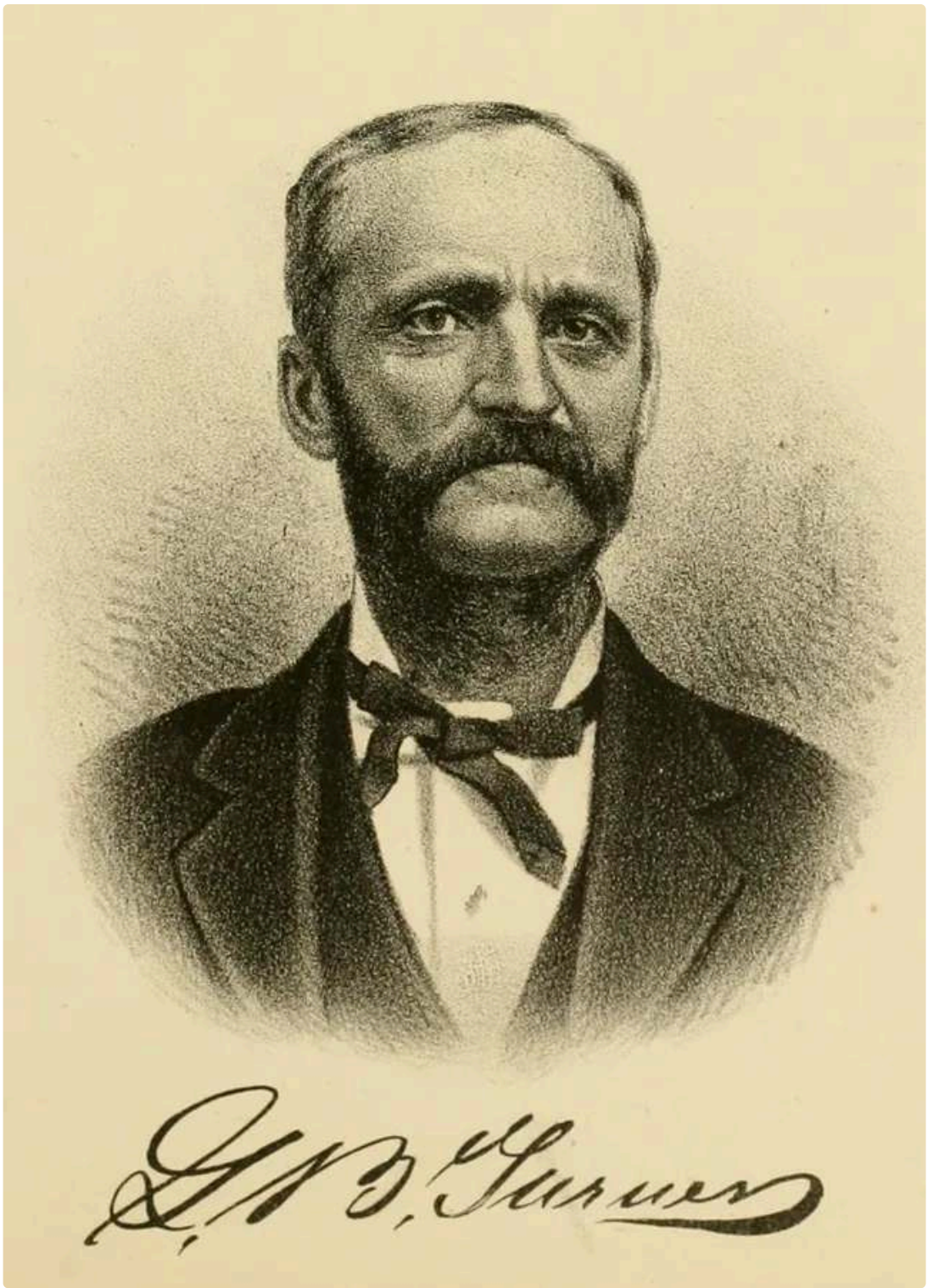
Lowell H. Glover, the Society's secretary in most years from 1877 to 1906, in his own *Twentieth Century History of Cass County* (1906). Internet Archive. Public domain.

PART II

A museum from the start, 1874–1882

DOCUMENTED The by-laws, adopted on 21 January 1874, made collecting part of the Society's purpose. A committee was to gather "books, maps, pictures, relics." The secretary was to receipt "books, documents, relics, or other articles contributed or deposited in the museum of the society," acknowledge each gift in the county-seat newspapers, and "make out semi-annually, a catalogue of the same for publication."

DOCUMENTED The museum was more than a plan. Howard S. Rogers wrote his 1875 *History of Cass County* at the request of old settlers "and those who were interested in establishing the Cass County Pioneer Association and Museum." At the picnic of 21 June 1876 the Society appointed John Haines, Eli Green, William Baldwin and John Struble to raise money "and take proper care of the specimens in the museum."

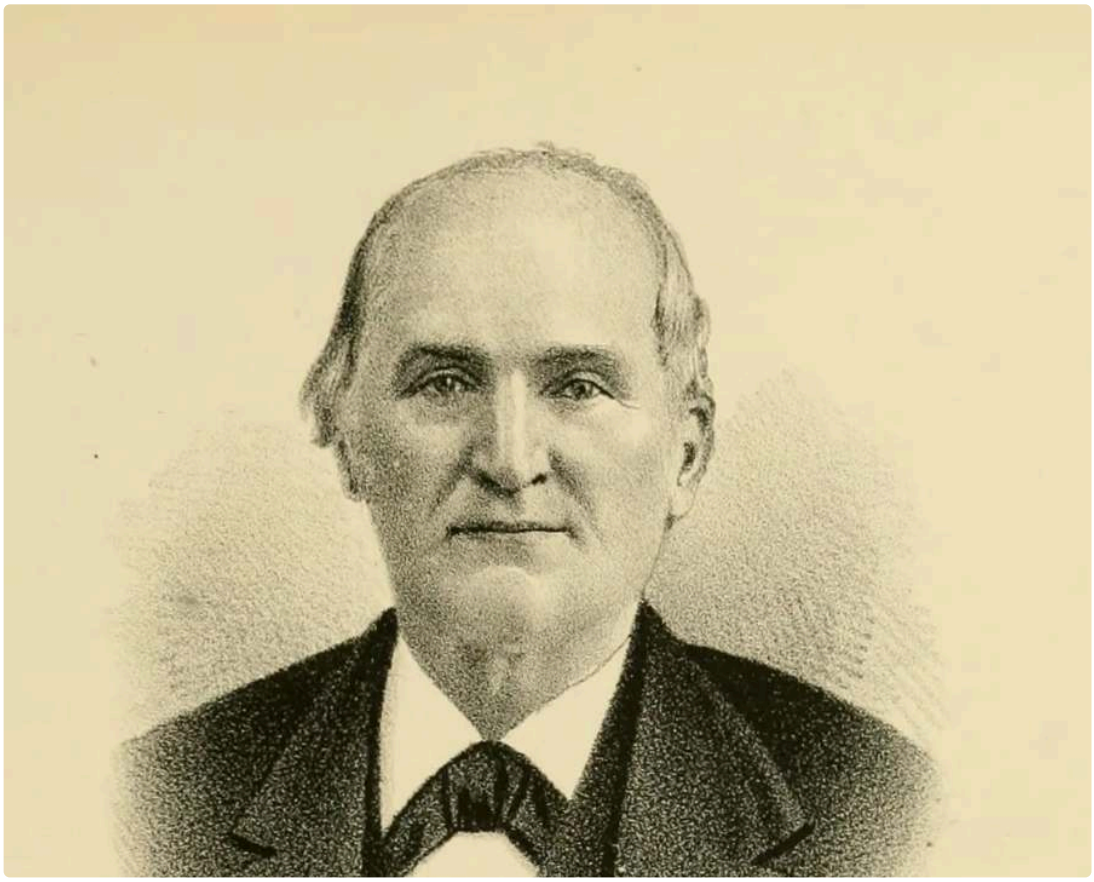


George B. Turner, the Society's president in 1879–80, the years the museum was kept at I. V. Sherman's store. Engraving in Mathews, *History of Cass County* (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED By 1880 the collection was living in a shop. That year the Society reported that "the museum has been continued under charge of Mr. I. V. Sherman, at his store," where Sherman, the assistant secretary, had "carefully cared for" it. Then the county gave it a proper home. The board of supervisors had set apart a room in the Court House for the Society. When C. W. Clisbee's rental of that room ran out, the Society took possession on 17 May 1882 "and removed the relics to that place," promising show cases and labels as soon as they could be had.



The old Court House, Cassopolis, where the Pioneer Society was founded in 1873 and kept its museum room from 1882; photograph in Glover, *A Twentieth Century History of Cass County* (1906). It later became the Colonial Opera House. Internet Archive. Public domain.



Jesse G. Beeson, elected the Society's president in June 1882, a month after the relics moved into a room in the Court House. Engraving in Mathews (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.

✦ NEW FINDING No modern account of the cabin we have found brings these records together: they show the county's pioneer museum at work from 1874, about fifty years before the cabin. READING A society with a by-law requiring a published catalogue, a collections committee, a curator and a room in the county's chief public building was running a museum by any fair definition. It was doing so decades before the log cabin was built. The building that held that room is the white courthouse that later became the Colonial Opera House; its story is told in The courthouse that became the Colonial (projectscroll.com/news/the-courthouse-that-became-the-colonial/).

PART III

Ten thousand at the picnic

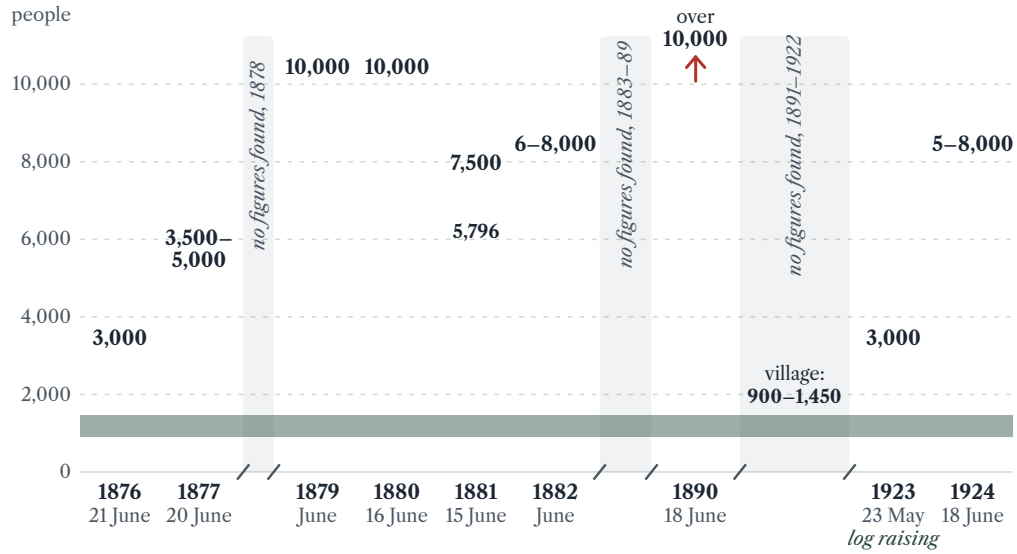
DOCUMENTED The Society's first reunion and picnic was held at the fair grounds on 17 June 1874. At the second, on 16 June 1875, "many interesting relics were exhibited." After that, Glover says, the reunion was held on the third Wednesday of June "with a single exception of one year." The reunions were numbered, and the numbers run without a break: the 24th in 1897, the 26th in 1899, the 27th in 1900, the 31st in 1904 and the 33rd in 1906.

DOCUMENTED They drew enormous crowds for a rural county. At the picnic of 21 June 1876, some three thousand people heard Governor John J. Bagley give an address later printed as *Old Times*. The next year the attendance was "variously estimated at from 3,500 to 5,000." Of the picnic of 19 June 1878 a Dowagiac paper wrote, "to say that it was a grand success is mild language," and forty-one names were added to the roll. ✦ NEW FINDING Henry Michael "presented to the society a miniature log cabin all complete, which attracted much attention" (*Cass County Republican*, 26 June 1878). DOCUMENTED Ten thousand came in 1879, a paper reported; in 1880 "ten thousand being the average guess," with bands from Volinia, Calvin and Mechanicsburg. In 1881, 5,796 people were counted and about 7,500 estimated, and Governor David H. Jerome spoke. In 1882 the crowd was put at six to eight thousand.



The race track at Cassopolis, real-photo postcard, about 1905–1918. READING The card names Cassopolis but not the fair grounds; the picnics were held "in the grove on the fair grounds," so this is very likely the fair grounds' track. David V. Tinder Collection of Michigan Photography, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

✦ NEW FINDING On 18 June 1890, at the seventeenth reunion, the crowd was "estimated over 10,000," and there were "two successful balloon ascensions and parachute leaps." DOCUMENTED The prize clock for the most descendants went to Mrs. Anna East of Vandalia, with 61 (*Detroit Plaindealer*, 27 June 1890). The prize ten years earlier had been a copy of Levi Bishop's poems, won by Mrs. Lovina Reames (printed "Reams" in the *Cass County Republican*), aged 83, with 116 descendants.

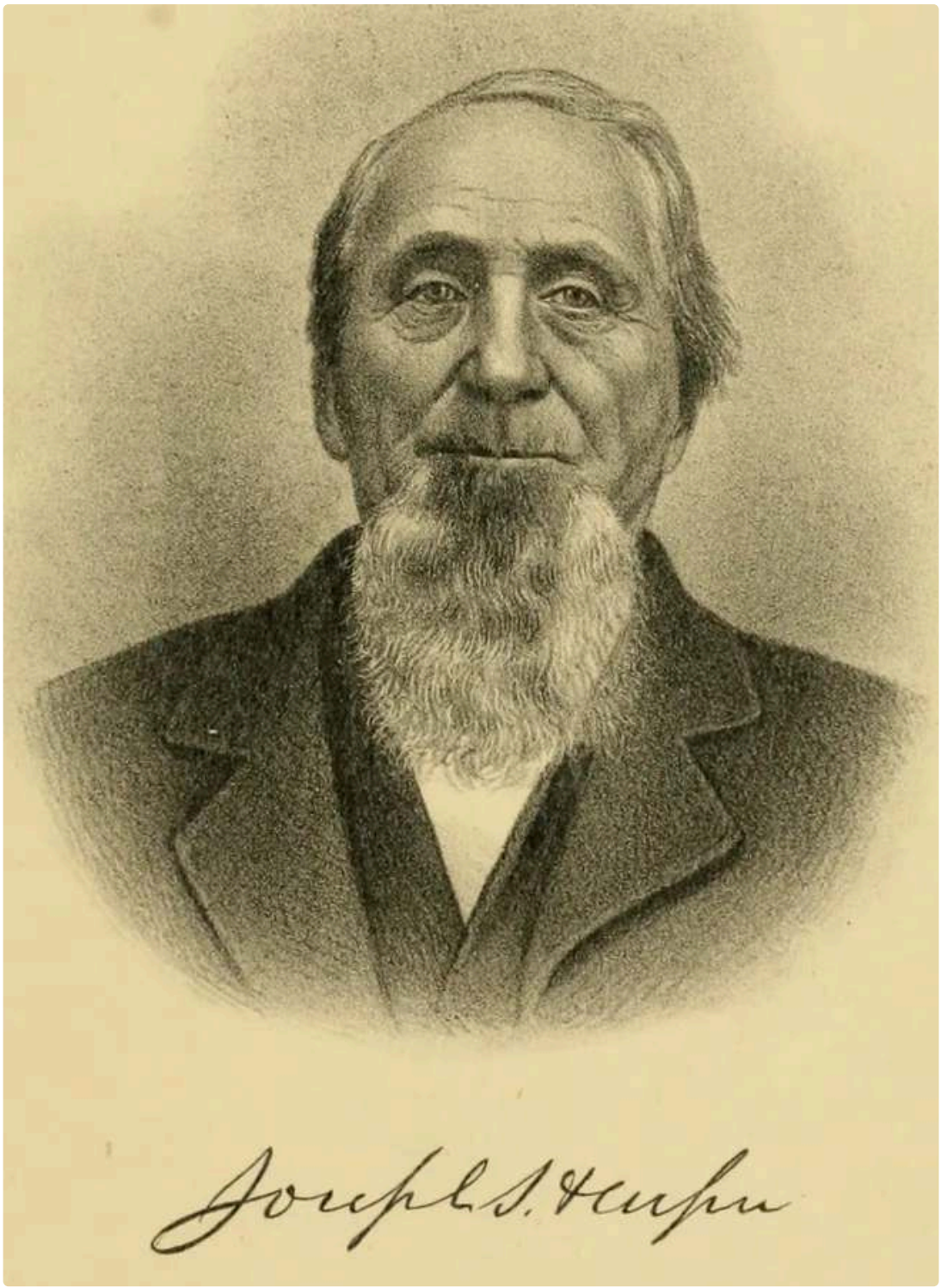


Tap or click any bar to see who reported that crowd, and where.

Counted (1881 only) · Estimate · Upper end of a range · 1923: the first log, not a picnic · The whole village of Cassopolis

How many came to the picnic? The crowds reported at the Pioneer Society's June meetings in Cassopolis, a village of about 900 people in 1880 and fewer than 1,500 through 1930. Every figure is a newspaper or society estimate, or for 1923 a note on a postcard of the day, not a count, except in 1881, when 5,796 were counted. The shaded gaps are years for which no figure has been found; the axis breaks there, and the bars are not spaced to scale in time. Sources: *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, vols. 1, 4 and 29 (the reports for 1876, 1880 and 1882); Mathews, *History of Cass County* (1882) for 1877 and 1881; *Crawford Avalanche*, 25 June 1879; *Detroit Plaindealer*, 27 June 1890; *South Bend News-Times*, 19 and 20 June 1924; for 1923, a postcard of building day, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (bh012198); village populations, Mathews (1870 and 1880) and the U.S. census (1890–1930).

DOCUMENTED By 1906, Glover wrote, "no less than seven of Michigan's governors" had come to Cassopolis for the picnic, which was then held in the grove on the fair grounds. Besides Bagley in 1876 and Jerome in 1881, the papers announced Governor Josiah W. Begole for 1883, Governor John T. Rich for 1893 and Governor Fred M. Warner for 1905; Thomas W. Palmer of Detroit, soon to be a United States senator, was announced for 1882, and Judge O. W. Coolidge spoke at the 31st reunion in 1904. The 1904 picnic had a printed program from the *Cassopolis Vigilant*'s press. The Society paid its way with booth rents and entry fees; its treasurer reported balances of $73.17 in 1879, $114.34 in 1880 and $73.06 in 1882.



Joseph Harper, the Society's president in 1881, engraving in Mathews (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.

READING The presidents were farmers, merchants and lawyers from every corner of the county, and the office changed hands nearly every June. The full list is at the end of this page.

PART IV

A drum, a sickle and a beaver's tail

DOCUMENTED What did the museum hold? The Society's reports, the county histories and the newspapers name only a few pieces:

A piece of oak with clothes-line nails grown over inside it, given by L. B. Reames (1880).

About a dozen Oregon specimens from "Uncle Ben. Silver": petrified wood, lava, agates, cinnabar ore that had been shown at the Oregon State Fair of 1879, and a beaver's tail (1880).

The lock of the old log jail, made by George Fosdick of Barren Lake (Mathews, 1882). Seventeen years later a directory still called it "a relic in the pioneer museum."

A millstone from a township's "first and only grist-mill," in "the Pioneer Museum at Cassopolis" (Mathews, 1882).

A two-tined pitchfork presented by Jedediah Grennell, and **a hatchel and flax** from William Hass (1882).

A bass drum "captured on a southern battle field," the earliest dated gift. An 1887 paper says Sidney Russey gave it in 1874, but his own letter of 1 June 1875 shows it still in his hands. ✦ NEW FINDING Its giver told its history himself, in a letter from Vandalia dated 1 June 1875 and addressed to G. B. Turner, which the Cassopolis *National Democrat* printed on 3 June and Tennessee papers copied. Signing himself A. S. Russey, he wrote that a squad of the Eleventh Michigan had captured the drum while foraging on the Nashville pike, about seven miles from Nashville, in 1862; that he belonged to the regimental band and traded his own band drum for it when he was mustered out; that it had split, and about ten inches had been cut off; and that through an air-hole could be read the maker's name: "Richard Bicknell, Dundee, March 23, 1640." "I will send it to you the first chance I get," he told Turner; "you will please take care of it." The paper wondered whether it had seen Cromwell's wars in Scotland, and on 4 June its publisher, C. C. Allison, sent it to the *Nashville Union and American*, asking for anything more of its history (copied in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 12 June 1875). ✦ NEW FINDING In 1887 a newspaper said its inscriptions and dates showed it to be "more than two centuries" old, "with a record in Scotch regiments" that included the battle of Culloden, and that by then "all trace of it has been lost, and the society is anxiously looking for it" (*Ypsilantian*, 2 June 1887).

An old sickle, said to be the first used in the county, brought from Greene County, Ohio, by Baldwin Jenkins in 1834. In 1876 it was in what the Society's report calls "the Old Settler's Museum," "where it may now be found suitably inscribed."

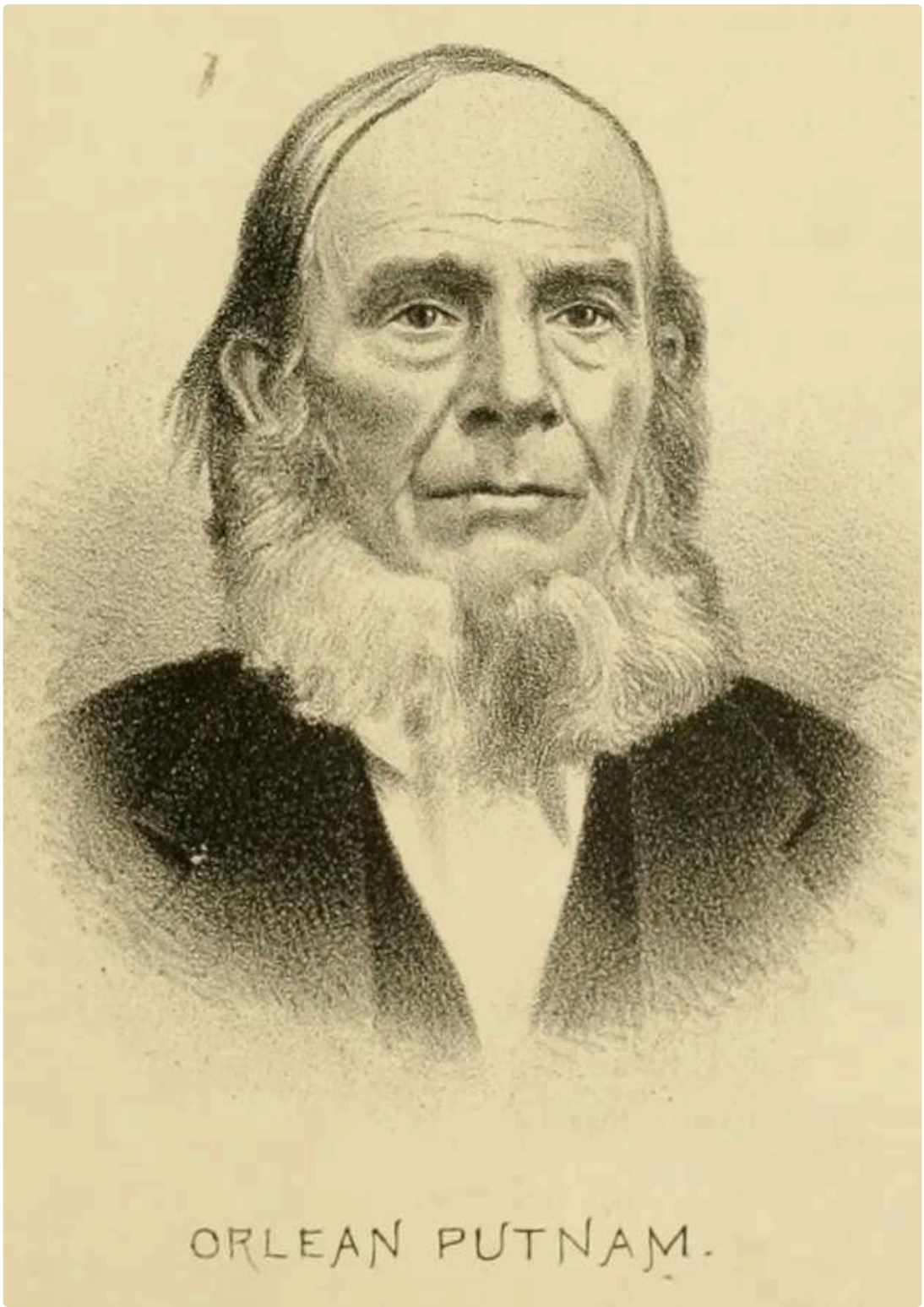


Dundee as John Slezer engraved it in 1693, for his *Theatrum Scotiae*: the town whose name the drum's giver read through its air-hole, "Richard Bicknell, Dundee, March 23, 1640." Whether a drum-maker of that name worked there is not yet known. National Library of Scotland, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

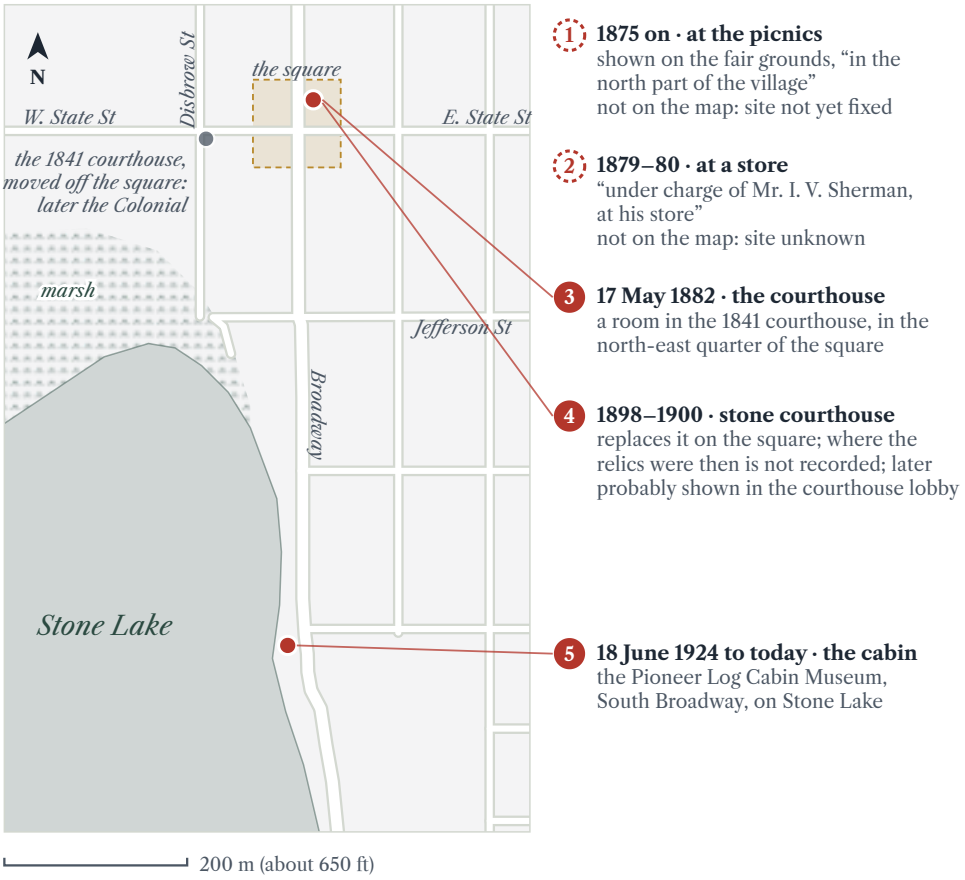


Culloden, 1746: *An Incident in the Rebellion of 1745*, attributed to David Morier, who died in 1770 (a drummer stands at the far right). In 1887 a Michigan paper said the Pioneer Society's lost drum had served there; nothing yet found confirms it. Royal Collection, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED At the 1882 picnic Orlean Putnam also showed Continental money and three old newspapers: the *New England Weekly Journal* of 1728, the *Boston Gazette* of March 1770 and the *New York Morning Post* of 7 November 1788.



Orlean Putnam, who showed Continental money and newspapers of 1728, 1770 and 1788 at the 1882 picnic. Engraving in Mathews (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.



Where the museum lived. The Pioneer Society's collection of relics moved from place to place for at least a quarter of a century; a collection that was probably the same one came to rest in the log cabin by Stone Lake by June 1924. Streets from OpenStreetMap and the shore of Stone Lake traced from the aerial photograph and 2015 USGS laser survey used in our Broadway in 3D (projectscroll.com/map/3d/cassopolis/) model; the public square is drawn approximately. Sources are given in the text of this series.

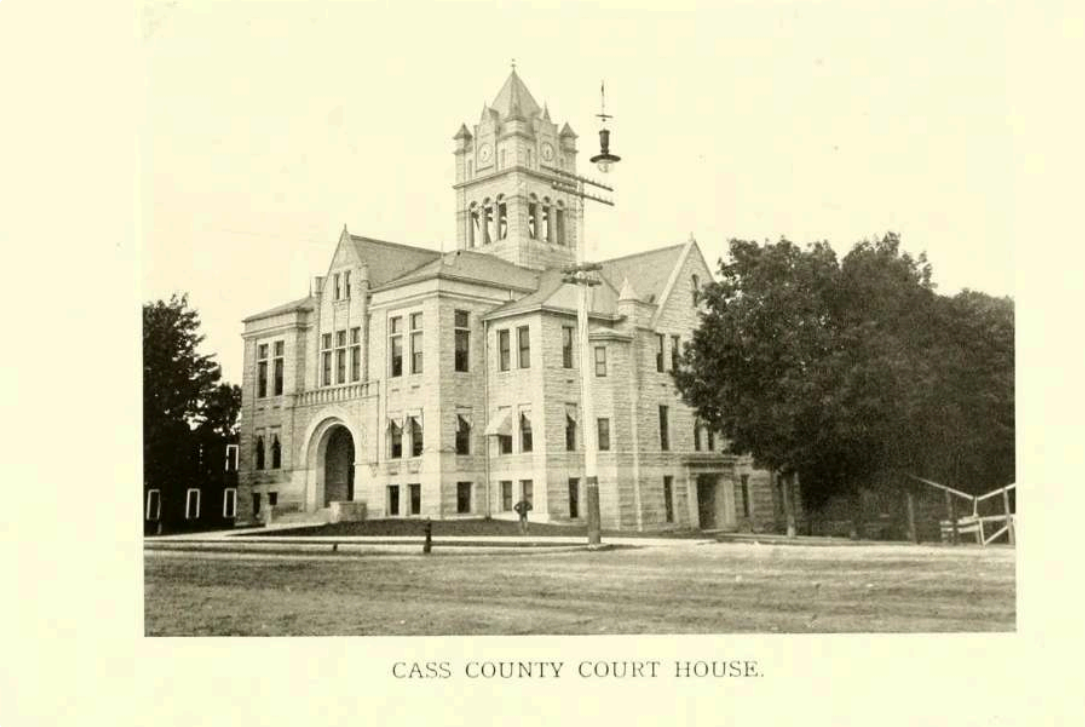
OPEN Where these objects are now is not known; the drum was already lost by 1887. Some may have gone into the cabin by June 1924 with the courthouse-lobby collection. Others may have gone home with their owners' families. The catalogues the by-laws demanded would answer the question, if any were printed and survive in the old newspapers.

PART V

The quiet years, about 1910–1922

DOCUMENTED The 33rd picnic, in June 1906, is the last one Glover's history records. The founders were dying: Glover counted that of the first seventy-two names on the constitution, only five were still living. In 1917 the Society still had officers: John A. Root of Dowagiac was president and J. Boyd Thomas of Cassopolis secretary, and James G. Hayden of Cassopolis was also named. But it reported that "few meetings have been held for the past three or four years" and that "it is now extremely difficult to arouse interest." Within a few years all three men were dead: Hayden in July 1917, Root in September 1921 and Thomas on 25 April 1924.

DOCUMENTED The collection still existed in 1906: a biography in Glover's county history of that year speaks of an object "now in the museum at Cassopolis." Glover also followed the 1899 directory's account of the lock of the county's first log jail, calling it "now a relic in the Pioneer Society's collection," and wrote that the village's ladies' library was "sheltered in the Pioneer Room of the Court House." READING By 1906 "the Court House" was the new stone building, so it seems the pioneers had a room of their own there; whether the relics were kept in it is not stated.



The new Cass County Court House, built in 1898–1900 on the square, as Glover published it in 1906, the year he wrote that the village's ladies' library was "sheltered in the Pioneer Room of the Court House." Internet Archive. Public domain.

✦ NEW FINDING The picnics had not stopped in 1906. The 34th annual reunion and picnic was announced for the fair grounds on Wednesday, 19 June 1907, with Lieutenant Governor Patrick H. Kelley to give the principal address (*True Northerner*, Paw Paw, 14 June 1907). Kelley, "a native of Cass county," was announced again for the 35th, on 17 June 1908 (*Detroit Times*, 9 June 1908). And on 15 June 1910 United States Senator Julius C. Burrows "was the central figure in the annual pioneer picnic celebration," "delivering an address to the Cass county pioneers" (*Detroit Times*, 17 June 1910). DOCUMENTED In July 1916 a paper far to the north reported: "Because there are so few old pioneers left and no one anxious to take up the work, the annual picnic ... will probably not take place this year" (*L'Anse Sentinel*, 1 July 1916). READING If the numbering ran unbroken, the 1910 picnic was the 37th. With the 1917 report of "few meetings" in "the past three or four years," the last regular picnics were probably held about 1911 or 1912, and the 1916 notice marks the end. OPEN No notice has yet been found for 1909, or for any year from 1911 to 1922. DOCUMENTED The *South Bend News-Times*, which carried a Cassopolis column, reported no pioneer picnic in the week of the third Wednesday of June in any year from 1913 to 1922 that survives online, and in 1928 it wrote that the reunions had been "resumed in 1924 following a lapse of many years" (15 June 1928; the paper counted from 1924, the year the museum opened, not from the 1923 dedication, as Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) explains). READING So the picnics had very probably stopped by 1913.

READING The museum seems to have outlived the picnics: by the 1920s a museum collection, probably the Society's, was on display in the lobby of the Court House. When it got there, and who looked after it in the years between, is not recorded.

PART VI

The man with the postcards, 1922–1924

DOCUMENTED The man who woke the Society up was Charles Owen Harmon. He was born in Porter Township on 6 March 1866, the son of a county clerk. He taught school from the age of sixteen, was register of deeds from 1889 to 1893 and worked in the Department of State at Lansing until July 1896, studying law in his spare hours; he was admitted to the bar there. He practiced at Dowagiac and then Marcellus, and in November 1898 came to Cassopolis, where he practiced law and ran the county abstract business. He married Catherine Greenawalt on 6 March 1889, his twenty-third birthday. He was county clerk himself, and by 1925 a circuit court commissioner and secretary of the Cassopolis Community Club. He was a Mason, a Knight of Pythias and a trustee of the Baptist church, and he wrote songs. ✦ NEW FINDING He registered copyrights in 1921 and 1923, one of them for "On the Winding Christianna."

DOCUMENTED In the summer of 1922 Harmon was corresponding secretary of a reunion of the old pupils of a one-room school where the poet Will Carleton had taught. He printed a list of more than four hundred living former pupils, and 126 automobiles came. READING The next year he seems to have brought the same method to the whole county: a printed appeal, a list and a big day.

DOCUMENTED The revival began that winter. "Reorganization of the Cass County Pioneer and Historical society has been started by Attorney Charles O. Harmon," the *South Bend News-Times* reported on 18 January 1923, and Harmon asked all persons born in Cass County who had lived in it sixty years or more to send him their names. By February more than 600 had enrolled, "Uncle Joe" Cannon was announced as a speaker (no report that he came has been found), "more than 20,000" were expected at the picnic, and "every community in the county will be asked to contribute a log." In March a division of "Junior pioneers" was formed for members under fifty (*News-Times*, 2 February and 9 March 1923).

DOCUMENTED As secretary, Harmon sent postcards and letters to the surviving pioneers asking each to give a log from their own woodlot. By March 1923 the cabin was already meant to house the county's relics: the *News-Times* wrote that it "is to shelter the historical curios of the county" (23 March 1923). Log Hauling Day was set for 4 April 1923. Volunteers began raising the cabin on 23 May on the shore of Stone Lake, before about three thousand people, and it was dedicated on Pioneer Day, 20 June 1923, at what the papers called "the revival of the Cass County Pioneer picnic," with former U.S. Senator William Alden Smith as principal speaker. Building day, 23 May, has its own story: The day 3,000 people came to watch one log (projectscroll.com/news/the-day-3000-came-to-watch-one-log/).

> *"Any kind of timber; a foot through at the top end and as near the same at the butt as is usual."*

DOCUMENTED The Society, now the Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society, had by 1924 Benjamin Franklin Thompson, a Cassopolis merchant, as president, Charles A. Ritter as treasurer and Harmon as secretary. The collection from the Court House lobby was moved into the cabin, people gave more relics to furnish it, and the museum opened there on Pioneer Day, 18 June 1924, before a crowd the *News-Times* put at "more than 5,000." To clear the debt, Harmon platted the cabin grounds into 1,212 souvenir "lots," each one foot by three, and offered them at a dollar apiece; that August he had 728 subscribers. The buyers gave their lots straight back to the Society.



The museum in its new home: "Cass County Pioneer Cabin and Relic Museum, Cassopolis, Mich.," postcard by the Auburn Post Card Mfg. Co., undated; the name places it after the museum opened in June 1924. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (bh012197).

DOCUMENTED Harmon did not live long to enjoy it. He died on 26 March 1928, aged sixty-two, and is buried at Prospect Hill Cemetery in Cassopolis. His obituary said that in 1924 he had "reorganized the Cass County Historical Society, and was secretary of that organization" (*South Bend News-Times*, 29 March 1928).

READING The cabin is usually remembered as the beginning of something. In the Society's own story it was a homecoming: a museum probably close to fifty years old finally given a building of its own, by a fifty-year-old society that had nearly died.

PART VII

One society becomes two

DOCUMENTED The old society was still alive in its new home. On Wednesday, 29 April 1925, the centennial of the arrival in 1825 of Uzziel Putnam Sr., its first president, was to be celebrated at the cabin "under the direction of the Pioneer society" (*South Bend News-Times*, 29 April 1925), and *Michigan History* that year called Harmon the "founder of the Pioneer Log Cabin and Museum." But the story does not end there; it divides. As early as April 1923 a newspaper called Harmon's society the "Cass County Historical society," by 1927 the papers were using that short name often, and by 1942 a society of that name had as its president George H. Tolbert, who was married to Charles Harmon's

sister Linda. Meanwhile a "Cass County Pioneer and Historical association" was still running the cabin as late as 1972. Today there are two incorporated bodies: the Cass County Historical Society (1977), and the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum (2012), which looks after the cabin. Since September 2026 the same man has been listed as president of both.

READING Both can claim descent from the 1873 society. One kept its purpose and the other kept its building, and we have not yet found a record that documents an unbroken organizational link between either of them and the 1873 society. The cabin's line is told in Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/), and the Historical Society's in Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/).

PART VIII

Why it matters

READING The pioneers of 1873 were doing something every family does sooner or later. The people who had cleared the county were dying, and their stories would die with them unless somebody wrote them down. So the Society signed its members on a roll, had its speeches printed, and kept a sickle, a lock and a pitchfork where the next generation could see them. At the picnic of 1878 its historian, C. W. Clisbee, read out the names of about seventy pioneers who had died that year.

READING Most of what they kept is now lost, and that is the lesson. A collection is only as safe as the people who look after it, and a record lasts only as long as somebody keeps it. What survives best is the log cabin on Stone Lake, which their successors built in 1923 to house what was left. Part 2 tells how, and why it deserves to stand another hundred years.

PART IX

How you can help

WANTED

THE SOCIETY'S LOST PAPERS

The missing pieces are probably not lost so much as scattered. Look in family papers, attics and scrapbooks for:

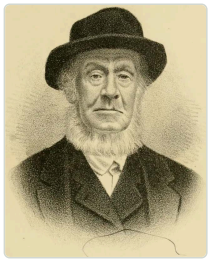
1. souvenir lot certificates from 1924, and the postcards, badges and programs of the 1923 dedication;
2. programs and ribbons from the annual pioneer picnics, especially before 1906;
3. letters or postcards signed "C.O.H.";
4. anything that came down in the families of the Society's officers named on this page, above all the secretaries A. B. Copley, L. H. Glover, C. W. Clisbee and J. Boyd Thomas.

If you have something, the Local History Branch of the Cass District Library in Cassopolis, the Pioneer Log Cabin Museum and the Cass County Historical Society are the places to share it. Please tell us too, at research@projectscroll.com: a photograph of the front and back is enough to start with.

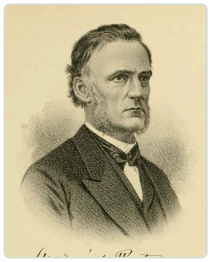
PART X

The presidents, 1873–1924

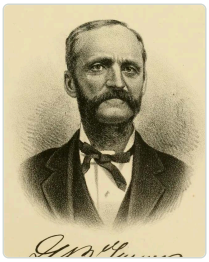
DOCUMENTED From Glover's 1906 list, the Society's reports in the *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, and later notices. Years are as Glover lists them; a president elected at one June picnic presided at the next. The portraits are engravings from Mathews's county history of 1882, which pictures some of the Society's men but not most; a blank frame is a president whose likeness we have not found. If your family has one, please write to us.



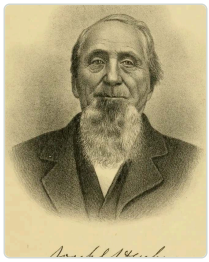
1873–74
Uzziel Putnam Sr.
(portrait probably his)



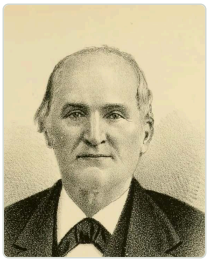
1875–78
Uzziel Putnam Jr.
Mathews has his father elected in 1875 and 1876



1879–80
George B. Turner



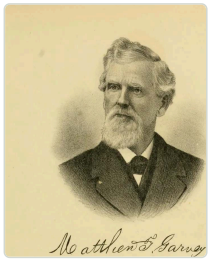
1881
Joseph Harper



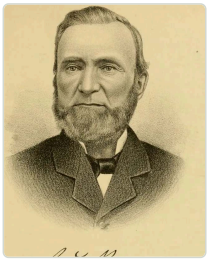
1882
Jesse G. Beeson

?

1883–84
Gillman C. Jones



1885
M. T. Garvey



1886
S. T. Read

?

1887
Joseph N. Marshall

?

1888
Henry Kimmerle

?

1889
Ezekiel Smith

?

1890
George T. Shaffer

?

1891
Chester Morton

?

1892
Abijah Huyck

?

1893
George Longsduff

?

1894
M. J. Gard

?

1895
David R. Stevens

?

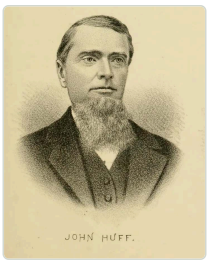
1896
Henry Michael

?

1897
Elias Morris

?

1898
James M. Truitt

?	?	?	?	
1899 Levi J. Reynolds	**1900** J. Boyd Thomas	**1901** Isaac Wells	**1902** Jonathan C. Olmsted	**1903** John Huff *(portrait probably his)*
?	?	?	?	?
1904 George J. Townsend	**1905** Henry A. Crego	**1906** S. M. Rinehart	**c. 1916–17** John A. Root	**1924–28** Benjamin Franklin Thompson

DOCUMENTED The secretaries kept the Society going. A. B. Copley was the first. John T. Enos served in 1875–76. Lowell H. Glover was secretary "yearly since, with but few exceptions" from about 1877 to 1906, and Charles W. Clisbee, whom a Society report calls "the historian of the society," served in the 1880s. J. Boyd Thomas, a former sheriff and state representative who was still marrying couples as a justice of the peace "in the court house" in 1916, was secretary in 1917, and Charles O. Harmon from 1923 until his death in 1928.

PART XI

Who's who across the series

The same names turn up across fifty years and three parts: founders of 1873, their children and grandchildren in 1923, and the keepers who followed. Follow a family from one part to the next.

George Newton	Chaired the first morning of the pioneers' founding meeting, 1873; the Newton House was his home	Part 1 · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) · *The Newton House* (projectscroll.com/news/the-newton-house/)
Major Joseph Smith	Almost certainly the Society's	Part 1 · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

	first treasurer, 1873; the cabin's first log came from his homestead	
John and Addie Tietsort	He was the first assistant secretary, 1873; his widow stood at Building Day, 1923	Part 1 · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)
John and Arthur Nixon	"The father of the Cass County Pioneer Society"; the cabin's last numbered log, from his grandson	Part 1 · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)
Henry Michael	Gave the miniature log cabin, 1878; president, 1896	Part 1 · *The miniature cabin (projectscroll.com/news/the-miniature-log-cabin-of-1878/)*
James G. and Asa K. Hayden	An officer of the Society, 1917; his son, the village president, spoke at Building Day	Part 1 · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)
Henry and Charles H. Kimmerle	Charles spoke at Building Day; his father	Part 1 · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

	Henry was almost certainly the Society's president of 1888	
Charles O. Harmon	Revived the Society and led the building of the cabin, 1923–28	Part 1 · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)
Peter Eby	Almost certainly Harmon's uncle; the cabin's caretaker	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) · *The caretaker (projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/)*
Charles A. and Joseph K. Ritter	Treasurer of the revived Society, 1924; his son helped reopen the cabin	Part 1 · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)
Jay C. Northrop	Gave log No. 6 and wrote the cabin's song; named as the Historical Society's secretary in a 1944 directory	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) · *The song (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/)*
George R. Fox	Helped reopen the cabin; president	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)

	of the Historical Society until 1963	
Lee Dodd	President, later chairman, of the Historical Society from 1970 or earlier to about 1990, and head of the county Historical Commission in 1974; the cabin's contact, 1973	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)

PART XII

Timeline

9 Oct 1873	About 200 settlers meet at the Court House, Cassopolis
6 Nov 1873	Constitution of "The Society of the Pioneers"; Uzziel Putnam Sr. president (Mathews; Glover dates both to 9 October)
21 Jan 1874	By-laws: a collections committee, published acknowledgments, a museum catalogue twice a year
17 Jun 1874	First reunion and picnic, at the fair grounds
1875	Rogers's *History of Cass County*, written for those establishing "the Cass County Pioneer Association and Museum"
21 Jun 1876	About 3,000 at the picnic; Governor Bagley speaks; a committee to care for "the specimens in the museum"
19 Jun 1878	Henry Michael presents a miniature log cabin
18 Jun 1879	"Ten thousand people" at the picnic; Levi Bishop of Detroit speaks
1879–80	The museum kept at I. V. Sherman's store
15 Jun 1881	5,796 counted; Governor Jerome speaks
17 May 1882	The relics move into a Court House room set apart by the county supervisors
18 Jun 1890	"Over 10,000"; two balloon ascensions and parachute leaps
1898–1900	The stone courthouse is built; the old one is moved off the square in 1898 or 1899

1906	33rd annual picnic; seven governors have attended over the years
1907–10	The picnics go on: the 34th (1907) and 35th (1908) announced with Lt. Gov. Patrick H. Kelley to speak; Senator Burrows speaks in 1910
1916	The picnic "will probably not take place this year"
1917	"Few meetings have been held for the past three or four years"
Jan 1923	Harmon begins the reorganization
4 Apr 1923	Log Hauling Day (the date set)
23 May 1923	Cabin building begins on Stone Lake; the first wall log laid before about 3,000 people
20 Jun 1923	Dedication on Pioneer Day; "the revival of the Cass County Pioneer picnic"
18 Jun 1924	The museum opens in the cabin; 1,212 souvenir lots offered to clear the debt
26 Mar 1928	Charles O. Harmon dies

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THE CASS COUNTY PIONEER SOCIETY · A SERIES IN THREE PARTS

Part 1: A museum before there was a museum

Part 2: The cabin a county built (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

Part 3: Keepers of the county (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)

Short stories from the same records: the miniature cabin of 1878 (projectscroll.com/news/the-miniature-log-cabin-of-1878/) · balloons over the 1890 picnic (projectscroll.com/news/balloons-over-the-pioneer-picnic/) · the day 3,000 came to watch one log (projectscroll.com/news/the-day-3000-came-to-watch-one-log/) · the cabin that opened twice (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-that-opened-twice/) · the caretaker (projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/) · the song "Old Log Cabin" (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/)
The whole series as one PDF › (projectscroll.com/data/pioneer-society-series.pdf) · A one-page handout for the cabin's visitors › (projectscroll.com/data/pioneer-log-cabin-handout.pdf)

✦ NEW FINDING **WHAT'S NEW HERE**

The Pioneer Society's old drum came from the Civil War: its giver, A. S. Russey of Vandalia, wrote on 1 June 1875 that a squad of the Eleventh Michigan captured it while foraging on the Nashville pike in 1862, that he traded his band drum for it, and that the maker's name inside read "Richard Bicknell, Dundee, March 23, 1640" (Cassopolis *National Democrat*, 3 June 1875, copied in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 12 June 1875).

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

Set out in Research Note 2026-07 (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-07/)

▸ What we searched

The Cass County Pioneer Society kept a museum long before the log cabin. Its by-laws of 21 January 1874 had the secretary receipt relics “deposited in the museum of the society” and publish a catalogue twice a year; in 1876 a committee was named to “take proper care of the specimens in the museum”; in 1879–80 it was kept at I. V. Sherman’s store; and on 17 May 1882 the relics moved into a Court House room set apart by the supervisors. The courthouse collection moved into the cabin in 1924 was probably the same museum.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

Set out in Research Note 2026-07 (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-07/)

▸ What we searched

The Cass County pioneer picnics went on after 1906: the 34th annual reunion and picnic was announced for 19 June 1907 and the 35th for 17 June 1908, both with Lieutenant Governor Patrick H. Kelley, a native of the county, to speak, and on 15 June 1910 United States Senator Julius C. Burrows was “the central figure” at the annual pioneer picnic.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The Pioneer Society’s first treasurer, Joseph Smith (elected in 1873), was almost certainly Major Joseph Smith (1809–1880), from whose homestead the Pioneer Log Cabin’s first log was cut in 1923 and given by his granddaughter, Mrs. A. N. Armstrong. Its first assistant secretary, John Tietsort, was the son of Abram Tietsort Jr., builder of the 1830 cabin on Stone Lake’s east bank, and his widow, Addie Tietsort, attended Cabin Building Day in May 1923.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The Society’s earliest dated gift, a bass drum given by Sidney Russey (in 1874, the paper said, though his own letter shows it still in his hands on 1 June 1875), was said to carry inscriptions showing it “more than two centuries” old, “with a record in Scotch regiments” back to Culloden; by 1887 “all trace of it has been lost, and the society is anxiously looking for it” (*Ypsilantian*, 2 June 1887).

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 25 October 2026.

Set out in Research Note 2026-07 (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-07/)

▸ What we searched

Charles O. Harmon, who built the Pioneer Log Cabin, also wrote songs: he registered copyrights in 1921 and 1923, one of them for “On the Winding Christianna” (Catalog of Copyright Entries, 1923).

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 25 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

At the Pioneer Society’s picnic of 19 June 1878, “Henry Michael presented to the society a miniature log cabin all complete, which attracted much attention” (*Cass County Republican*,

26 June 1878): a log cabin in the Society's collection forty-five years before the Pioneer Log Cabin was built.

Found by Michael Urbanski , *Project Scroll, 25 October 2026.*

▸ What we searched

The Pioneer Society's seventeenth picnic, on 18 June 1890, had "two successful balloon ascensions and parachute leaps," at ten in the morning and half past four, before a crowd "estimated over 10,000" (*Detroit Plaindealer*, 27 June 1890).

Found by Michael Urbanski , *Project Scroll, 25 October 2026.*

▸ What we searched

The last numbered log of the 1923 Pioneer Log Cabin, No. 144, given by "Art Nixon for Nixon Estate," came from Arthur K. Nixon, a grandson of John Nixon of Penn Township, whom the county history of 1882 called "the father of the Cass County Pioneer Society." Arthur's 1951 death index names his father Phineas, and Phineas's 1901 death certificate names his parents as John and Esther Nixon.

Found by Michael Urbanski , *Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.*

▸ What we searched

A **new finding** is a fact found in a primary source that we could not find in any published history, article or website we searched. Credit: Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will say so here. All our discoveries › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/)

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35. 1923 Pioneer Log Cabin Museum Searchable Donor List, compiled by Marcia Gaskin (2012), with the 1924 letterhead and the souvenir-lot papers. Internet Archive. (https://archive.org/details/pioneer_log_cabin_museum_text_searchable1a)
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Numbers in the text point to this list; entries without a number are further sources we consulted. How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/) · The libraries behind all our stories › (projectscroll.com/sources/libraries/)

VISIT AND SEE

Cass County Court House. The stone court house of 1898–1900, on the old square where the pioneers first met in 1873. A working court house: visit during business hours.
Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=120%20N%20Broadway%20St%2C%20Cassopolis%2C%20M

Pioneer Log Cabin Museum. The 1923 cabin on Stone Lake. Open on summer weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day and for special events; check the museum's Facebook page before you go. Admission is free; the museum is supported by donations and its gift shop.
Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=400%20S%20Broadway%20St%2C%20Cassopolis%2C%20M

Prospect Hill Cemetery. Charles O. Harmon, who led the building of the cabin, is buried here under a stone he shares with his wife, Catherine.
Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=Prospect%20Hill%20Cemetery%2C%20Cassopolis%2C%20M

Public places only. Please respect private land and posted hours.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Project Scroll is independent research and does not speak for the Cass County Historical Society or the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum. Their names are used here only to identify them, and the history on this page is drawn from the published record cited below.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Research and reporting

Michael Urbanski (projectscroll.com/about/michael-urbanski/) · Project Scroll

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THE PIONEER SOCIETY · PART 2

The cabin a county built

DISCOVERY · 12 NEW FINDINGS › | UPDATED | SERIES · 2 OF 3 › | GO SEE IT | 48 MIN READ

In 1923 the families of Cass County each cut a log from their own woods, and in four weeks a two-story cabin had risen on the shore of Stone Lake. Every log has a number and every number a name. Part 2: the Pioneer Log Cabin, its builders and its keepers.

LIVE RESEARCH DOCUMENT
This story is part of a series still being researched. New records are added as they are found.

By Michael Urbanski · Project Scroll · First published 25 October 2026 · Updated 26 October 2026 · 48 min read



Building the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin, Cassopolis, Michigan, 23 May 1923, postcard. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (bh012201). On the back, almost certainly in Harmon's hand: "The first forenoon's work, done by 52 volunteers. C.O.H." Public domain.

The short version

The Pioneer Log Cabin in Cassopolis was built by volunteers in the spring of 1923 from logs given by families all over Cass County, each numbered and listed with the donor's name and, for most, the town and tree. It was dedicated on 20 June 1923 and opened as a museum on 18 June 1924, with a collection moved in from the Court House lobby, probably the Pioneer Society's old museum.

It was meant to be temporary. A century later it is still open, kept by volunteers, but it is on neither the National nor the State Register, as far as we can find. You can search the 1923 donor list for your family's name.

Read the whole story ›

✦ NEW FINDING 12 new findings in this story. **See what's new ›**

On the morning of Wednesday, 23 May 1923, the schoolchildren of Cassopolis had a holiday, and a parade formed at the Court House behind the Cassopolis Military Band. It marched down to the east shore of Stone Lake, where the logs were waiting. "There are 146 logs on the grounds," the *South Bend News-Times* reported that morning, in an item dated the day before, "donated ... from every part of the county."

Each one had a number painted on its end. Somewhere a list matched every number to a name and, for most, a town and a kind of tree: a fifty-two-foot beech from Cassopolis, walnut from Vandalia, whitewood from Marcellus, elm from Dowagiac. That morning a black walnut log twenty-six feet long was carried to its place by twenty-four men while about three thousand people sang. Four weeks later the cabin was dedicated, and a county had signed its name in timber.

The cabin also keeps its secrets. Its donor list numbers 144 logs, the newspaper counted 146, and an old postcard says 170. Its first log came from a pioneer homestead that can be narrowed to one of two farms, but not yet to one. It had its own song, and its words have not been found. And the "Lease Deed" its builders spoke of in 1924 has not been found, if it was ever signed.

This is the story of that building, the Pioneer Log Cabin, and of the people who have kept it for more than a hundred years. It is the second of three parts. Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) tells the story of the Pioneer Society and the museum it kept long before the cabin was built; Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) follows the Cass County Historical Society.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE DOCUMENTED READING OPEN ✦ NEW FINDING

41 documented · 23 readings · 12 new

? What the marks mean

AT A GLANCE

What	A two-story log cabin built by volunteers in 1923, open as a museum since 1924
Where	400 S. Broadway, Cassopolis, Michigan, on the east side of Stone Lake
Built	Log Hauling Day, set for 4 April 1923; raised from 23 May 1923; dedicated on Pioneer Day, 20 June 1923; a "grand opening" announced for 17 October 1923 and a commemoration on Sunday, 28 October 1923
Opened as a museum	Pioneer Day, Wednesday 18 June 1924

Organizer	Charles Owen Harmon (1866–1928), Cassopolis lawyer and secretary of the revived Cass County Pioneer Society
Size	A two-story cabin 18 by 26 feet with a 1½-story wing of the same size; a front porch 18 by 22 feet with a floor above it; and a 20 by 40 foot rear room, added in 1972–73 in place of the first back porch, 8 by 42 feet, overlooking the lake
Logs	146 “banked on the ground”; 144 in the numbered donor list; 170 on an undated postcard, probably of the 1920s
On a historic register?	Not on the National Register or the Michigan State Register lists we checked
Visiting	Saturdays and Sundays, Memorial Day to Labor Day, and for special events. Check the cabin’s community page (https://pioneerlogcabinmuseum.com) before you go

On this page

1. A log from every woodlot
2. Twenty-four men and a black walnut log
3. Did your family give a log?
4. Ten things you probably didn’t know about the cabin
5. Who has looked after the cabin
6. What’s inside
7. Which Major Smith?
8. Why it should be kept
9. The case for the registers
10. How you can help
11. Who’s who across the series
12. Timeline
13. Sources

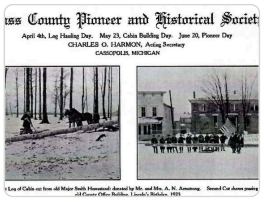
Find in this story: a name, a place, a word

Next ›

PART I

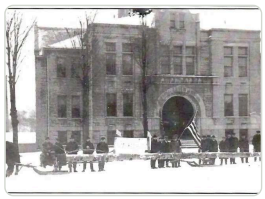
A log from every woodlot

THE MAKING OF THE CABIN, STEP BY STEP



12 Feb 1923

Lincoln's Birthday: the first log, a beech, is hauled past the old county office building



Probably 12 Feb 1923

The first log cut reaches the Court House



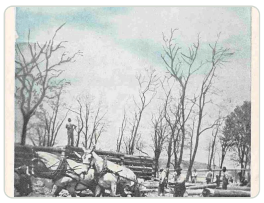
14 May 1923

Ground is broken on the shore of Stone Lake



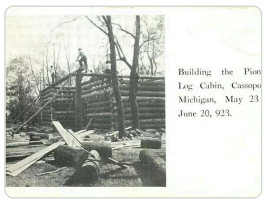
23 May 1923

The first wall log, a black walnut, is laid before about 3,000 people



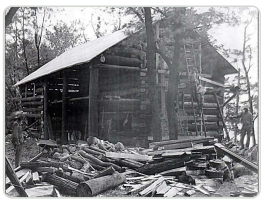
May 1923

Teams bring in the logs as the walls rise



1 Jun 1923

The walls are up to the second story



20 Jun 1923

Pioneer Day: the cabin is dedicated



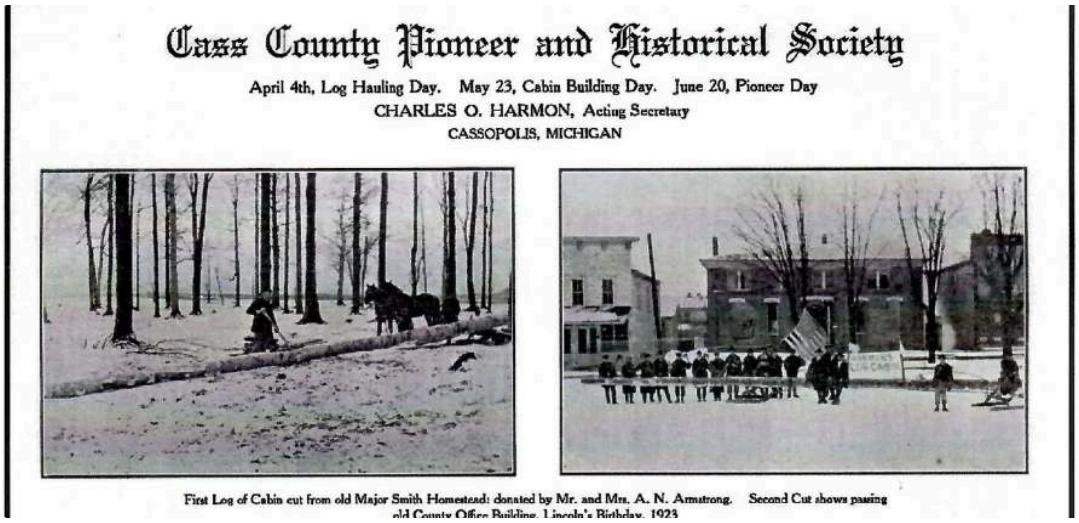
18 Jun 1924

The museum opens in the cabin

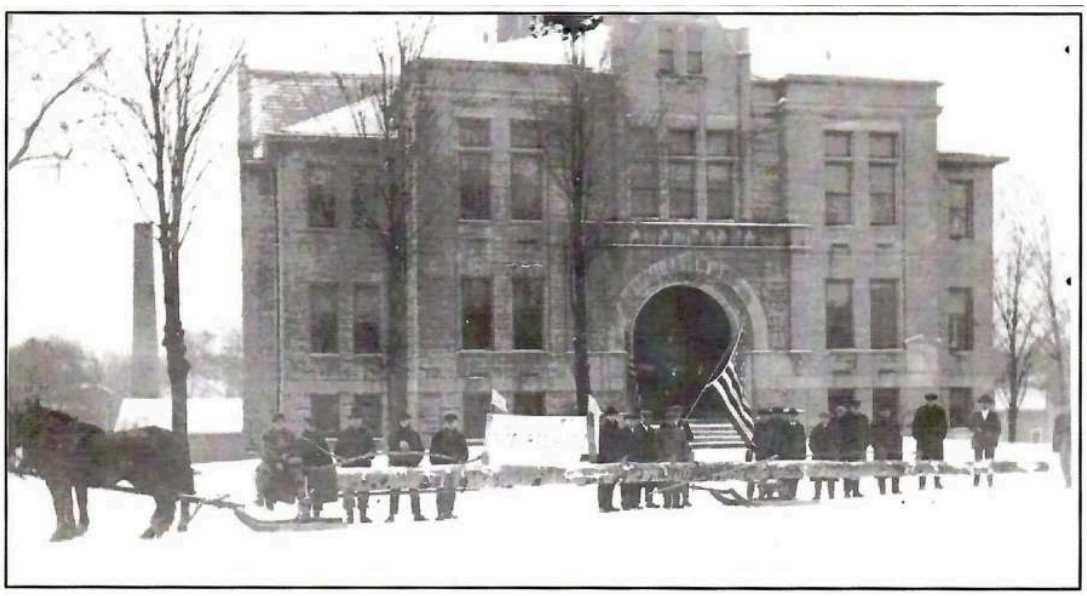
Scroll for more. The pictures illustrate each step and are those shown in this story; not all were taken on the day itself.

DOCUMENTED The idea began with Charles O. Harmon, a Cassopolis lawyer and the secretary of the Cass County Pioneer Society, which he had set about reviving in January 1923. That winter he wrote postcards and letters to the county's surviving pioneers. According to the history compiled from the cabin's papers, the cabin "was originally conceived as a temporary structure for the Pioneer Day Picnic." Yet in March 1923 the *News-Times* already said the logs would be drawn to the fair grounds on Log Hauling Day and that the cabin "is to shelter the historical curios of the county" (23 March 1923). Families were asked to cut a log from their own woodlots and bring it into the village.

DOCUMENTED Harmon's letter to the donors was practical. It asked whether each could bring a log on hauling day, how long it would be and whether they could drive a team, and it promised a free dinner. When he wrote it, "twenty-three logs are on the ground," and in early March a report from Dowagiac said, "Logs are now being hauled to Cassopolis" (*News-Times*, 9 March 1923). Log Hauling Day was set for Wednesday, 4 April 1923. The booklet says the haulers met at the south end of town and paraded past the Court House. ✦ NEW FINDING A report from Cassopolis dated 6 April gives the scale: some eighty farmers came to town "with auto trucks, teams and tractors," paraded through the streets behind two bands, and took their logs of ash, maple, oak, sycamore, whitewood and birch to the fair grounds (*News-Times*, 7 April 1923). DOCUMENTED By the end, the booklet says, 146 logs were banked on the ground, and everyone who brought one was given a chicken dinner. OPEN The same report says the farmers came on "Thursday," which would be 5 April. Whether the day was put off by one day, or the report is loose, we have not settled.

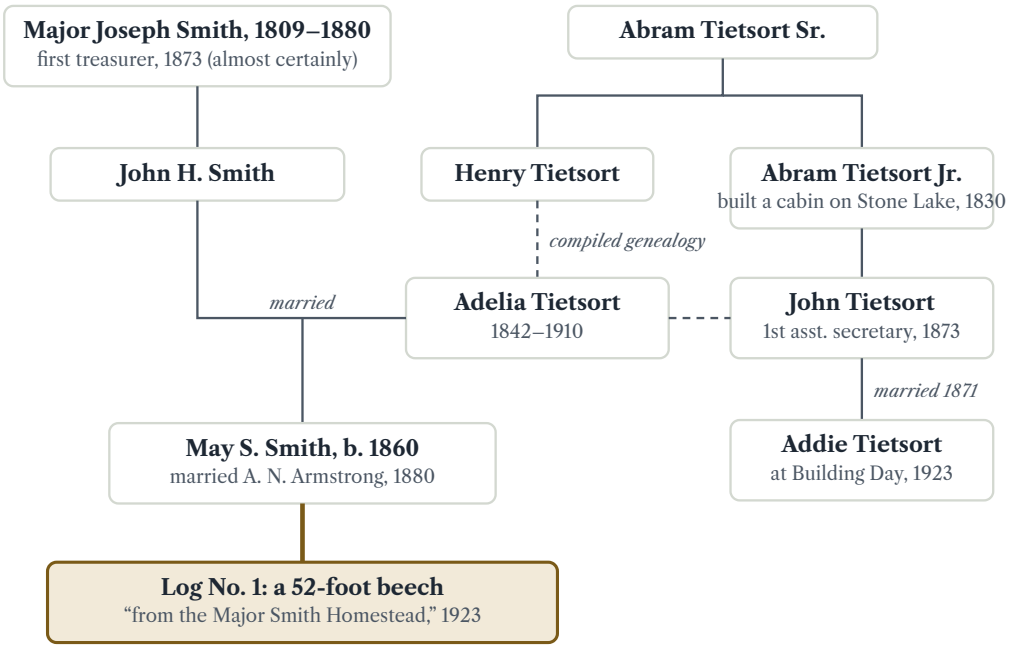


Harmon's letterhead of 1923, with the year's three dates in its heading and two photographs: the first log, a beech from the old Major Smith homestead given by Mr. and Mrs. A. N. Armstrong, being cut, and the same log passing the old county office building on Lincoln's Birthday, 1923 (the printed caption calls it the "Second Cut"). Reproduced in Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), Internet Archive. Public domain.



One long log on sledges in the snow before the Court House, early 1923. It is probably the first log, the fifty-two-foot beech, on Lincoln's Birthday, 12 February. The scene matches the letterhead's dated picture above: a single log, a line of about twenty men, a flag and a sign. Judged by the men beside it, the log is about twice the length of a cabin wall, and the ground is under snow. In the 2012 booklet it has no caption and stands above the paragraph on Log Hauling Day. It could be that day, when the haulers did parade past the Court House, but the report of it describes some eighty farmers with trucks, teams and tractors behind two bands. From Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), used with her permission.

DOCUMENTED The first log cut for the cabin was a fifty-two-foot beech "from the Major Smith Homestead," given by Mr. and Mrs. A. N. Armstrong of Cassopolis. It is No. 1 on the donor list. Mrs. Armstrong was the Major's granddaughter (see the mysteries below).



The family behind the first log. Solid lines are from Mathews (1882) and Glover (1906); the dashed line from Henry Tietsort to Adelia rests on a compiled online genealogy, and the short dashed line marks Adelia and John Tietsort as first cousins. That the Major was the Society’s treasurer of 1873 is our reading (see Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)).



Building the Pioneer Log Cabin, Cassopolis, Mich., postcard, 1923. Private collection; scan shared online.

PART II

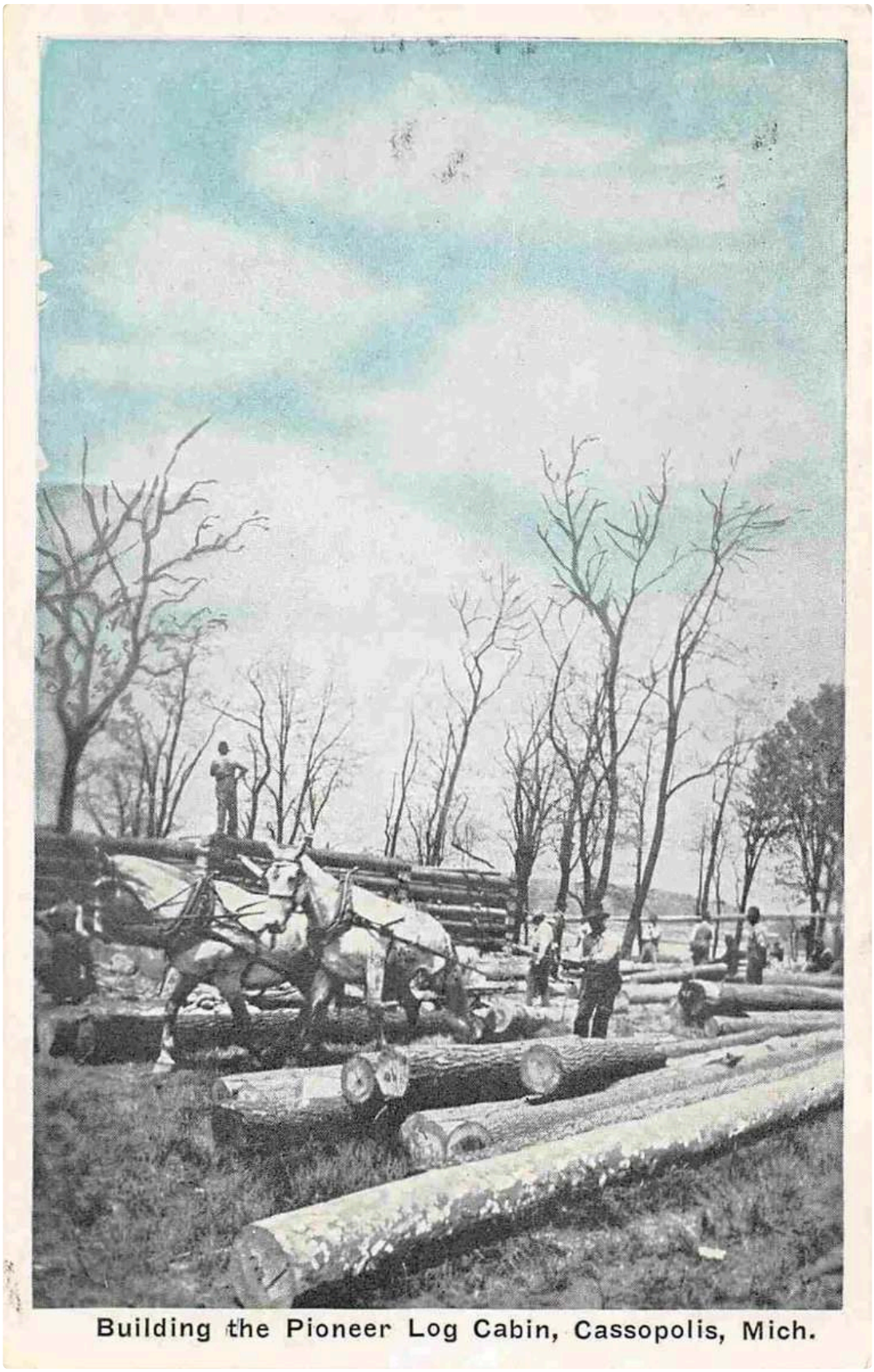
Twenty-four men and a black walnut log

DOCUMENTED Building day had its speeches: Harmon welcomed the crowd and introduced the village president, Asa K. Hayden, and Charles H. Kimmerle. ✦ NEW FINDING Asa Hayden was a son of the old Pioneer Society: his father, James G. Hayden, had been one of its officers as late as 1917. DOCUMENTED Charles Kimmerle was a son of Henry Kimmerle, and a Henry Kimmerle is on Glover's list as the Society's president in 1888. READING They were almost certainly the same man: Glover's history knows only one Henry Kimmerle, a pioneer of 1833 who farmed four miles west of Cassopolis and whose name is on the Society's roll (Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)). So the revival of 1923 was carried in part by the children of the society it revived. DOCUMENTED Mrs. Addie Tietsort was there; she owned the original parchment deed to the ground, issued to her pioneer ancestors in 1831 under President Andrew Jackson. DOCUMENTED She was the widow of John Tietsort, the eldest son of Abram Tietsort Jr., who had built a log cabin on the lake's east bank in 1830, and in 1873 John had been the Pioneer Society's first assistant secretary (Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)). READING So the "pioneer ancestors" were very probably her husband's family. The speaking program closed with the schoolchildren singing "America." On the back of a postcard of the moment, now in the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library, someone wrote: "The 1st log, a 26 ft black walnut was placed at 8:30 am witnessed by 3000 people, many from 50 miles drive. Carried to place by 24 men as the band played and the 3000 voices sang 'Home sweet home.'" That morning has a story of its own (projectscroll.com/news/the-day-3000-came-to-watch-one-log/).



The moment, as printed on the card: "Laying first log of the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin, May 23, 1923, 8:30 A.M., Cassopolis, Michigan." Postcard, 1923. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (bh012198). Public domain.

DOCUMENTED A second card, the one at the top of this page, shows the walls already rising, with a crowd around them. On its back, in handwriting, is a line signed with three initials, transcribed in the library's catalogue: "The first fore-noon's work, done by 52 volunteers. C.O.H." ✦ NEW FINDING Those are almost certainly Charles O. Harmon's initials. If so, the man who organized the cabin was also writing notes for posterity on its souvenir cards.



“Building the Pioneer Log Cabin, Cassopolis, Mich.”: a team brings in logs as the walls rise. Tinted postcard, 1923. Private collection; scan shared online. Public domain.



Breaking ground on the shore of Stone Lake, 14 May 1923. The photograph was published that year as a postcard. Reproduced in Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED Ground had been broken nine days earlier, on Monday, 14 May, when a party of men with spades posed on the lakeshore for a postcard lettered "Ground Breaking for Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin" and dated 14 May 1923. The work had a foreman. Ed Ferguson, an experienced cabin builder, supervised the construction, the booklet says; a crew of 46 men assembled for it, and Tom Connelly and Mack Weikel are named for the axe work. Trenches were dug around the outline, filled with cobblestone and grouted with concrete for a foundation, and Ack Anderson built the fieldstone fireplace and the stick chimney. By 1 June the walls were up to the second story, with the materials and the labor given, the paper said. On Pioneer Day, 20 June 1923, the cabin was dedicated to the pioneers of Cass County, and there was a log-riding contest on Stone Lake.



The walls nearly up: "Building the Pioneer Log Cabin, Cassopolis, Michigan, May 23 to June 20, 923" (the card misprints the year). Postcard, 1923. Private collection; scan shared online. Public domain.

BUILDING DAY, RE-CREATED

A re-creation of building day, made in 2026 with AI tools from the written record and photographs of 1923. It is an illustration, not a record: no film of the day is known to survive. If

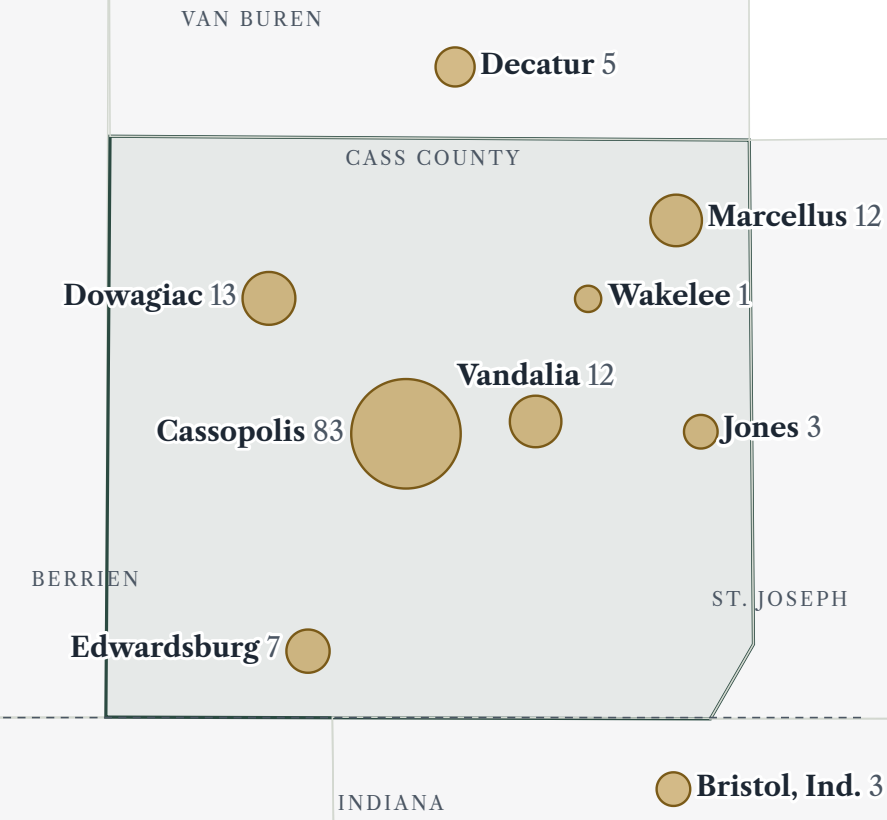
your family has one, the museum would like to hear from you.

The cabin has a community page on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/pioneerlogcabinmuseum/), where this video and news of the museum's open days are posted. Open the video on Facebook › (https://www.facebook.com/reel/1644378713457535)

PART III

Did your family give a log?

DOCUMENTED Every log has a number, and every number has a name. The list, published in the cabin's 2012 booklet, gives the donor for all 144 numbered logs, and for most of them the post-office town and the kind of wood. Eighty-three came from Cassopolis people; others came from Dowagiac, Marcellus, Vandalia, Edwardsburg, Decatur, Jones, Wakelee and across the state line at Bristol, Indiana. Twenty-eight of the entries mention a woman. Some logs were given in memory of the dead, such as "Myron & Minnie Robinson (dec'd)," and some by a son "for Father." No. 119 is "2 pine logs for chinking."



Where the logs came from. Each circle is a post-office town on the 1923 donor list, sized by its number of logs; tap one to see its givers. A farm family usually gave its nearest post office, so "Cassopolis" covers the country around the county seat as well as the village. Decatur lies just over the line in Van Buren County, and Bristol across the state line in Indiana. Woods are grouped as in the chart below (all oaks together; yellow poplar with whitewood). From the donor list compiled by Marcia Gaskin (2012), read against its page images; county lines from the U.S. Census Bureau.

▸ **Cassopolis** 83 logs · most often whitewood 16, oak 16, beech 7

- **Dowagiac** 13 logs · most often elm 5, beech 3, whitewood 2
- **Marcellus** 12 logs · most often whitewood 3, oak 2, maple 2
- **Vandalia** 12 logs · most often oak 3, beech 3, walnut 2
- **Edwardsburg** 7 logs · most often oak 4, cherry 2, beech 1
- **Decatur** 5 logs · most often elm 2, walnut 1, sycamore 1
- **Bristol, Ind.** 3 logs · most often cherry 2, oak 1
- **Jones** 3 logs · most often walnut 1, ash 1, hickory 1
- **Wakelee** 1 log
- **No town given** 5 logs · most often ash 2, walnut 2, elm 1



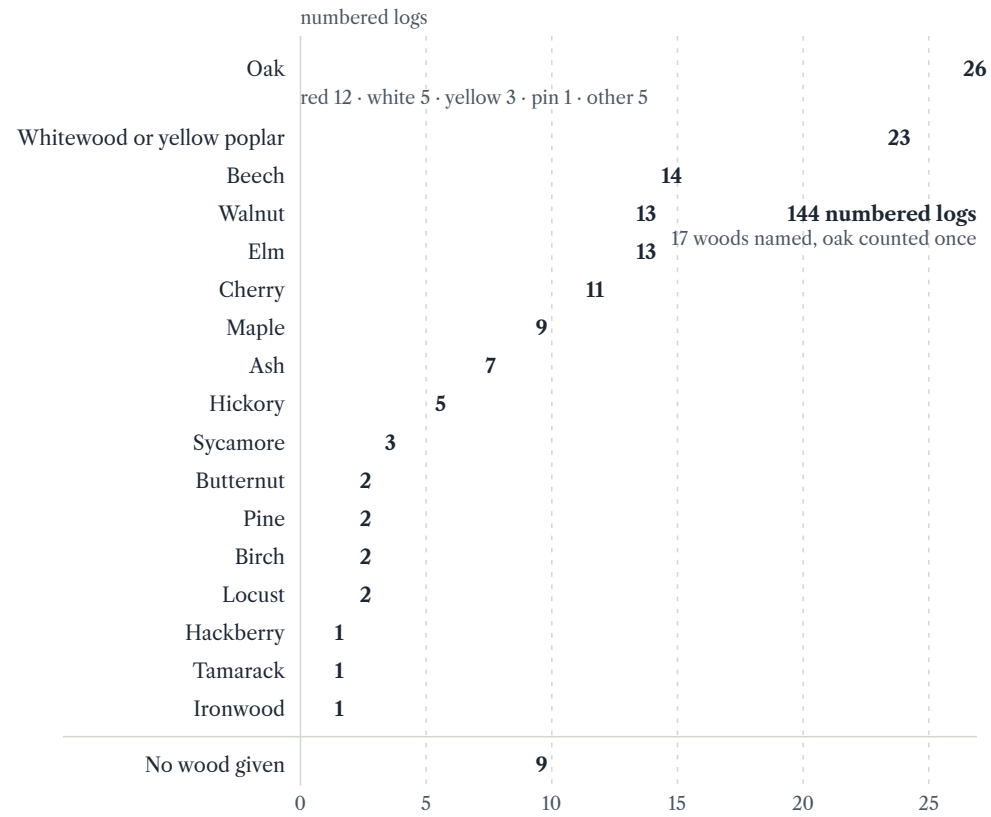
A painted number on a log end. On the 1923 list, No. 21 is an eight-foot whitewood log given by Elmer Griffis of Dowagiac. From Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), used with her permission.

SEARCH THE 1923 DONOR LIST

We have read all 144 entries against the page images of the 2012 list and added them to our searchable roll of old Cass County names. Type a surname, a town or a tree.

A surname, a town or a tree | Find the log

Or see the whole list (projectscroll.com/names/?town=logs-1923). If your family's name is there, there is very likely a log in those walls with your family's number on it.



Tap or click any bar for the count.

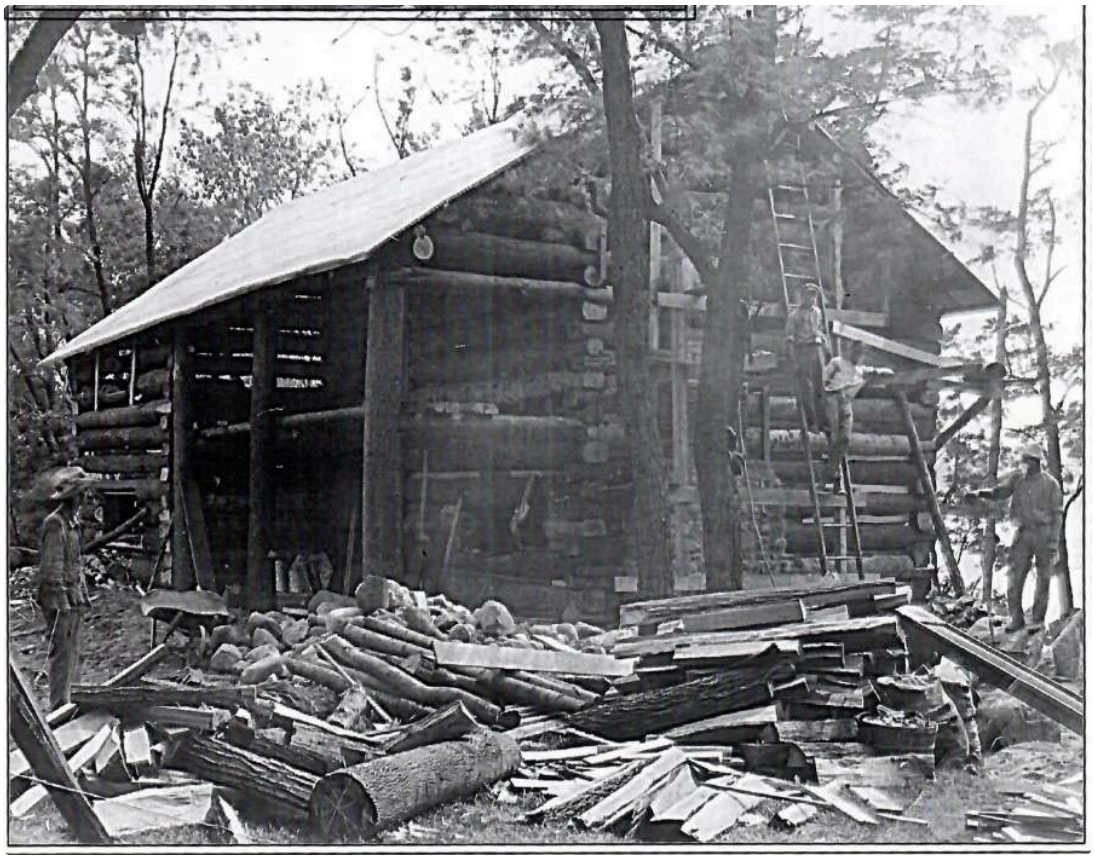
From the 1923 donor list (compiled by Marcia Gaskin, 2012), read against its page images. Spelling normalized; ‘whitewood’ and ‘yellow poplar’ are counted together. Counts are numbered logs; No. 119 is “2 pine logs for chinking.” An undated postcard, probably of the 1920s, claims 20 native species.

DOCUMENTED The woods tell their own story. Oak is the commonest, with 26 logs (red, white, yellow and pin oak), then whitewood or yellow poplar with 23, beech with 14, walnut and elm with 13 each, cherry with 11 and maple with 9; ash, hickory, sycamore, butternut, pine, birch, locust, hackberry, tamarack and ironwood make up the rest. An undated postcard, probably of the 1920s, speaks of 38 varieties of 20 native species, gives the cabin as 36 by 42 feet overall, and says its logs would stretch 2,800 feet laid end to end. READING The list is a census of the county’s woodlots in 1923, taken by the people who owned them.

PART IV

Ten things you probably didn’t know about the cabin

1. It was never supposed to last. DOCUMENTED According to the cabin’s papers, it was planned as a temporary building for the Pioneer Day picnic. It is now more than a hundred years old.

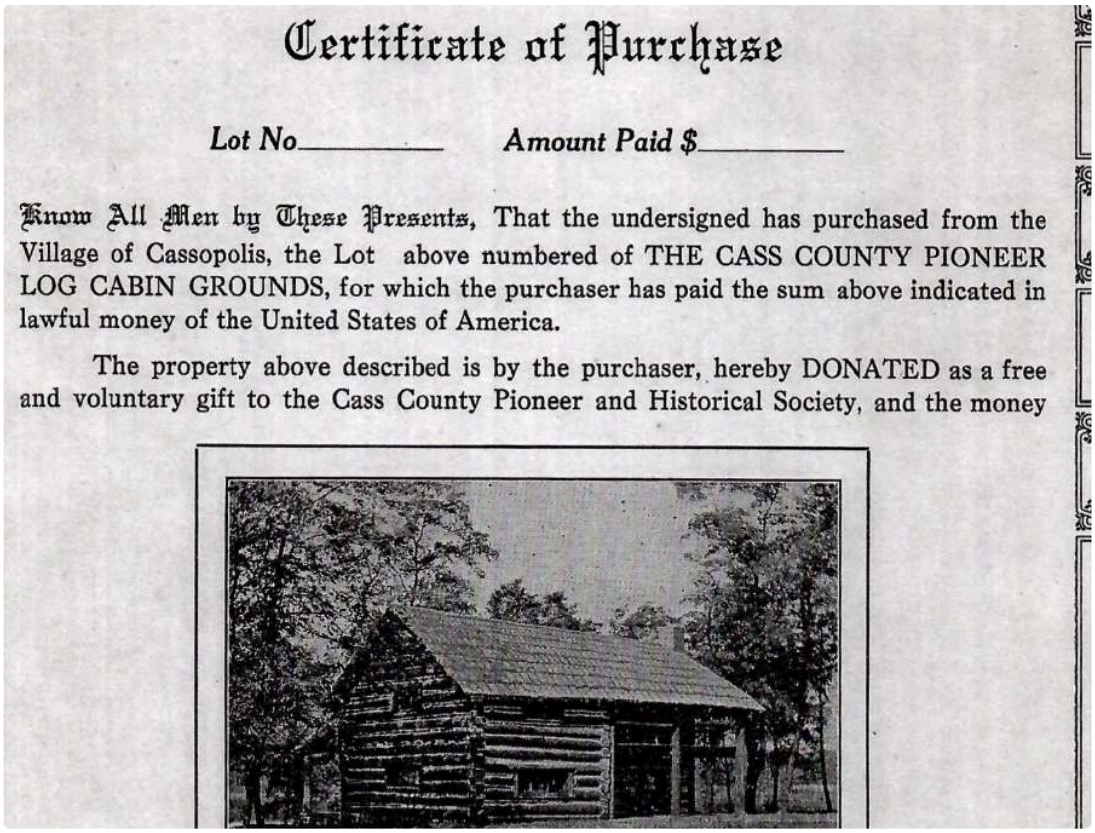


The cabin roofed but not yet finished, 1923, with the offcuts still piled in front. From Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), used with her permission.

2. The pieces inside have donors too. DOCUMENTED The cabin's papers list some forty-five gifts of boards and fittings from about thirty givers: the mantel, a bench on the front porch, the legs of an exhibit table, a corner shelf, the casings of a particular window. Four lines simply begin "From Mill."

3. The wood of the doors is older than the cabin, by a lifetime. DOCUMENTED The doors were made of black walnut boards more than seventy-five years old, the stair rail of lumber from an 1845 barn, and the door hinges of hickory. Some logs were sawn into boards for the upstairs floor.

4. Nobody bought "one square inch." DOCUMENTED A 2003 newspaper account says that, to raise money for the museum, Harmon sold "lots" of the cabin ground "of one square inch each for one dollar." The cabin's papers tell it differently. In June 1924, to clear a remaining debt of $1,200, the grounds were platted into 1,212 "souvenir lots," each one foot wide by three feet long, offered at $1 each. A Society letterhead of 18 August 1924 counts 728 subscribers; since one person could buy several lots, that does not tell us how many of the 1,212 were taken. Every buyer signed a certificate giving the lot back to the Pioneer Society.



Certificate of Purchase

*Lot No*_____ *Amount Paid $*_____

Know All Men by These Presents, That the undersigned has purchased from the Village of Cassopolis, the Lot above numbered of THE CASS COUNTY PIONEER LOG CABIN GROUNDS, for which the purchaser has paid the sum above indicated in lawful money of the United States of America.

The property above described is by the purchaser, hereby DONATED as a free and voluntary gift to the Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society, and the money

A souvenir-lot certificate of June 1924. The buyer of a one-foot-by-three-foot lot gave it straight back to the Society. Reproduced in Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), Internet Archive. Public domain.

5. It opened more than once. ✦ NEW FINDING After the dedication in June 1923, the papers announced a "grand opening day for the completed log cabin" for Wednesday, 17 October 1923. DOCUMENTED The museum opened on Pioneer Day, 18 June 1924. The story of the two openings is told in The cabin that opened twice (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-that-opened-twice/). Some modern summaries give 17 June 1924 for the museum's opening; 18 June was the Wednesday.

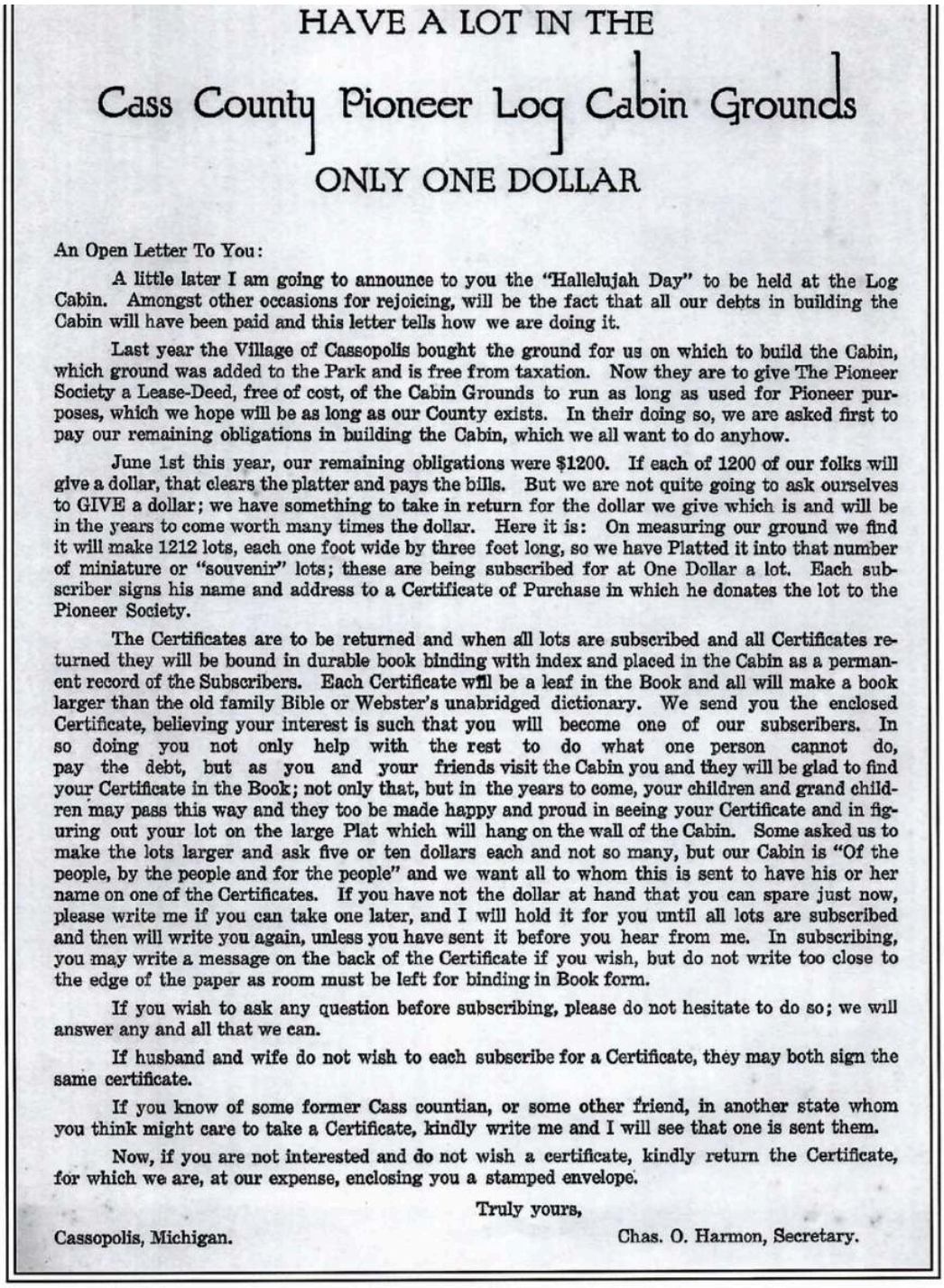
6. It had its own song. DOCUMENTED At a commemoration at the cabin on Sunday, 28 October 1923, the program included a poem to the cabin by Ralph Scoles Thomas, "the Blind Poet." ✦ NEW FINDING It also included a song, "Old Log Cabin," with words by Jay C. Northrop (*South Bend News-Times*, 24 October 1923), who had given log No. 6. See "Old Log Cabin" (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/).

7. A woman was born on this ground, says the record. DOCUMENTED The cabin's papers record that Julia Tietsort, the first white child in the township, was born in a cabin at this site. A county history of 1882 says that in 1830 Abram Tietsort Jr. "built a small log cabin on the east bank of Stone Lake," and that Julia Ann Tietsort "was born there July 3, 1830, and was the first white child which had its nativity in Cassopolis." OPEN The 1893 memorial of her mother calls Julia "the second white female child born in Cass county," and the 1882 history places the Tietsort cabin "near the spot where the bowl factory now stands," "between the sites of the foundry and bowl factory"; an 1899 directory puts it "near the place where the ice houses now stand, but it was south of the village plat." Whether that was this ground is not yet shown. DOCUMENTED The same book, in its chapter on the township, gives the township's first white child as Mary Bonnell, born 6 January 1830, and says Julia Ann "has been commonly considered" the first.

8. In 1931 it stood "on M-60." DOCUMENTED When *Michigan History Magazine* listed the state's historical markers and memorials in 1931, it described the "Pioneer log cabin on M-60, corner of Broadway and South Sts., Cassopolis. Erected in 1923 by the citizens of Cassopolis largely through the efforts of Chas. O. Harmon," and said it held "a large collection of pioneer relics" that were "supported by the Women's Club of Cassopolis."

9. It once closed, and was brought back. DOCUMENTED According to the cabin's papers and a 2003 newspaper account, the museum was open in summers for years and then closed as interest faded. George R. Fox and Joseph K. Ritter, the son of the Society's treasurer of 1924, Charles A. Ritter, among others, worked with local businesses and organizations to reopen it. READING Fox settled in Cass County about 1933 and died in 1963, and a 1941 state guide lists the cabin as open June to September, so the reopening came between about 1933 and 1963; whether it was before or after 1941, the record does not say. OPEN When it closed, and for how long, is not yet known.

10. "An apparent oversight of many years." DOCUMENTED The souvenir-lot certificates of June 1924 said the money was going to the cabin's debts "according to a Lease Deed from said Village of Cassopolis, conveying to The Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society, the Pioneer Log Cabin Grounds." ✦ NEW FINDING In June 1972 the Cass County commissioners took a 99-year lease on the cabin grounds from the Village of Cassopolis, at $1 a year. The *Herald-Press* called it "rectifying an apparent oversight of many years": the question had come up when the county was asked to cover the museum under its liability insurance, and a check showed the village still held title. The museum, the paper said, was run by the "Cass County Pioneer and Historical association." READING That lease runs to about 2071, at a dollar a year, the price of a souvenir lot. OPEN Whether the 1924 lease deed was ever signed and recorded, and what became of it, is not known. A lease would have left the title with the village, as the 1972 check found it.



HAVE A LOT IN THE

Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Grounds

ONLY ONE DOLLAR

An Open Letter To You:

A little later I am going to announce to you the "Hallelujah Day" to be held at the Log Cabin. Amongst other occasions for rejoicing, will be the fact that all our debts in building the Cabin will have been paid and this letter tells how we are doing it.

Last year the Village of Cassopolis bought the ground for us on which to build the Cabin, which ground was added to the Park and is free from taxation. Now they are to give The Pioneer Society a Lease-Deed, free of cost, of the Cabin Grounds to run as long as used for Pioneer purposes, which we hope will be as long as our County exists. In their doing so, we are asked first to pay our remaining obligations in building the Cabin, which we all want to do anyhow.

June 1st this year, our remaining obligations were $1200. If each of 1200 of our folks will give a dollar, that clears the platter and pays the bills. But we are not quite going to ask ourselves to GIVE a dollar; we have something to take in return for the dollar we give which is and will be in the years to come worth many times the dollar. Here it is: On measuring our ground we find it will make 1212 lots, each one foot wide by three feet long, so we have Platted it into that number of miniature or "souvenir" lots; these are being subscribed for at One Dollar a lot. Each subscriber signs his name and address to a Certificate of Purchase in which he donates the lot to the Pioneer Society.

The Certificates are to be returned and when all lots are subscribed and all Certificates returned they will be bound in durable book binding with index and placed in the Cabin as a permanent record of the Subscribers. Each Certificate will be a leaf in the Book and all will make a book larger than the old family Bible or Webster's unabridged dictionary. We send you the enclosed Certificate, believing your interest is such that you will become one of our subscribers. In so doing you not only help with the rest to do what one person cannot do, pay the debt, but as you and your friends visit the Cabin you and they will be glad to find your Certificate in the Book; not only that, but in the years to come, your children and grand children may pass this way and they too be made happy and proud in seeing your Certificate and in figuring out your lot on the large Plat which will hang on the wall of the Cabin. Some asked us to make the lots larger and ask five or ten dollars each and not so many, but our Cabin is "Of the people, by the people and for the people" and we want all to whom this is sent to have his or her name on one of the Certificates. If you have not the dollar at hand that you can spare just now, please write me if you can take one later, and I will hold it for you until all lots are subscribed and then will write you again, unless you have sent it before you hear from me. In subscribing, you may write a message on the back of the Certificate if you wish, but do not write too close to the edge of the paper as room must be left for binding in Book form.

If you wish to ask any question before subscribing, please do not hesitate to do so; we will answer any and all that we can.

If husband and wife do not wish to each subscribe for a Certificate, they may both sign the same certificate.

If you know of some former Cass countian, or some other friend, in another state whom you think might care to take a Certificate, kindly write me and I will see that one is sent them.

Now, if you are not interested and do not wish a certificate, kindly return the Certificate, for which we are, at our expense, enclosing you a stamped envelope.

Truly yours,

Cassopolis, Michigan. Chas. O. Harmon, Secretary.

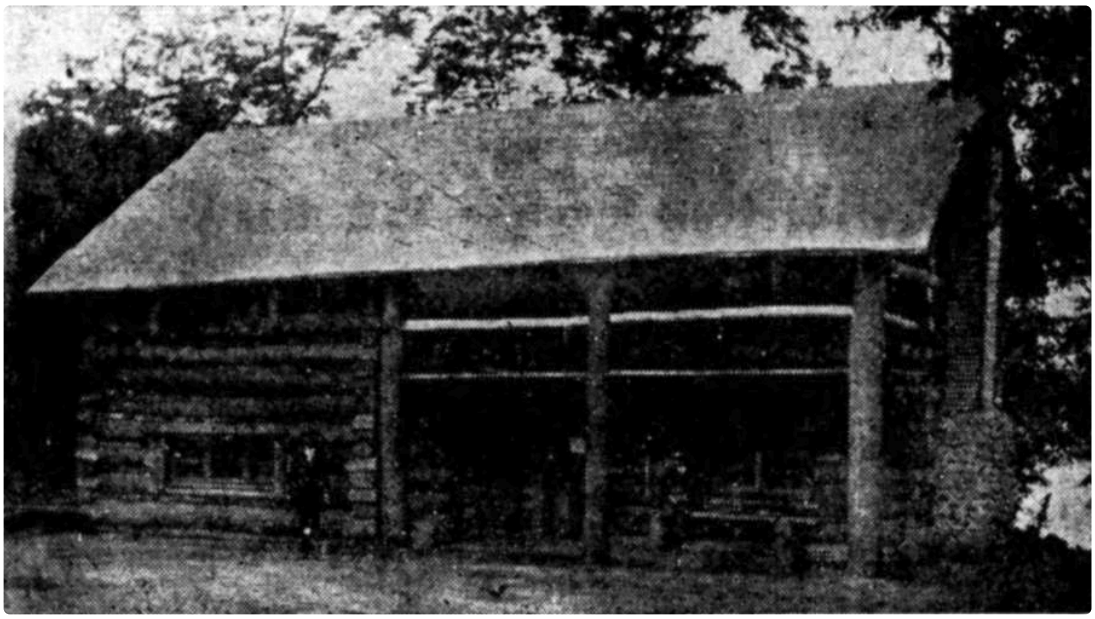
"Have a lot in the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Grounds: only one dollar." Harmon's open letter of 1924, which says the village bought the ground and would give the Society a lease-deed. Reproduced in Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), Internet Archive. Public domain.

PART V

Who has looked after the cabin

DOCUMENTED Charles Owen Harmon died at his home on North O'Keefe Street on Monday, 26 March 1928, aged 62, five years after the logs came in. He had been ill with tuberculosis for two years.

He was buried at Prospect Hill Cemetery in Cassopolis with Masonic rites, under a stone he shares with his wife, Catherine Greenawalt Harmon, who died in 1931. His obituary remembered a lawyer of 33 years and a former county clerk who in 1924 "reorganized the Cass County Historical Society, and was secretary of that organization" (*South Bend News-Times*, 29 March 1928). It does not mention the cabin.



The Pioneer Log Cabin, from the *South Bend News-Times*, 7 June 1930. The paper's caption says it shows "the late Charles O. Harmon ... standing, and Peter Eby, caretaker of the museum, seated, before the Log cabin," so the photograph was taken before Harmon's death in 1928. The figures are hard to make out in the newsprint. Library of Congress, Chronicling America, which lists the paper with no known copyright restrictions.

DOCUMENTED The caretaker was Peter Eby. A Peter Eby, born in 1848, was a son of Gabriel Eby, and Glover's county history of 1906 calls him the brother of "Catherine, the widow of John B. Harmon," Charles Harmon's mother. READING The caretaker was almost certainly that Peter, which made him Harmon's uncle. ✦ NEW FINDING No earlier account of the cabin we have found names its caretaker. OPEN When he was chosen is not recorded. DOCUMENTED He was still on duty past eighty in June 1930, and died in January 1935, aged 86. See The caretaker was Harmon's uncle (projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/).



"Pioneer's Log Cabin, Cassopolis, Mich." Postcard by the Auburn Post Card Mfg. Co., undated, probably the 1920s; published without a copyright notice. Private collection; scan shared online.

DOCUMENTED Since 1923 the cabin has passed through several pairs of hands:

1923 to the 1930s: the Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society, with, by 1924, Benjamin Franklin Thompson, a Cassopolis merchant (1856–1929), as president through 1928, Charles A. Ritter as treasurer and Harmon as secretary. Its picnic at the cabin drew 5,000 to 8,000 people in 1924. No picnic was planned for June 1928, after Harmon's death. By 1930 Ritter was the last of the original officers; he died at Cassopolis on 12 October 1933, and his son Joseph gave the details for his death certificate. A 1933 directory says the cabin was "owned by" the society, and a 1941 state guide lists it as open June to September.

1930–31: the Cassopolis Woman's Club began cataloguing and labeling the relics in 1930; the club's officers were Mrs. F. E. Sinclair, president, Mrs. A. D. Greenawalt (so printed; we read her as very probably Mrs. Adam B. Greenawalt, whose husband was the brother of Harmon's widow, Catherine), vice-president, Mrs. Edith Parker, secretary, and Mrs. S. A. Noecker, treasurer. In 1931 the relics were "supported by the Women's Club of Cassopolis." At the village centennial that August much of the program was held at the cabin, with a pageant scene of the pioneers' picnic of 1876, and the souvenir airmail cachet carried an engraving of the cabin by Helen Fitzsimmons.

Sometime between the 1930s and 1960s: a closing, and a reopening with help from George R. Fox and Joseph K. Ritter.

1961–65: Mrs. Arthur Nixon, director, with the cabin open daily from 15 June to 1 September (*Museums Directory*, 1961 and 1965). READING She was almost certainly Tillie J. Nixon of Cassopolis, Arthur Nixon's widow. DOCUMENTED Tillie Nixon, a retired teacher in the Dowagiac and Cassopolis schools, died in 1975; her obituary says her second husband, Arthur Nixon, died in 1951, and her first, Fred Mater, before him (*Herald-Palladium*, 25 August 1975). DOCUMENTED The last log on the 1923 list, No. 144, was given by "Art Nixon for Nixon Estate." READING "Art Nixon" was Arthur K. Nixon, the county's under-sheriff in 1923, a grandson of John Nixon of Penn Township, whom the county history of 1882 called "the father of the Cass County Pioneer Society" (Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)). DOCUMENTED The state's index of Arthur K. Nixon's death, in 1951, gives his father as Phineas,

and Phineas Nixon's own death certificate, of 1 June 1901 in Penn Township, names his parents as John Nixon, born in North Carolina, and Esther, born in Ohio. The census of 1850 lists Phineas, aged 11, in John Nixon's household. ✦ NEW FINDING So the cabin's last numbered log was given by the grandson of the man called the Pioneer Society's father.

1972–73: the "Cass County Pioneer and Historical association" ran the museum when the county took its lease. A 20 by 40 foot room replaced the old back porch over the lake; the county commissioners helped pay off that debt in 1973. Lee Dodd was the cabin's listed contact; he sat on the county board of commissioners in 1972–74, and by 1970 he was also president of the Cass County Historical Society.

1975: a Lewis Cass memorial plaque was to be dedicated at the cabin on Saturday, 1 November, by Masonic Lodge No. 55 (announced in the *Herald-Palladium*, 25 October 1975).

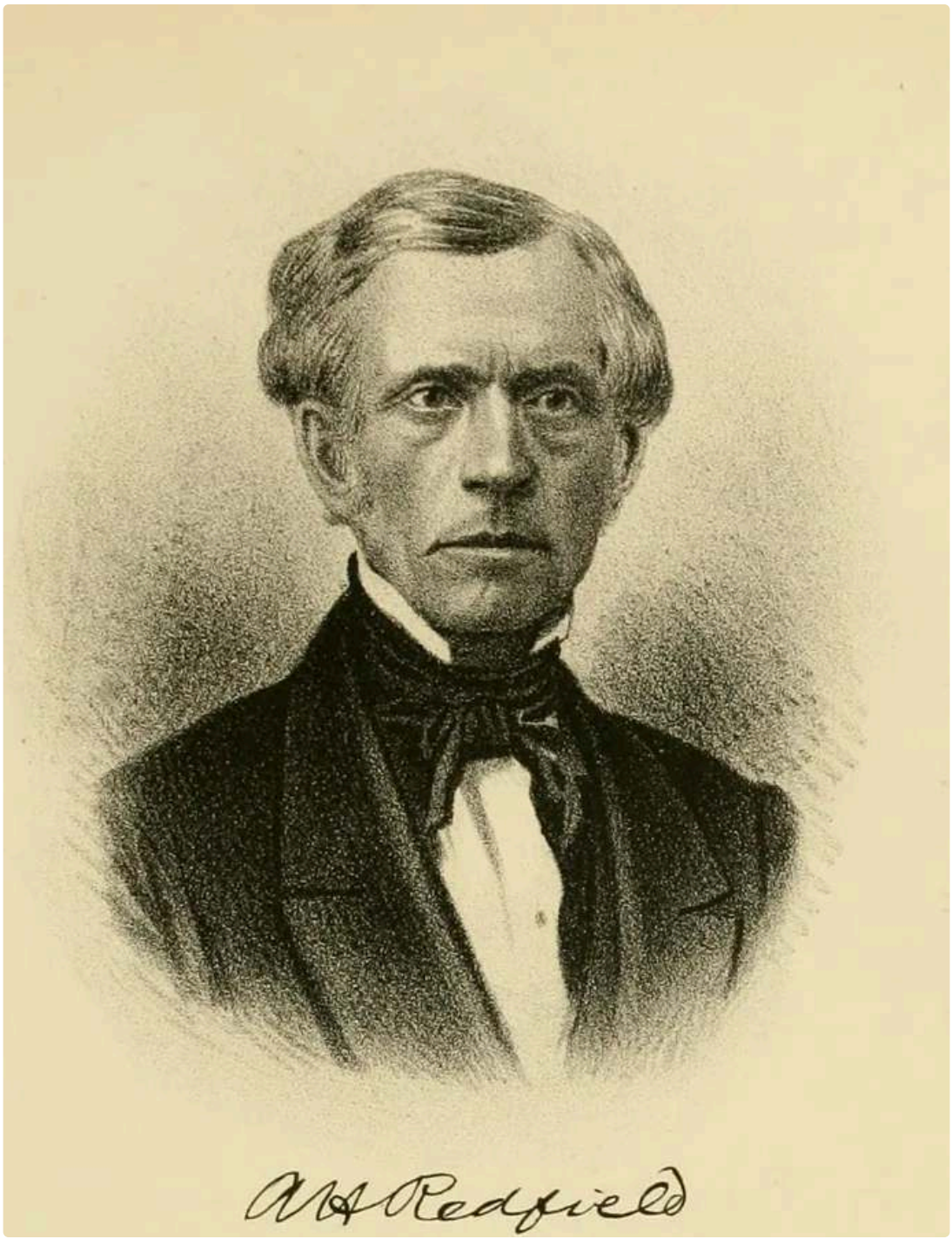
2012 to today: a volunteer board, incorporated as the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum, a Michigan nonprofit, on 17 August 2012 and recognized as a 501(c)(3) charity in July 2013; that year the local paper called its volunteers the "Pioneer Log Cabin Society." Its articles give its purpose as "to promote and preserve the Pioneer Log Cabin located in the Village of Cassopolis, Michigan and local historical artifacts from the early days of Cass County." Its annual report of 17 September 2026 lists Darren Bettinger, president of the Cass County Historical Society, as its president too.

READING So the cabin has a line of its own, running from Harmon's society through the 1972 association to today's volunteers. The Cass County Historical Society, which grew from the same roots and today counts the cabin among the historic sites it helps keep, is the subject of Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/).

PART VI

What's inside

DOCUMENTED The cabin holds the household goods of Cass County's first century, given by families and later by their descendants. Published accounts mention baby shoes, a long black dress, wire-framed spectacles, the county clerk's original safe, the desk of A. H. Redfield, Cassopolis's first postmaster, dollhouses and toys, Civil War memorabilia, household tools, pots and dishes, and a case of Michigan birds and animals from the 1860s that includes a passenger pigeon. DOCUMENTED In the years around 1903, when the cornerstone of its new building was laid, the Dowagiac library received from Elias Pardee, "an old resident of the city," a museum of "stuffed birds and small animals and some very fine deer and elk heads; birds' nests and eggs, shells, etc." (Glover, 1906, p. 288). In 1970 the Dowagiac historian Everett Claspy wrote that a Dowagiac library collection, whose donor had died in 1908, had been moved to the log cabin. READING That donor was very probably Pardee, and the cabin's bird case very probably began as his gift to the library. ✦ NEW FINDING Earlier accounts we have found describe the birds but not where they came from.

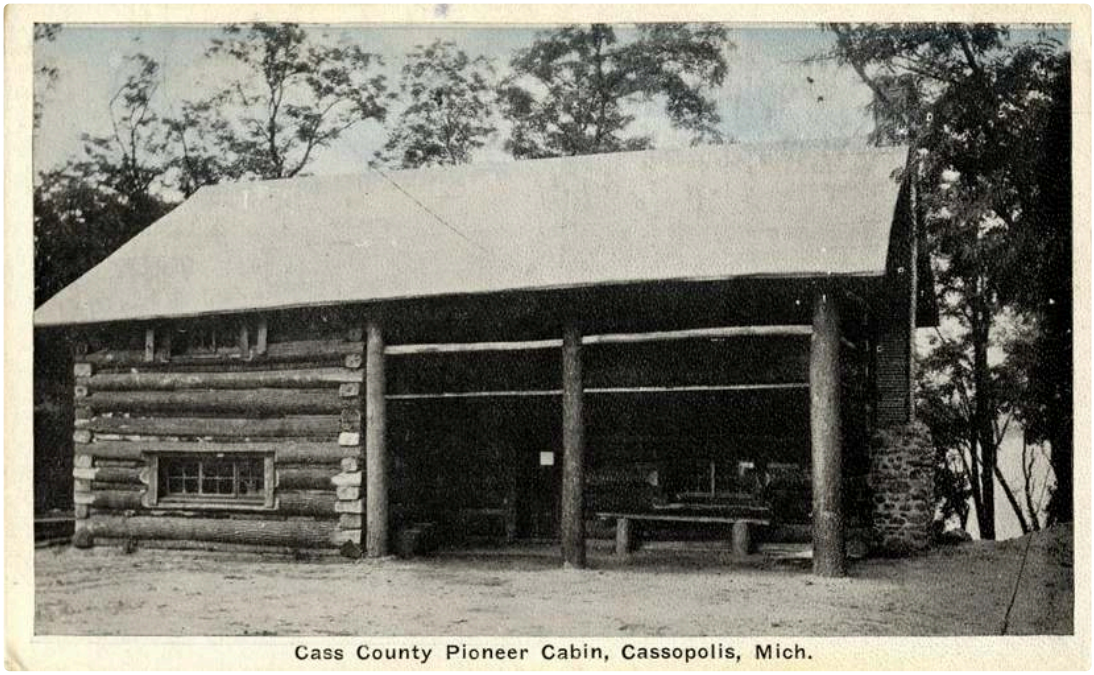


A. H. Redfield, the village's first postmaster, whose desk is in the cabin. Engraving in Mathews, *History of Cass County* (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.

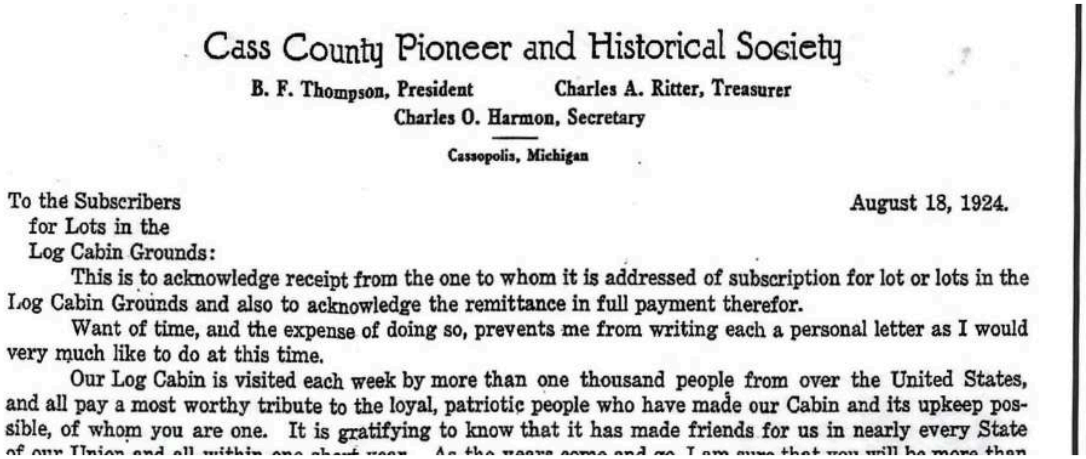
DOCUMENTED Some fittings have their givers on record. Andirons, a crane and lug hooks were given for the fireplace, and the cabin's papers credit Harry Gleason with the mantel, the top of an exhibit table and a shelf in the wing. DOCUMENTED One small exhibit is especially moving. A 2003 newspaper account describes a doll carriage and doll that belonged to Ethel Harson, a twelve-year-old who died of diphtheria in 1898.

READING Some of these things may have come from the collection in the courthouse lobby, probably the Pioneer Society's older museum, before it was moved down to the lake. A doll, a desk, a

safe: things like these usually get thrown away. These were kept because there was a log house by the lake to keep them in.



The cabin before its "old time roof": "Cass County Pioneer Cabin, Cassopolis, Mich.," postcard by the Auburn Post Card Mfg. Co., 1923–24. On the back, in what is almost certainly Harmon's hand: "Lacks the old time roof which will be put on before the annual meeting next June, C.O.H." Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (bh012199). Public domain.



Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society

B. F. Thompson, President Charles A. Ritter, Treasurer
Charles O. Harmon, Secretary

Cassopolis, Michigan

To the Subscribers
for Lots in the
Log Cabin Grounds:

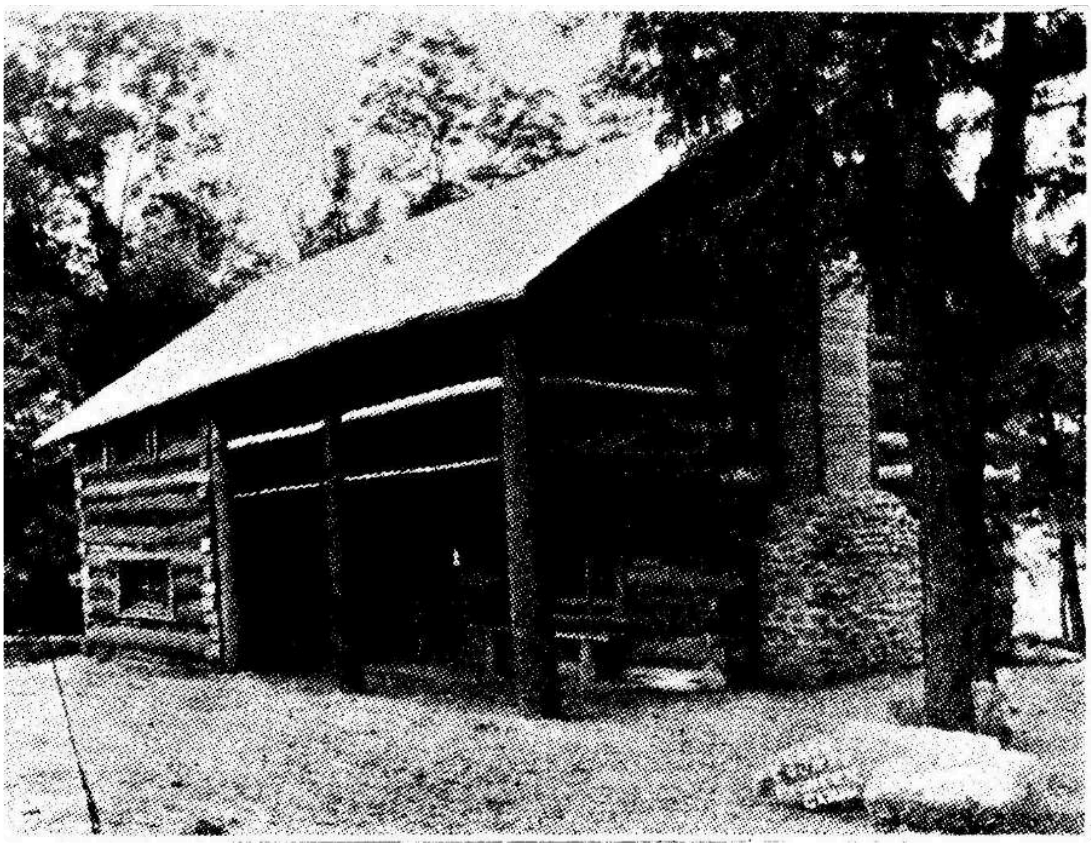
August 18, 1924.

This is to acknowledge receipt from the one to whom it is addressed of subscription for lot or lots in the Log Cabin Grounds and also to acknowledge the remittance in full payment therefor.

Want of time, and the expense of doing so, prevents me from writing each a personal letter as I would very much like to do at this time.

Our Log Cabin is visited each week by more than one thousand people from over the United States, and all pay a most worthy tribute to the loyal, patriotic people who have made our Cabin and its upkeep possible, of whom you are one. It is gratifying to know that it has made friends for us in nearly every State

The opening of Harmon's letter of 18 August 1924 to the 728 subscribers, which asks for dimes for the back-porch steps. Reproduced in Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), Internet Archive. Public domain.



"Cass County Pioneer Memorial Cabin," in George N. Fuller, ed., *Historic Michigan*, vol. III (*An Account of Southwest Michigan and St. Joseph County*), published in the mid-1920s. READING The roof reads as a smooth, pale surface with no courses of shakes or shingles, though the coarse halftone cannot settle the question of the "old time roof." Internet Archive. Public domain.

PART VII

Which Major Smith?

1. **Which Major Smith?** The first log came "from the Major Smith Homestead," given by Mr. and Mrs. A. N. Armstrong. DOCUMENTED Glover's county history of 1906 says that Armstrong, the village postmaster from 1897, married May S. Smith in 1880, "a daughter of John and Adelia (Tietsort) Smith," and that "the father was a son of Major Joseph Smith, who was a prominent Democrat and early settler of Cass county." The 1882 history says Joseph Smith (1809–1880) was "commonly spoken of by old settlers as Maj. Smith," was "Major of the regiment of militia organized in Cass County in 1841," sat in the first legislature under the state constitution and bought large tracts of land near the village. ✦ NEW FINDING So the first log came from the homestead of Mrs. Armstrong's own grandfather. ✦ NEW FINDING He was almost certainly also the Pioneer Society's first treasurer of 1873 (Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)): the Joseph Smith elected to that office came from the Cassopolis area, where the Major lived, and "Maj. Joseph Smith" spoke at the Society's reunion of 1878. So, almost certainly, the cabin's first log came from the land of one of the Society's founders. On her mother's side she was a Tietsort, the surname of the family whose pioneer cabin stood on the shore. READING A compiled family genealogy makes her mother, Adelia, a daughter of Henry Tietsort; the county history of 1882 names a Henry among the sons of Abram Tietsort Sr., which would make Adelia a first cousin of John Tietsort. ✦ NEW FINDING The county atlas of 1872 shows land in the Major's name north of the village, inside it and south of it: 131½ acres just

north of the village line, across the road from the county fair grounds, with no house drawn on it; 38 acres inside the village; and, marked "Jos. Smith," 154 acres in Jefferson Township, just south of the village toward Diamond Lake, with a house drawn on it. Beside that farm is land marked "J. Smith," and directly south of it 240 acres of "L. Graham." In the atlas of 1896 the Major's widow, Jemima, held land in the same corner north of the village, then 150 acres. DOCUMENTED The 1882 county history says the Major bought "1,000 acres of land in Jefferson Township" and farmed there for about eighteen years before he turned to trade in Cassopolis, and it names among his children "John Henry," then deceased, and "Margaret (wife of Lester Graham, of Jefferson Township)." READING So the farm with the house south of the village, among his children's land, is the likelier homestead, and the neighboring "J. Smith" may well be John, Mrs. Armstrong's father. DOCUMENTED Mrs. Armstrong had left the village by 1928, when the *News-Times* listed "Mrs. May S. Armstrong, of South Bend, a member of the class of 1879, the second graduated by the local school," at the Cassopolis alumni banquet.

PART VIII

Why it should be kept

READING Start with what the county did. In a few months of 1923 a county of farms and small towns raised a two-story log cabin almost entirely out of its own woods. Some eighty farmers hauled logs into town on one day; fifty-two volunteers did the first morning's work on the walls; families gave a mantel, a porch bench, the casings of a window; Harmon asked his subscribers for dimes for the back-porch steps. The logs, most of the fittings and the work were given, and Harmon set out to pay off the last of the debt a dollar at a time. Nobody had to remember the pioneers that way. It seems they did it because they thought the past belonged to everyone, and that a child ought to be able to walk into it.

DOCUMENTED The cabin is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places or on the Michigan State Register of Historic Sites, as far as the public listings we checked show. READING Its protection comes from people: the village that owns the ground, the county that leases it, and the volunteers who open the door. DOCUMENTED Upkeep costs real money. In August 2012, as the cabin neared its ninetieth anniversary, the local paper reported that it needed a new roof that would cost $12,000. That summer a Cassopolis man and his two grandsons from Mishawaka patched it "to get it through the winter," and in March 2013 the paper still reported that "the roof needs to be replaced." That month the Cassopolis–Vandalia Chamber of Commerce gave $3,000 toward the roof and the display cases.



"Cass County Pioneer Cabin and Museum, Cassopolis, Mich.," with Stone Lake behind. Postcard by the Auburn Post Card Mfg. Co., whose printed back counts "170 logs, 38 varieties of 20 species"; undated, probably the 1920s. Private collection; scan shared online. Public domain.

READING What threatens a log building is slow, not dramatic. The National Park Service's guide to historic log buildings (Preservation Brief 26) warns above all about water, calls chinking "the least durable part of a log building," and advises that repairing a log only partly decayed "is always preferable to replacing it." Those are general principles, not a report on this cabin; we have not seen a condition survey. But a building of hand-hewn logs on a lakeshore, more than a century old, will always need a sound roof, dry sills, sound chinking and someone watching.

> *"The silent voice of the days gone by of which it and its contents speak in an influence to the younger people, instilling in them a reverence for labor, loyalty, self denial, and patriotism."*

READING The cabin is a document you can walk into. A newspaper tells you that 3,000 people came; the cabin shows you what they made. The donor list tells you a family gave a cherry log from Vandalia; the wall holds the cherry log. If the building is lost, the list becomes a list of things that no longer exist. A hundred years on, the cabin needs what it needed in 1923: a county that shows up.

PART IX

The case for the registers

READING The cabin belongs on the National Register of Historic Places and on the Michigan State Register of Historic Sites. It is more than a century old, it stands where it was built, and its whole

making is written down.

DOCUMENTED The National Register of Historic Places admits buildings tied to events that shaped a community's history, buildings that show a way of building, and, when time has given them a significance of their own, buildings put up to honor the past (36 CFR 60.4). Pioneer cabins built to keep settlers' memory are already on it. The Old Settlers' Association of Johnson County, Iowa, built two log cabins in 1889 and 1913 "to commemorate the community's common pioneer heritage"; they were listed in 2013. A pioneer log cabin in City Park at Manhattan, Kansas, was listed in 2020, and the Lincoln Pioneer Village at Rockport, Indiana, a set of log buildings of 1934–35, in 1998. READING We have not found another surviving cabin in Michigan built, as this one was, from logs given by families across a whole county as a pioneer society's memorial and museum. If there is none, Cassopolis has something rare.

READING The cabin meets each of those tests. It is the work of a county-wide commemoration and has housed what is probably the county's oldest museum collection since 1924. It is a full-size two-story log building raised in a single season by volunteers, with 144 numbered logs, nearly all from the county's own woods. And after a century it has a history of its own, from the souvenir lots to the 1972 lease.

DOCUMENTED A listing is a mark of recognition. In the words of the state's preservation office, it "brings honor and recognition to a property and community," and "can also facilitate investment through rehabilitation projects and tourism and support some grant funding." READING A nomination would go best with the support of the Village of Cassopolis, which owns the ground, and of Cass County, which leases it. OPEN Who would prepare and sponsor a nomination has not been decided. READING What it needs first is what the cabin needed in 1923: people in the county who say they want it done. If you would like to see the cabin on the registers, tell the village council, the museum's board, or us.

PART X

How you can help

WANTED

HELP KEEP THE CABIN, AND ITS RECORD

The cabin is open only because volunteers open it, and its history is still being pieced together.

1. **Visit** when the museum is open: Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Michigan Log Cabin Day on the last Sunday in June, and the village's December celebration. Check the cabin's community page (https://pioneerlogcabinmuseum.com) first.
2. **Give** through the museum's own donation box or gift shop. A roof, a sill log or a season of chinking is a concrete thing to pay for.
3. **Look for your name** in the 1923 donor list (projectscroll.com/names/?town=logs-1923), and tell the museum if you find it.
4. **Share what your family kept:** photographs of the cabin from any year, a 1923 or 1924 postcard with writing on the back, a souvenir-lot certificate, the 1923 program, a reel of film, a story about hauling a log. Offer copies to the museum, and keep the originals safe.

5. **Speak up for a listing.** Tell the Village of Cassopolis and the museum's board that you would like the cabin on the National and State Registers.
6. **Volunteer.** Ask at the museum or the Cass County Historical Society.

And if you hold a record that answers one of the mysteries above, please write to us at research@projectscroll.com.

WANTED

HAVE A PICTURE OF THE CABIN?

Many of the photographs on this page came out of somebody's drawer or album. If your family has a snapshot of the cabin from any year, the building of it, a picnic in front of it, a visit inside, we would love to see it. A phone photo of the front and the back is enough.

When was it taken, even a rough guess?

Who or what is in it?

Is anything **written on the back**? Please photograph that too.

May we **show it here**, with your name or your family's in the credit?

Send us a photograph Nothing is published without your permission, and you keep the original.

PART XI

Who's who across the series

The same names turn up across fifty years and three parts: founders of 1873, their children and grandchildren in 1923, and the keepers who followed. Follow a family from one part to the next.

George Newton	Chaired the first morning of the pioneers' founding meeting, 1873; the Newton House was his home	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) · *The Newton House* (projectscroll.com/news/the-newton-house/)
Major Joseph Smith	Almost certainly the Society's first treasurer,	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) · Part 2

	1873; the cabin's first log came from his homestead	
John and Addie Tietsort	He was the first assistant secretary, 1873; his widow stood at Building Day, 1923	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2
John and Arthur Nixon	"The father of the Cass County Pioneer Society"; the cabin's last numbered log, from his grandson	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2
Henry Michael	Gave the miniature log cabin, 1878; president, 1896	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) *The miniature cabin (projectscroll.com/news/the-miniature-log-cabin-of-1878/)*
James G. and Asa K. Hayden	An officer of the Society, 1917; his son, the village president, spoke at Building Day	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2
Henry and Charles H. Kimmerle	Charles spoke at Building Day; his father Henry	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2

	was almost certainly the Society's president of 1888	
Charles O. Harmon	Revived the Society and led the building of the cabin, 1923–28	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2 Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)
Peter Eby	Almost certainly Harmon's uncle; the cabin's caretaker	Part 2 Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) *The caretaker (projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/)*
Charles A. and Joseph K. Ritter	Treasurer of the revived Society, 1924; his son helped reopen the cabin	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2 Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)
Jay C. Northrop	Gave log No. 6 and wrote the cabin's song; named as the Historical Society's secretary in a 1944 directory	Part 2 Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/) *The song (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/)*
George R. Fox	Helped reopen the cabin; president of the	Part 2 Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)

	Historical Society until 1963	
Lee Dodd	President, later chairman, of the Historical Society from 1970 or earlier to about 1990, and head of the county Historical Commission in 1974; the cabin's contact, 1973	Part 2 · Part 3 (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)

PART XII

Timeline

1830 Abram Tietsort Jr. builds a small log cabin by Stone Lake; the cabin's papers place Julia Tietsort's birth "at this site"

43 YEARS LATER

1873 The Cass County Pioneer Society founded at the Court House (Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/))

50 YEARS LATER

Jan 1923 Charles O. Harmon begins reviving the Society

4 Apr 1923 Log Hauling Day (the date set)

23 May 1923 Cabin Building Day: 146 logs on the grounds; the first wall log, a 26-foot black walnut, laid before about 3,000 people

20 Jun 1923 Pioneer Day: the cabin dedicated to the pioneers of Cass County

17 Oct 1923 "Grand opening day for the completed log cabin" announced

28 Oct 1923 A commemoration at the cabin, with Jay C. Northrop's song "Old Log Cabin"

18 Jun 1924 The museum opens; "more than 5,000" come

Jun–Aug 1924 1,212 souvenir lots offered at $1; 728 subscribers by 18 August

26 Mar 1928 Charles O. Harmon dies

1930 The Woman's Club begins cataloguing and labeling the relics; Peter Eby, past eighty, still caretaker

1931	*Michigan History Magazine* lists the cabin “on M-60”

30 YEARS LATER

1961–65	Mrs. Arthur Nixon, director
Jun 1972	The county takes a 99-year, $1-a-year lease on the grounds
1972–73	A 20 by 40 foot rear room replaces the back porch

39 YEARS LATER

2012	The roof patched, and a new one reckoned at $12,000; the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum incorporated (17 August)
23 May 2023	Centennial of Cabin Building Day
Sep 2026	Darren Bettinger, president of the Historical Society, is listed as the cabin museum’s president

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Part 2: The cabin a county built

Part 3: Keepers of the county (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)

Short stories from the same records: the miniature cabin of 1878 (projectscroll.com/news/the-miniature-log-cabin-of-1878/) · balloons over the 1890 picnic (projectscroll.com/news/balloons-over-the-pioneer-picnic/) · the day 3,000 came to watch one log (projectscroll.com/news/the-day-3000-came-to-watch-one-log/) · the cabin that opened twice (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-that-opened-twice/) · the caretaker (projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/) · the song “Old Log Cabin” (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/)

The whole series as one PDF › (projectscroll.com/data/pioneer-society-series.pdf) · A one-page handout for the cabin’s visitors › (projectscroll.com/data/pioneer-log-cabin-handout.pdf)

✦ NEW FINDING **WHAT’S NEW HERE**

The notes signed “C.O.H.” on the backs of two 1923–24 cabin postcards in the Burton Historical Collection (“The first fore-noon’s work, done by 52 volunteers” and “Lacks the old time roof which will be put on before the annual meeting next June”) are almost certainly by Charles O. Harmon, the Society’s secretary and the cabin’s organizer. The library’s catalogue gives only the initials.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

In June 1972 the Cass County commissioners took a 99-year lease on the Pioneer Log Cabin grounds from the Village of Cassopolis at $1 a year, “rectifying an apparent oversight of many years”: a check made for the county’s liability insurance showed the village still held title; the 1924 souvenir-lot certificates had spoken of a “Lease Deed” from the village to the Society (*St. Joseph Herald-Press*, 14 June 1972).

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The cabin’s caretaker in its first years was Peter Eby, still “on duty” past eighty in June 1930 (*South Bend News-Times*, 7 June 1930). He was almost certainly the Peter Eby (1848–1935) whom Glover’s 1906 county history names as brother of “Catherine, the widow of John B. Harmon,” Charles O. Harmon’s mother, which made the caretaker Harmon’s uncle.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The cabin’s case of mounted Michigan birds and animals probably began as Elias Pardee’s gift to the Dowagiac library: Glover (1906, p. 288) records his “museum” of stuffed birds, small animals, deer and elk heads, nests, eggs and shells, and Everett Claspy (1970) writes that a Dowagiac library collection, whose donor had died in 1908, was moved to the log cabin. Claspy does not name the donor.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The cabin’s first log, cut “from the Major Smith Homestead” and given by Mr. and Mrs. A. N. Armstrong, came from Mrs. Armstrong’s own family: Glover (1906, pp. 454–455) says she was May S. Smith, daughter of John and Adelia (Tietsort) Smith, and that her father “was a son of Major Joseph Smith,” the Cass County pioneer whom Mathews (1882) calls “Maj. Smith,” major of the county militia regiment of 1841.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

A report from Cassopolis dated 6 April 1923 describes Log Hauling Day: some eighty farmers came to town “with auto trucks, teams and tractors,” paraded behind two bands and took logs of ash, maple, oak, sycamore, whitewood and birch to the fair grounds. It puts the day on “Thursday,” 5 April, not the Wednesday announced (*South Bend News-Times*, 7 April 1923).

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

Between its dedication on 20 June 1923 and its opening as a museum in June 1924, the Pioneer Log Cabin had another opening: “Wednesday, October 17, is the grand opening day for the completed log cabin in Cassopolis, and all the pioneer relics” (*South Bend News-Times*, 21 September 1923).

Found by Michael Urbanski , Project Scroll, 25 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The Pioneer Log Cabin had its own song: the program of the commemoration at the cabin on Sunday, 28 October 1923 includes "Song. 'Old Log Cabin,' words by Jay C. Northrup" (*South Bend News-Times*, 24 October 1923). Jay C. Northrop had given log No. 6.

Found by Michael Urbanski , Project Scroll, 25 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The county atlas of 1872 places Major Joseph Smith's land around Cassopolis: 131½ acres just north of the village line, across the road from the county fair grounds; 38 acres inside the village; and, marked "Jos. Smith," 154 acres with a house in Jefferson Township just south of the village, beside land of "J. Smith" and "L. Graham" (very probably his son-in-law Lester Graham). One of the two farms was very probably the "Major Smith Homestead" that gave the Pioneer Log Cabin its first log in 1923; the farm with the house is the likelier.

Found by Michael Urbanski , Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The Pioneer Society's first treasurer, Joseph Smith (elected in 1873), was almost certainly Major Joseph Smith (1809–1880), from whose homestead the Pioneer Log Cabin's first log was cut in 1923 and given by his granddaughter, Mrs. A. N. Armstrong. Its first assistant secretary, John Tietsort, was the son of Abram Tietsort Jr., builder of the 1830 cabin on Stone Lake's east bank, and his widow, Addie Tietsort, attended Cabin Building Day in May 1923.

Found by Michael Urbanski , Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The two men Harmon introduced at Cabin Building Day, 23 May 1923, were sons of the old Pioneer Society: the village president, Asa K. Hayden, was a son of James G. Hayden, an officer of the Society in 1917, and Charles H. Kimmerle was a son of Henry Kimmerle, almost certainly the Henry Kimmerle who was the Society's president in 1888. Joseph K. Ritter, who later helped reopen the cabin, was the son of the Society's 1924 treasurer, Charles A. Ritter.

Found by Michael Urbanski , Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The last numbered log of the 1923 Pioneer Log Cabin, No. 144, given by "Art Nixon for Nixon Estate," came from Arthur K. Nixon, a grandson of John Nixon of Penn Township, whom the county history of 1882 called "the father of the Cass County Pioneer Society." Arthur's 1951 death index names his father Phineas, and Phineas's 1901 death certificate names his parents as John and Esther Nixon.

Found by Michael Urbanski , Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

A **new finding** is a fact found in a primary source that we could not find in any published history, article or website we searched. Credit: Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will say so here. All our discoveries › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/)

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Numbers in the text point to this list; entries without a number are further sources we consulted. How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/) · The libraries behind all our stories › (projectscroll.com/sources/libraries/)

VISIT AND SEE

Pioneer Log Cabin Museum. The 1923 cabin on Stone Lake. Open on summer weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day and for special events; check the museum's Facebook page before you go. Admission is free; the museum is supported by donations and its gift shop. Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=400%20S%20Broadway%20St%2C%20Cassopolis%2C%20M

Prospect Hill Cemetery. Charles O. Harmon, who led the building of the cabin, is buried here under a stone he shares with his wife, Catherine. Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=Prospect%20Hill%20Cemetery%2C%20Cassopolis%2C%20M

Public places only. Please respect private land and posted hours.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Project Scroll is independent research and does not speak for the Cass County Historical Society or the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum. Their names are used here only to identify them, and the history on this page is drawn from the published record cited below.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Research and reporting

Michael Urbanski (projectscroll.com/about/michael-urbanski/) · Project Scroll

SOURCES	Every fact on this page is drawn from the sources listed above, and each can be checked where it is held.
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THE PIONEER SOCIETY · PART 3

Keepers of the county

DISCOVERY · 6 NEW FINDINGS › UPDATED SERIES · 3 OF 3 › GO SEE IT 33 MIN READ

In September 2026 the two organizations that trace their roots to the 1873 Pioneer Society came to have the same president. Part 3 follows the Cass County Historical Society from Harmon's revival through George Fox, the 1977 incorporation and the Newton House, and asks whether it is the same society the pioneers founded.

LIVE RESEARCH DOCUMENT

This story is part of a series still being researched. Records for several decades have not yet turned up in the public collections we have searched, and new records are added as they are found.

By Michael Urbanski · Project Scroll · First published 25 October 2026 · Updated 28 October 2026 · 33 min read



The old Court House, Cassopolis, where the Cass County Pioneer Society was founded in 1873; photograph in Glover, A Twentieth Century History of Cass County (1906). Internet Archive. Public domain.

The short version

After Charles O. Harmon revived the Pioneer Society in 1923, it took the name Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society and, in everyday use, Cass County Historical Society. The directories of historical societies date the Society to 1952 or 1953, with its seat at Dowagiac. Its presidents can be traced through Harmon's brother-in-law George Tolbert (1942), the museum man George R. Fox (by 1955–56 until 1963) and Lee Dodd (by 1970 to about 1990). It was incorporated in 1977, and in 2026 Michigan State University authorized the sale to it of the Newton House, which the county has leased since 1974.

The cabin kept a line of its own, and since September 2026 the same man has been listed as president of both. We have not yet found a record that documents an unbroken organizational link between today's Society and the 1873 society.

Read the whole story ›

✦ NEW FINDING 6 new findings in this story. **See what's new ›**

Who inherits a society's memory? In 1873 about two hundred settlers met at the Court House to found a society that would keep the county's past. A century and a half later two organizations can trace their roots to it, and we have not yet found the paper that would prove an unbroken line to either.

On 17 September 2026 a short annual report was filed with the State of Michigan for a small nonprofit called the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum. It lists as the museum's president Darren Bettinger, who was already president of the Cass County Historical Society.

It was an ordinary piece of paperwork. It also meant that, for the first time on record since the cabin's volunteers incorporated in 2012, the two bodies that trace their roots to the Cass County Pioneer Society of 1873 had the same president. Their paths had crossed before: in 1923 the papers called the cabin's society the "Cass County Historical society," George R. Fox led the Society and helped reopen the cabin, and Lee Dodd was the Society's president by 1970 and the cabin's listed contact in 1973. One line of that society kept the log cabin its secretary built in 1923. The other kept the name "historical society," and with it, by 2026, a schoolhouse it owns, a farmhouse it runs and is set to buy, and a lecture series.

This is the story of the second line, from the 1920s to today, and of the question that runs under all three parts of this series: is today's Cass County Historical Society the same society the pioneers founded at the Court House in 1873? Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) tells the Pioneer Society's story to 1924, and Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) the cabin's.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE DOCUMENTED READING OPEN ✦ NEW FINDING

25 documented · 16 readings · 6 new

? What the marks mean

AT A GLANCE

Today	The Cass County Historical Society, a Michigan nonprofit incorporated on 20 June 1977, federally tax-exempt since March 1978
Its sites	The Newton House near Decatur (leased by Michigan State University to the county's Historical Commission since August 1974, and run by the Society; sale to the Society authorized June 2026), the Red Brick School (owned since 2024) and, with the cabin's own board, the Pioneer Log Cabin
Its year	A lecture series from April to October, moving around the county; the Fall Festival at the Newton House; Christmas at the Newton House in December
Earlier names	"The Society of the Pioneers" (1873), soon the Cass County Pioneer Society; Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society (from 1923); "Cass County Historical Society" in print by April 1923
Founded	1952 or 1953, by the directories of 1963–74, with its seat at Dowagiac; heir in name to the Pioneer Society of 1873
Presidents found	B. F. Thompson (1924–28), George H. Tolbert (1942), George R. Fox (by the winter of 1955–56 until his death in 1963), Lee Dodd (by 1970; head of the Society and the county Commission in 1974; "chairman"

	in 1977, 1980 and a 1990 directory), Claude E. Parker (1994, 1997–98), Marilyn J. Fry (1999–2015), Marilyn Seitz (2017–18), Allen Butchbaker (2019–21), Ronald McAdam (2022), Darren Bettinger (2024–); the federal filings name Alan Palmer as principal officer for 2008–15, Marilyn Fry for 2016 and Bettinger for 2023
Still unknown	Who led it in 1929–41, 1943–54, 1963–69, between Dodd and 1994, in 1995–96, and in 2016 and 2023; whether an unbroken organizational link to the 1873 society can be documented

On this page

1. From pioneers to historians, 1923–1942
2. George Fox and the second revival, c. 1933–1963
3. Building a society, 1960–1982
4. Today, 1994–2026
5. Did the Pioneer Society become the Historical Society?
6. Why it matters
7. Test yourself
8. How you can help
9. Who's who across the series
10. Timeline
11. Sources

Find in this story: a name, a place, a word

Next ›

PART I

From pioneers to historians, 1923–1942

DOCUMENTED In 1923 Charles O. Harmon revived the old Pioneer Society around the log cabin he led the county in building. From January 1923 the papers used a new name, the Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society, and that name was still in print in 1939. Its officers in 1924 and 1925 were Benjamin Franklin Thompson, a Cassopolis merchant, president; Charles A. Ritter, treasurer; and Harmon, secretary. Its June picnic of 1924, which one report called the first annual reunion, drew a huge crowd: "more than 5,000" by one estimate and "between 6,000 and 8,000" by another. The "third annual picnic and reunion of the Reorganized Cass County Pioneer and Historical society" followed in 1925, and another in 1927. READING The 1925 notice probably counted the 1923 dedication picnic as the first; a 1924 report counts 1924 as the first, and a 1928 notice dates the resumption of the reunions to 1924.

DOCUMENTED Harmon died on 26 March 1928. His obituary said that "In 1924, he reorganized the Cass County Historical Society, and was secretary of that organization" (*South Bend News-Times*, 29 March 1928). That June no picnic was planned. The *News-Times* gave two reasons, a lack of parking and the death of Harmon, its secretary, and called Thompson "president of the Cass County Historical society, which has annually sponsored the reunions since they were resumed in 1924." Thompson died on 24 October 1929, aged 73.

DOCUMENTED The museum carried on without them. By June 1930 Ritter was "the only survivor of the original officers," and the caretaker, Peter Eby, was past eighty and "still on duty." That spring the Cassopolis Woman's Club began cataloguing and labeling the relics, after studying the Chamberlain Museum at Three Oaks. At the village centennial in August 1931 much of the program was held at the cabin, and a souvenir airmail cachet showed an engraving of it. A 1941 state guide still lists the cabin as open June to September.



The village centennial at the cabin, August 1931. Photograph by Harry Ashton. From Marcia Gaskin's 1923 donor-list booklet (2012), used with her permission.

✦ NEW FINDING The short name is as old as the cabin. On 7 April 1923 the *News-Times* report of Log Hauling Day said the logs were for "the cabin to be erected by the Cass County Historical society." DOCUMENTED The short name was in the papers again by June 1927, in a headline over a story about the Pioneer and Historical Society's picnic, and again in 1928 and 1929, while directories kept the longer name until 1939. READING The name seems to have shortened in everyday use long before 1942. OPEN Who led the society from 1929 to 1941 is not yet known; the *Cassopolis Vigilant* for those years, on microfilm, is the place to look.

DOCUMENTED By the summer of 1942 a new president's name appears. *Michigan History* magazine thanked "Mr. George H. Tolbert, president of Cass County Historical Society, Cassopolis," for an article on the Bookfellow Library. Tolbert, a Porter Township farmer born in 1867, had married Linda Harmon, Charles Harmon's sister, and died at Dowagiac on 26 June 1944. OPEN A "Geo. Tolbert" of Jones gave log No. 43 to the cabin in 1923; whether he was this George H. Tolbert of Porter Township is not known. DOCUMENTED In 1944 a national directory of historical societies listed the Cass County Historical Society with Jay C. Northrop as its secretary, though Northrop had died in Calvin Township on 14 April 1942. READING So the listing cannot describe the society later than April 1942. DOCUMENTED Northrop had given a log in 1923. ✦ NEW FINDING He wrote the words of "Old Log Cabin (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/)," the song on the program for the cabin's commemoration on 28 October 1923.

READING A society whose president was Harmon's brother-in-law and whose secretary was one of Harmon's log-givers looks less like a new beginning than like Harmon's society under a new name.

PART II

George Fox and the second revival, c. 1933–1963

DOCUMENTED George R. Fox, an archaeologist and museum man, served the Chamberlain Memorial Museum at Three Oaks, first for some months in 1917 as curator of the new museum and later as its permanent curator until 1930, ran a boys' camp in Ontario for three years, and then settled in Cass County. In 1927, at a meeting at the museum he directed, he had been "elected president of the new association," the Michigan-Indiana Museums Association, which grew into today's

Association of Midwest Museums (the election: *Science*, 1927). He wrote a column on Cass County history for the *Dowagiac Daily News*, contributed to *The Acorn*, and in 1941 compiled *An Audit of the Scenic, Historical and Recreational Facilities of Cass County and Dowagiac* for the Dowagiac Chamber of Commerce. His papers at the Bentley Historical Library say that after 1930 he "moved to Cass County, worked for the city of Dowagiac, and founded a local historical society," without naming it. DOCUMENTED The Library of Michigan's entry lists, under 1933 and Dowagiac, "Worker for the city of Dowagiac and founded a local historical society." READING The only society file in his papers is the Cass County Historical Society's (minutes, 1954–1973, and a short history of the society), so the society he founded may be this one; but since a Cass County Historical Society was already in print by 1923, "founded" would then mean revived or reorganized. It may instead have been a Dowagiac society.

DOCUMENTED The Society was active again by August 1955, when *Michigan History* listed it among the county societies represented at the Upper Peninsula historical conference at Sault Ste. Marie. By the winter of 1955–56 Fox was its president, and he still was in March 1958. The Dowagiac historian Everett Claspy, who sat in on several of his meetings, wrote that Fox "was Chairman of the meeting at which the Cass County Historical Society was revived in 1958 and its President until his death," and that the Society's meetings were "still opened with the George Fox Roll call," at which "each member gives his name and place of residence." In September 1956, when the Historical Society of Michigan met at Niles, its Saturday tour was "directed by George Fox, president of the Cass County Historical Society" (*Michigan History* 40:4, p. 499). Claspy adds that Fox was treasurer of Wayne Township, that at eighty-two he went to the Seattle World's Fair of 1962, and that a scrapbook he kept is in the library of Southwestern Michigan College. Fox died on 3 June 1963, aged 83, in a Kalamazoo nursing home. He also helped reopen the log cabin after a period when it had been closed. READING His path had crossed the cabin's before. In the spring of 1930, the last year of his curatorship at Three Oaks, the Cassopolis Woman's Club studied the Chamberlain Museum before it began cataloguing and labeling the cabin's relics, so the cabin's first labels may well have followed the example of the museum Fox ran.

READING Fox was already president before 1958, so "revived" probably means reorganized. DOCUMENTED The Society had a Court House address in 1956, and its long-serving secretary, Berenice E. Vanderburg, Mrs. Lionel Vanderburg, a correspondent for the *Dowagiac Daily News* since at least 1934, was described in 1976, when she was honored for her history writing, as "one of the founders ... and its secretary for 21 years." READING The notice does not say when her twenty-one years as secretary ran; the directories below help. DOCUMENTED In 1973 a book of Michigan place names thanked her and Mrs. S. L. Loupee of the Society for their help. She died in 1999, and her *A Dowagiac Collection* (1982) was reprinted in 1985 "for her many years of service to the Cass County Historical Society."

✦ NEW FINDING The directories of historical societies give the Society a founding date of its own, and it is not 1873. In 1959 the American Association for State and Local History listed the "CASS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Dowagiac. Mrs. Bernice Vanderberg; secretary," with 260 members, a summer museum, a library and manuscripts. Its directory of 1963 gives the Society, under Cassopolis, as "Mail % Berenice E. Vanderburg, sec., 101 James St., Dowagiac. f. 1952," with 150 members, and the Historical Society of Michigan's directories of 1973 and 1974 both say "founded in 1953," again at 101 James Street, Dowagiac, with Mrs. Vanderburg as its secretary. Later accounts name charter members of a Cass County Historical Society: Dr. Sherman L. Loupee of Dowagiac, a physician and state representative from 1939 to 1948, called "a charter member of the Cass County Historical Society" when the Michigan House honored him on his ninety-third birthday in September 1965, and the Bowmans of Decatur (1976). Mrs. S. L. Loupee was one of the two members the 1973 book of place names thanked. READING Neither account says which founding it means. The Bowmans, still living in 1976, fit the 1950s better than 1923; Dr. Loupee, born in 1872, could have been a charter member of either. So the Society that Fox led was most likely organized in 1952 or 1953, with its seat at Dowagiac, where Fox worked and Mrs. Vanderburg wrote for the paper. That makes her "one of the founders" in the plain sense, and her twenty-one years as secretary would run

from about 1955 to 1976. It also makes this Society the likeliest candidate for the "local historical society" Fox founded, though the Library of Michigan dates his founding twenty years earlier. Claspy's "revived in 1958" is the hardest piece to place: the directories, Fox's presidency by the winter of 1955–56 and minutes that begin in 1954 all describe a society already at work, so 1958 was perhaps a reorganization, or a slip of memory twelve years on.



"Pioneer Log Cabin and Museum, Stone Lake, Cassopolis, Mich.," the cabin as it was by the late 1940s. Real-photo postcard by the C. R. Childs Co., Chicago; one copy was written in January 1948. Published without a copyright notice. Private collection; scan shared online.



The Cass County Court House, the Society's address in 1956. Real-photo postcard published by O. L. Yerty, about 1908–1916. David V. Tinder Collection of Michigan Photography, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

PART III

Building a society, 1960–1982

DOCUMENTED The Society compiled historical information on the county in 1960 and leased the Red Brick School in the mid-1960s. In 1972 a body under the older name, the "Cass County Pioneer and Historical association," was still running the log cabin. In 1973 the county created its own

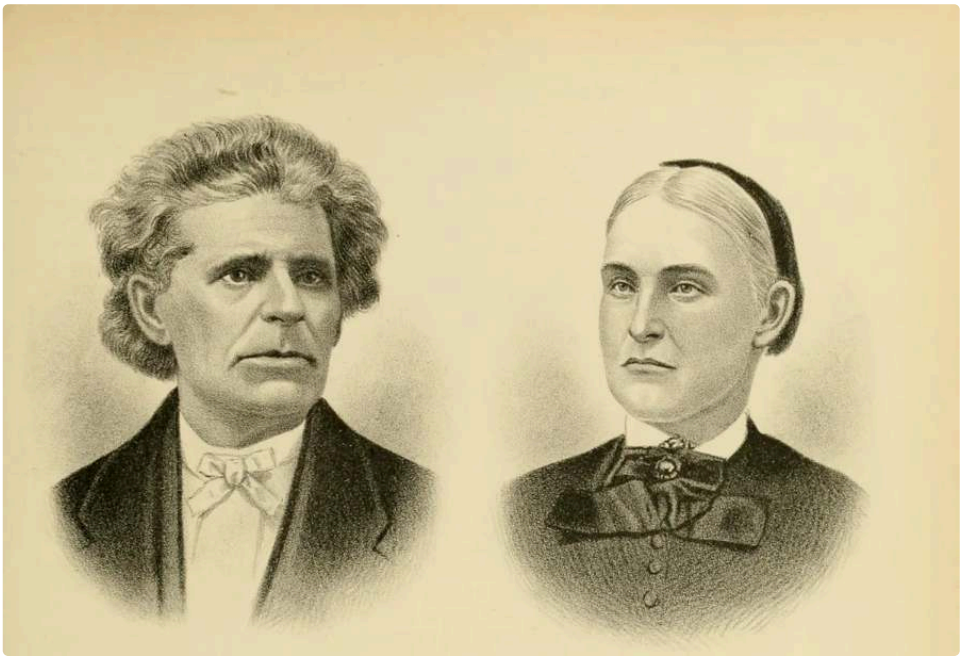
Historical Commission, which opened the Newton House for Sunday tours by February 1975, furnished largely with pieces "donated or loaned by private individuals," and was restoring it in 1977. DOCUMENTED How the house was offered to the Society is told in an undated *South Bend Tribune* article, "Offered as Cass Museum," kept in a Decatur scrapbook: the hundred-year-old forester's home at the Fred Russ Experimental Forest "has been offered to the Cass County Pioneer Historical Society for a museum," on what the forester, John Bright, expected would be "a five-year lease. During that period it would be determined if they could manage the property." If no one took it, the university planned to raze it. READING Bright was at the forest from about 1960 and gone by 1975, and the county's Historical Commission, which opened the house, was created in 1973, so the offer was probably made in 1973 or 1974. A Decatur teacher, writing her recollections about 1975 in the same scrapbook, put the Society's taking over of "the old Newton mansion" at "about 1974 or 1975," which favors 1974. A five-year term from 1974 would have run out in 1979, and a new lease, dated January 1980, was in fact made, though not with the Society (below). The article's name for the society, with "Pioneer" still in it, is worth noting too. ✦ NEW FINDING We have found no earlier telling of this offer or of the proposed trial lease.

DOCUMENTED Lee Dodd, a Howard Township farmer, former township trustee and county road commissioner, and a county commissioner in 1972–74, was its president by 1970: Everett Claspy, writing that year about a meeting of the Society at Crystal Springs reported in the *Dowagiac Daily News* of 26 July 1966, calls him "Lee Dodd, who is now President of the Society." In the same book Claspy names Mrs. Barbara Hunziker, a trustee of Southwestern Michigan College since its organization, as "now Treasurer of the County Historical Society." In June 1975 a newspaper caption named Dodd as the Society's display chairman, with James Holtz as vice-president. He was its president in October 1976, when the *Herald-Palladium* profiled him as a candidate for the county board. In September 1977, at the unveiling of the state historic-site marker at the Court House, the same paper named him "chairman of county historical society." In 1975 and 1976 the Society raised money from shows of Earl Marhanka's collection of restored antique tractors and trucks; in 1976 the proceeds were shared with the Van Buren County historical society. DOCUMENTED The record also shows how wide his reach was, and how long it lasted. The Historical Society of Michigan's *Bulletin* said in 1974 that he "heads the Cass County Historical commission and Society and the Niles-Fort St. Joseph Historical Association." Benjamin C. Wilson's 1980 study of Cass County's Black settlers thanks "Mr. Lee Dodd (chairman of the Cass County Historical Society)," and *The Official Museum Directory 1991*, published in 1990, gives "Chm. Cass County Historical Society, Lee Dodd," with a mailing address of 1666 Dodd Road, Niles. The federal lists of exempt organizations from 1982 to 1996 give the Society's address as Niles, and a state directory of 1999 still gives it as 1666 Dodd, Niles. Lee William Dodd was born on 26 November 1915 and had died by 1995, when a Niles history listed him among its late contributors; in 1998 the authors of *Pokagon Township Reflections* dedicated their book to him, a man who "probably knew and forgot more about local and Cass County history than we will ever learn." OPEN No president has yet been found for 1963–69, or for the years between Dodd and 1994.

DOCUMENTED On 27 May 1977 four members, among them Lee Dodd and James Holtz, signed articles of incorporation, filed on 20 June. The Society's stated purpose was to be "a vehicle to preserve and to perpetuate historical projects and interest in the county." It declared no real estate and no personal property, and said it would be financed by donations. Before the year was out the members amended the articles twice, adding a clause that would pass the Society's assets to other tax-exempt bodies if it were ever dissolved, and a line saying that it "is organized and operated exclusively to promote historical education, restoration and collecting only." READING That is the standard wording the federal tax rules required, and it explains what followed. DOCUMENTED In March 1978 the Society received federal tax exemption. In late 1977 it sponsored a reprint of the 1872 *Atlas of Cass County*, prepared, with an index, by the county library's staff, and in 1981 it joined the county Historical Commission and Planning Department in publishing *Historical Reflections of Cass County*.

> *"If someone does n ake it, I understand the university plans to raze it. The society has first choice."*

✦ NEW FINDING The lease went to the county, not to the Society. Michigan State University had owned the house since 1942 as part of the Fred Russ Experimental Forest. The National Register nomination of 1982 says: "In August 1974 the university leased the Newton House and its four acre site to the Cass County Historical Commission, which now operates the home as a county museum." A letter from the university's Department of Forestry in the same file, dated 10 February 1982, says the house "is leased to the Cass County Historical Commission, Cassopolis, Michigan, under a lease dated January 8, 1980, and expiring June 30, 1984." DOCUMENTED The minutes of Michigan State's trustees for 15 October 1976 already say that in 1974 the university "leased a house on the Russ Forest property to the Cass County Historical Society," and its trustees' paper of June 2026 dates a lease to the Society from January 1980, at a dollar a year; the university's own list of leased properties still names the Commission. READING So the mix-up is almost as old as the lease, and it is an easy one to forgive. In 1974 one man, Lee Dodd, headed both the Commission and the Society, and the 1990 museum directory lists the "Historical Newton Home" as governed by the commission and "affiliated with Cass County Historical Society." The lease of January 1980 was most likely a renewal of the Commission's first lease, not a beginning. DOCUMENTED The house was listed on the National Register on 12 May 1982. DOCUMENTED George Newton of Volinia, for whom the house was enlarged in 1865–68, had taken the chair at the first meeting of the Pioneer Society at the Court House on 9 October 1873 (Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)). So the Society now keeps the home of the man who opened the pioneers' first meeting. Its story, from George Newton's farm to the university's forest, is told in The Newton House (projectscroll.com/news/the-newton-house/).



George Newton and Mrs. Newton, whose farmhouse near Decatur the county has leased since 1974 and the Society keeps today. George Newton chaired the first morning of the Pioneer Society's founding meeting in 1873. Engravings in Mathews, *History of Cass County* (1882). Internet Archive. Public domain.

PART IV

Today, 1994–2026

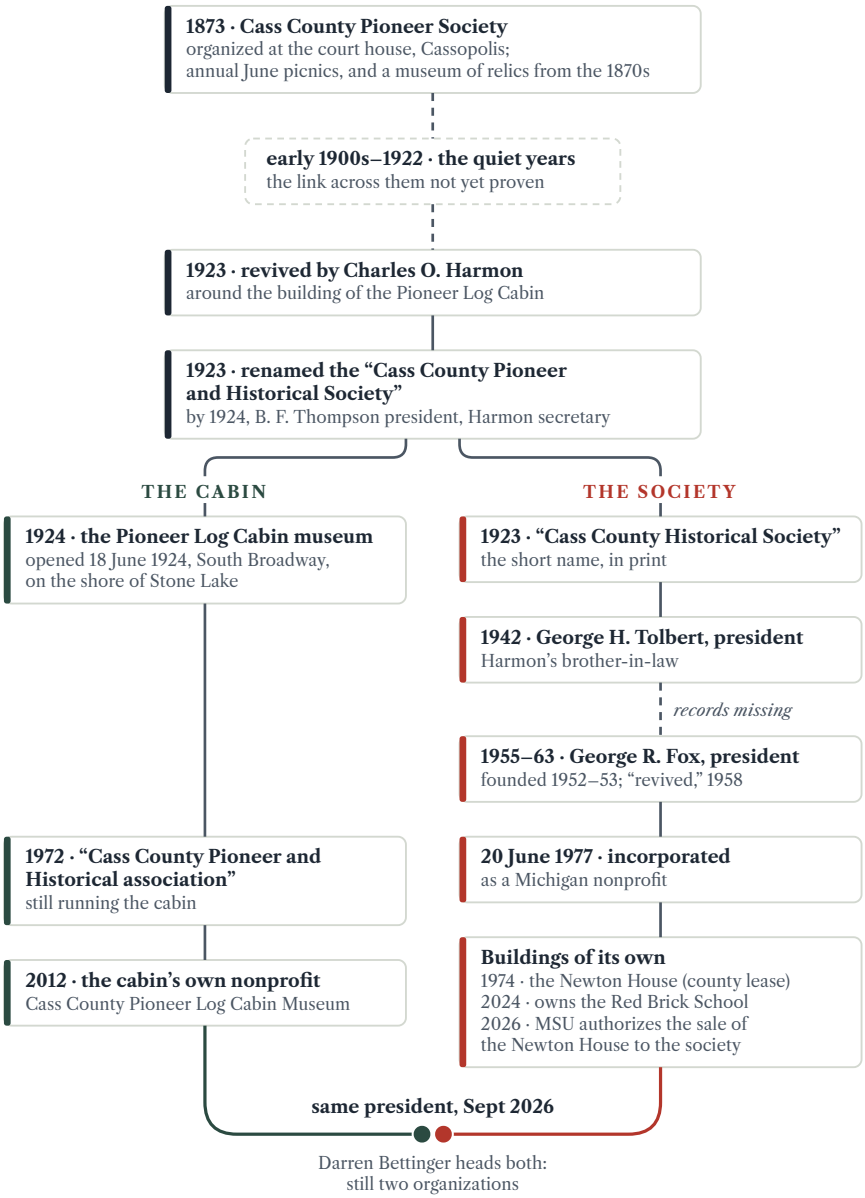
DOCUMENTED The Society's state filings name a line of presidents: Claude E. Parker in 1994 and in 1997–98; Marilyn J. Fry of Cassopolis, president for seventeen years, from 1999 until her death, which the Society's 2016 annual report records; Marilyn Seitz in 2017–18, when the Society described itself as "in charge of preserving the Newton House in Cass County"; Allen Butchbaker in 2019–21; Ronald McAdam in 2022; and Darren Bettinger from 2024, with Melissa Bettinger as secretary and treasurer. ✦ NEW FINDING The Society's yearly e-Postcards to the Internal Revenue Service, filed for every tax year since 2008, name a "principal officer" for every year but 2018: Alan Palmer for 2008 to 2015, Marilyn Fry for 2016, Allen Butchbaker for 2017 and 2019–21, Ron McAdam for 2022, and Darren Bettinger for 2023 to 2025. Alan Ray Palmer (1935–2023), formerly of Dowagiac, retired after more than thirty years with General Telephone; he was "a proud member of the Cass County Historical Society," where he volunteered, and he helped establish the Dowagiac Area History Museum. READING A principal officer is whoever the filer names, not always the president: the state reports name Fry as president through 2015 and Seitz for 2017. So the filings suggest who led the Society in 2016 and 2023 without proving it (the 2016 filing, made in May 2017, may simply carry over Fry's name), and Palmer may have kept the Society's books. OPEN The annual reports for 1979–1993 and 1995–96, which would name the presidents for those years (1978 is not yet traced), are held by the Archives of Michigan.

DOCUMENTED The Society resumed regular meetings in 2021, and it now meets on the third Tuesday of each month at changing places. In 2024 it took ownership of the Red Brick School, which dates from 1848. In June 2026 Michigan State University's trustees authorized the sale of the Newton House to the Society, which runs and maintains the house and wants to own it so that it can apply for restoration grants; the proceeds go to the Russ Forest endowment, and the university keeps the forest.

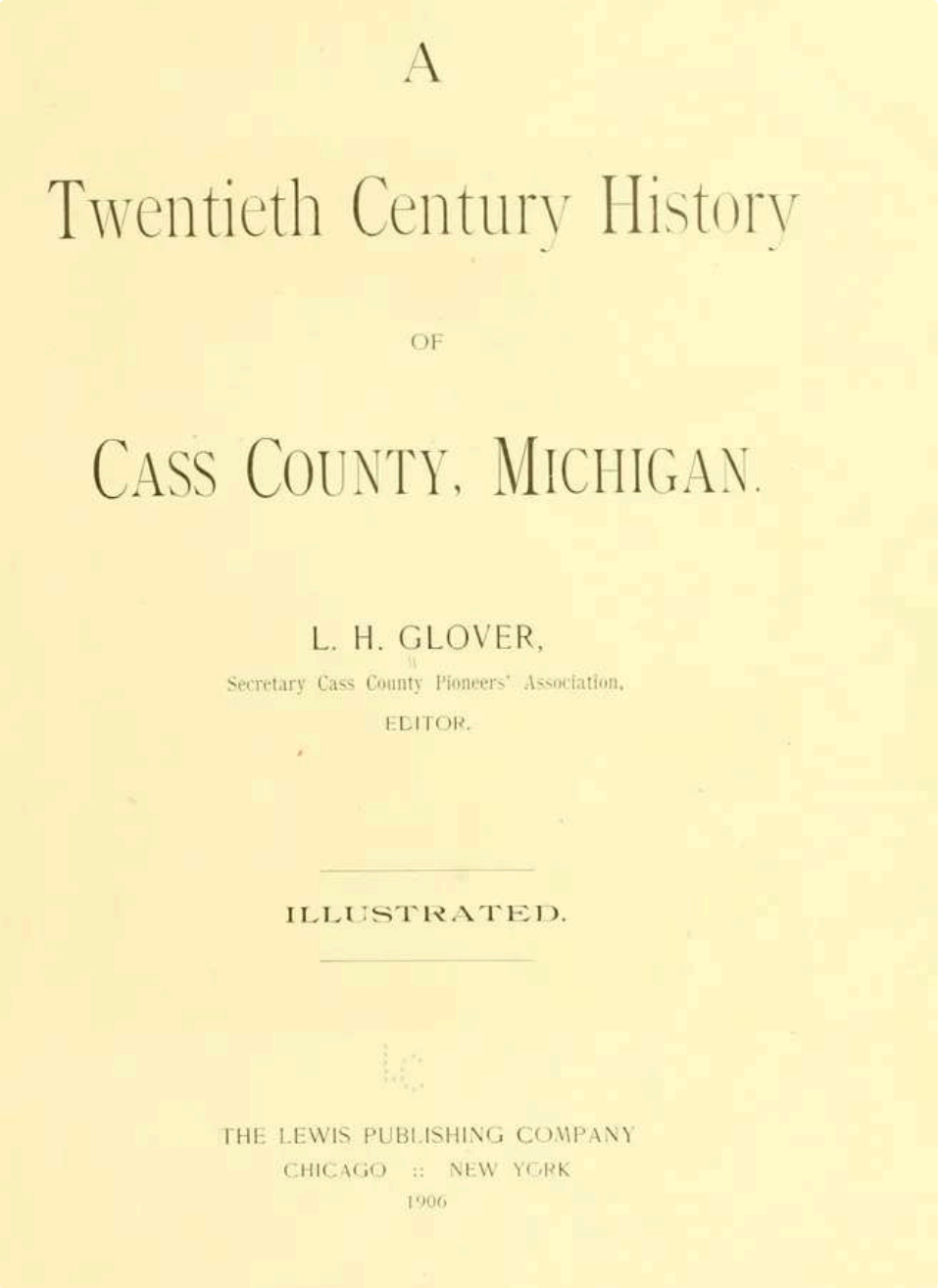
DOCUMENTED Today the Society runs a lecture series from April to October that meets in a different part of the county each month and ends with its Fall Festival at the Newton House, which it calls its biggest event of the year; in December it opens the house for Christmas. Its events are on our Seasons (projectscroll.com/seasons/) calendar. The cabin museum's annual report of 17 September 2026 lists the Society's president as its president too. DOCUMENTED The Society's stated purpose has changed with the years. Its annual reports gave it as "promote History of Cass Co. & Educate its citizens of our History" in 2001 and "Historical Education & Preservation of Local History" in 2019, and since 2024 as "Dedicated to preserving the history of Cass County, MI for future generations."

PART V

Did the Pioneer Society become the Historical Society?



One society, two lines. The Pioneer Society of 1873 came back to life around the log cabin in 1923; after 1924 the cabin and the society slowly became separate lines, which crossed more than once (Fox and Lee Dodd served both), and in September 2026 they share a president. Dashed links are where the record has gaps. Sources are given in the text of this series.



A

Twentieth Century History

OF

CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN.

L. H. GLOVER,

Secretary Cass County Pioneers' Association,

EDITOR.

ILLUSTRATED.

THE LEWIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

CHICAGO :: NEW YORK

1906

The society's name in 1906: Glover signed his county history as "Secretary Cass County Pioneers' Association." Internet Archive. Public domain.

READING Here is the honest answer as the evidence stands.

For: the Historical Society presents the Pioneer Society's history as part of its own, and its website dates the Pioneer Society to 1874 (Part 1 gives 1873, from Mathews and Glover); in 1925 Harmon's society called itself "Reorganized," not new; its presidents included Harmon's brother-in-law (1942) and its secretary was a 1923 log-giver; the name changed step by step, from Pioneer Society to Pioneer and Historical Society to Historical Society; and Harmon's own obituary already used the short name.

Against: the directories of historical societies date the Society to 1952 or 1953, with its seat at Dowagiac; it was "revived" in 1958; a 1976 notice called its long-serving secretary, who had held the post for 21 years, "one of the founders"; it was incorporated in 1977, and its articles list no property; and in 1972 the cabin was run by a separately named "Pioneer and Historical association," nearly the name Harmon's society had used in 1924, which suggests the cabin's keepers saw themselves as that society's heirs.

So far: the Historical Society is the Pioneer Society's heir in purpose and in some of its people. The cabin has a line of its own, from the 1972 association to the 2012 nonprofit, which may be the more direct descendant of Harmon's society. Since September 2026 the same man has been listed as president of both. We have not yet found a record that documents an unbroken organizational link between either of them and the society of 1873.

PART VI

Why it matters

READING The question of who is the pioneers' heir is not a quarrel about a name. The heir is the one who holds the memory: the minutes, the relics, the buildings, and the duty to hand them on. Records go missing when nobody is sure whose they are, and that may be one reason this story has gaps.

READING Whichever line can claim the pioneers, both are doing what the pioneers set out to do. The Historical Society keeps a schoolhouse and a farmhouse, and runs a season of lectures that moves around the county; the cabin's volunteers open its door on summer weekends. The best answer may be the one the pioneers gave in 1873: come to the meeting, sign the roll, and bring something worth keeping.

PART VII

Test yourself

Ten questions from all three parts. Tap an answer to see whether you are right, and why.

1. **When was the Cass County Pioneer Society founded?**

   1850 · 1873 · 1898 · 1923

   About two hundred settlers met at the Court House in Cassopolis on 9 October 1873. Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)

2. **Where was the Society's museum kept in 1879–80?**

   In the Court House lobby · In I. V. Sherman's store · In the log cabin · In the Newton House

   The assistant secretary, I. V. Sherman, kept it at his store until the county gave the Society a Court House room in 1882. Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)

3. **How many people did the papers say came to the 1879 picnic?**

   About 500 · About 2,000 · Ten thousand · Fifty thousand

   "Ten thousand people attended the annual pioneers' picnic at Cassopolis." It was a guess, and probably a generous one. Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)

4. **What did Henry Michael give the Society in 1878?**

   A bass drum · A miniature log cabin · A millstone · A balloon

   Forty-five years before the real cabin, a miniature one "all complete, which attracted much

attention." Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)

5. **How many logs are on the 1923 numbered donor list?**

   52 · 100 · 144 · 170

   144 numbered logs; the paper counted 146 on the ground and a postcard says 170. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

6. **What was log No. 1?**

   A black walnut · A white oak · A beech · A sycamore

   A 52-foot beech "from the Major Smith Homestead," given by Mr. and Mrs. A. N. Armstrong, the Major's granddaughter and her husband. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

7. **How big was a 1924 souvenir "lot" of the cabin grounds?**

   One square inch · One foot by three feet · Ten feet square · A quarter acre

   1,212 lots, each one foot by three, at a dollar apiece; every buyer gave the lot back to the Society. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

8. **Who kept the cabin's door in its first years?**

   George R. Fox · Peter Eby · Lee Dodd · Jay C. Northrop

   Peter Eby, almost certainly Charles Harmon's uncle, still on duty past eighty in 1930. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

9. **Who wrote the words of the cabin's song, "Old Log Cabin"?**

   Charles O. Harmon · Ralph Scoles Thomas · Jay C. Northrop · Will Carleton

   Jay C. Northrop, who gave log No. 6. The words have not been found. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

10. **Which house does the Cass County Historical Society keep today, the home of the man who opened the pioneers' first meeting?**

    The Bonine House · The Newton House · The Colonial · The Red Brick School

    George Newton of Volinia chaired the first morning of the founding meeting in 1873; his farmhouse near Decatur is the Newton House. Part 3 › (projectscroll.com/news/keepers-of-the-county/)

Score: **0** of 10

PART VIII

How you can help

WANTED

HELP FILL THE GAPS

For most of the twentieth century, the Society's records have not turned up in the public collections we have searched; the Society may hold some. If your family was involved, look for:

1. programs, minutes, letters or membership cards of the Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society or the Cass County Historical Society, 1923–1993;
2. newspaper clippings about its meetings, picnics and presidents, especially 1929–41 and 1963–69;
3. photographs of George R. Fox, Berenice Vanderburg, Lee Dodd or the Society's early meetings at the Court House;
4. anything about the Newton House or the Red Brick School in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Society itself welcomes members, volunteers and donations for its three historic sites, and its website lists each year's lectures. If you hold a record that answers one of the questions above, please write to us at research@projectscroll.com.

PART IX

Who's who across the series

The same names turn up across fifty years and three parts: founders of 1873, their children and grandchildren in 1923, and the keepers who followed. Follow a family from one part to the next.

George Newton	Chaired the first morning of the pioneers' founding meeting, 1873; the Newton House was his home	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) · Part 3 *The Newton House* (projectscroll.com/news/the-newton-house/)
Major Joseph Smith	Almost certainly the Society's first treasurer, 1873; the cabin's first log came from his homestead	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)
John and Addie Tietsort	He was the first assistant secretary, 1873; his widow stood at Building Day, 1923	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) · Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

John and Arthur Nixon	"The father of the Cass County Pioneer Society"; the cabin's last numbered log, from his grandson	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)
Henry Michael	Gave the miniature log cabin, 1878; president, 1896	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) *The miniature cabin (projectscroll.com/news/the-miniature-log-cabin-of-1878/)*
James G. and Asa K. Hayden	An officer of the Society, 1917; his son, the village president, spoke at Building Day	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)
Henry and Charles H. Kimmerle	Charles spoke at Building Day; his father Henry was almost certainly the Society's president of 1888	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)
Charles O. Harmon	Revived the Society and led the building of the cabin, 1923–28	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) Part 3
Peter Eby	Almost certainly Harmon's uncle; the	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) Part 3 *The caretaker (projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/)*

	cabin's caretaker	
Charles A. and Joseph K. Ritter	Treasurer of the revived Society, 1924; his son helped reopen the cabin	Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/) Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) Part 3
Jay C. Northrop	Gave log No. 6 and wrote the cabin's song; named as the Historical Society's secretary in a 1944 directory	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) Part 3 *The song (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/)*
George R. Fox	Helped reopen the cabin; president of the Historical Society until 1963	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) Part 3
Lee Dodd	President, later chairman, of the Historical Society from 1970 or earlier to about 1990, and head of the county Historical Commission in 1974; the cabin's contact, 1973	Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/) Part 3

PART X

Timeline

1873 The Cass County Pioneer Society founded at the Court House (Part 1 (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/))

50 YEARS LATER

1923–24	Harmon revives it as the Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society; the log cabin built (Part 2 (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/))
Apr 1923	“Cass County Historical society” in print, in a report of Log Hauling Day
1924–28	B. F. Thompson, president; Charles A. Ritter, treasurer; Harmon, secretary
26 Mar 1928	Harmon dies; no picnic planned that June
1930–31	The Woman’s Club begins cataloguing and labeling the relics; much of the Cassopolis centennial planned for the cabin
1939	“Cass County Pioneer and Historical Society” still in print
1942	George H. Tolbert, president; Jay C. Northrop listed as secretary in a 1944 directory (he died in April 1942)
1952–53	The Society founded anew, by the directories of 1963 and 1973–74, with its seat at Dowagiac
1955–63	George R. Fox, president until his death; the Society “revived” in 1958
3 Jun 1963	Fox dies
mid-1960s	The Society leases the Red Brick School
1970–c. 1990	Lee Dodd, president or chairman; in 1974 he heads the county Commission too
1972	The “Pioneer and Historical association” still runs the cabin
1973	County Historical Commission created
Aug 1974	MSU leases the Newton House to the county Historical Commission
20 Jun 1977	Incorporated as a Michigan nonprofit
Mar 1978	Federal tax exemption
8 Jan 1980	A new lease to the Commission, to June 1984
12 May 1982	Newton House on the National Register
1994, 1997–98	Claude E. Parker, president
1999–2015	Marilyn J. Fry, president; Alan Palmer, principal officer on the federal filings, 2008–15
2017–22	Marilyn Seitz, Allen Butchbaker and Ronald McAdam, presidents
2021	Regular meetings resume
2024	The Society owns the Red Brick School; Darren Bettinger, president
12 Jun 2026	MSU authorizes sale of the Newton House to the Society
Sep 2026	The cabin museum’s nonprofit names the Society’s president as its own

Editorial independence. Project Scroll is an independent publication. It is not affiliated with or sponsored by the Cass County Historical Society or the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum, and it does not speak for either. Neither organization commissioned, reviewed or approved this story; their names are used only to identify them. We would welcome either organization as a sponsor of this series, and we would be glad to collaborate on research and writing projects or to publish articles by their members and volunteers. Sponsors and collaborators are always credited on the page, and our research remains independent. Ways to work with us › (projectscroll.com/sponsor-and-advertise/#together)

THE CASS COUNTY PIONEER SOCIETY · A SERIES IN THREE PARTS

Part 1: A museum before there was a museum (projectscroll.com/news/a-museum-before-there-was-a-museum/)

Part 2: The cabin a county built (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/)

Part 3: Keepers of the county

Short stories from the same records: the miniature cabin of 1878 (projectscroll.com/news/the-miniature-log-cabin-of-1878/) · balloons over the 1890 picnic (projectscroll.com/news/balloons-over-the-pioneer-picnic/) · the day 3,000 came to watch one log (projectscroll.com/news/the-day-3000-came-to-watch-one-log/) · the cabin that opened twice (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-that-opened-twice/) · the caretaker (projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/) · the song "Old Log Cabin" (projectscroll.com/news/old-log-cabin-the-song/)
The whole series as one PDF › (projectscroll.com/data/pioneer-society-series.pdf) · A one-page handout for the cabin's visitors › (projectscroll.com/data/pioneer-log-cabin-handout.pdf)

✦ NEW FINDING **WHAT'S NEW HERE**

The Newton House was leased in August 1974 to the Cass County Historical *Commission*, not the Society, and held in 1982 under a lease dated 8 January 1980 and running to June 1984: so says the National Register nomination of 1982, with a letter from Michigan State University's Department of Forestry in the same file. Michigan State's trustees named the Society as tenant in 1976 (for the lease of 1974) and again in a paper of June 2026 that dates the Society's lease to January 1980; in 1974 one man, Lee Dodd, headed both bodies.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 28 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The directories of historical societies date the Cass County Historical Society to 1952 (AASLH, 1963) or 1953 (Historical Society of Michigan, 1973 and 1974), with its seat at Dowagiac, the address of its secretary Berenice E. Vanderburg, and a 1965 tribute calls Dr. Sherman L. Loupee of Dowagiac a charter member. That explains why a 1976 notice called Mrs. Vanderburg "one of the founders," and makes the Society the likeliest candidate for the local historical society George R. Fox founded.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 28 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The Society's federal e-Postcards, filed for every tax year since 2008, name its principal officers (all but 2018): Alan Palmer, formerly of Dowagiac (2008–15), Marilyn Fry (2016), Allen Butchbaker (2017, 2019–21), Ron McAdam (2022) and Darren Bettinger (2023–25). Palmer's name appears in no earlier account of the Society.

New documentation · Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 28 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

An undated *South Bend Tribune* article, "Offered as Cass Museum," kept in a Decatur scrapbook, reports that Michigan State University offered the Newton House "to the Cass County Pioneer Historical Society for a museum," on what its forester expected would be "a five-year lease" to test whether the society could manage it, and that the university planned to raze the house if no one took it. From the forester it names, it probably dates from 1973 or 1974; the house was in fact leased to the county's Historical Commission in August 1974, with a new lease dated January 1980.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.

▸ What we searched

The Pioneer Log Cabin had its own song: the program of the commemoration at the cabin on Sunday, 28 October 1923 includes "Song. 'Old Log Cabin,' words by Jay C. Northrup" (*South Bend News-Times*, 24 October 1923). Jay C. Northrop had given log No. 6.

Found by Michael Urbanski , *Project Scroll, 25 October 2026.*

▶ What we searched

The name "Cass County Historical society" is as old as the Pioneer Log Cabin: on 7 April 1923 the *South Bend News-Times* report of Log Hauling Day said the logs were for "the cabin to be erected by the Cass County Historical society." The earliest use found before was in 1927.

Found by Michael Urbanski , *Project Scroll, 26 October 2026.*

▶ What we searched

A **new finding** is a fact found in a primary source that we could not find in any published history, article or website we searched. Credit: Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will say so here. All our discoveries › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/)

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Numbers in the text point to this list; entries without a number are further sources we consulted. How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/) · The libraries behind all our stories › (projectscroll.com/sources/libraries/)

VISIT AND SEE

Newton House. George Newton's farmhouse in the Russ Forest, kept by the Cass County Historical Society. Open for the Society's Fall Festival and at Christmas; check the Society's website first.
Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=20689%20Marcellus%20Hwy%2C%20Decatur%2C%20MI%2049045)

Red Brick School. The Historical Society's schoolhouse, on M-62 about two miles south of Cassopolis. Open on special days; check the Society's website first.
Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=Red%20Brick%20School%20House%2C%20M-62%2C%20Cassopolis

Pioneer Log Cabin Museum. The 1923 cabin on Stone Lake. Open on summer weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day and for special events; check the museum's Facebook page before you go. Admission is free; the museum is supported by donations and its gift shop.
Directions › (https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=400%20S%20Broadway%20St%2C%20Cassopolis%2C%20MI%2049

Public places only. Please respect private land and posted hours.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Project Scroll is independent research and does not speak for the Cass County Historical Society or the Cass County Pioneer Log Cabin Museum. Their names are used here only to identify them, and the history on this page is drawn from the published record cited below.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Research and reporting
Michael Urbanski (projectscroll.com/about/michael-urbanski/) · Project Scroll

SOURCES	Every fact on this page is drawn from the sources listed above, and each can be checked where it is held.
CORRECTIONS	Errors are corrected on the page, and each correction is noted there.
CONTACT	To report an error or share a record that adds to the story, write to research@projectscroll.com.
METHOD	How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/)

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