PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-44

The keepers of the Pioneer Log Cabin, 1930–1965: Peter Eby, Charles O. Harmon's uncle, and Arthur and Till Nixon, grandson of the man called the Pioneer Society's "father"

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SUMMARY

Published accounts of the Pioneer Log Cabin at Cassopolis, Michigan, name its builder, Charles O. Harmon, but not the people who kept it open after him. In June 1930 the *South Bend News-Times* wrote that "Peter Eby was chosen caretaker and although he has passed the four score mark is still on duty to welcome old residents and to explain the exhibits," and pictured him with Harmon before the cabin. Glover's county history of 1906 lists the children of the Porter Township pioneer Gabriel Eby, beginning "Catherine, the widow of John B. Harmon ... Peter," and Harmon's obituary names his parents as "John B. and Catherine Eby Harmon": the caretaker was almost certainly Harmon's uncle. The cabin's last numbered log, No. 144, was given in 1923 by "Art Nixon for Nixon Estate." A Jones family genealogy of 1951 shows Arthur K. Nixon, born at Cassopolis in 1883, as a son of Phineas Nixon and grandson of Esther (Jones) Nixon, wife of the John Nixon whom Mathews in 1882 called "the father of the Cass County Pioneer Society"; it adds that in 1949 Arthur and his wife Till lived at Cassopolis, "where they supervised Cass County Historical Museum." The museum directories of 1961 and 1965 name "Mrs. Arthur Nixon" as the cabin's director.

THE RECORD

1. **George Scheuer, article on the Pioneer Log Cabin, *South Bend News-Times*, 7 June 1930, Part Two, p. 1 (Chronicling America image 23)**

> *"Peter Eby was chosen caretaker and although he has passed the four score mark is still on duty to welcome old residents and to explain the exhibits to the present generation."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn87055779/1930-06-07/ed-1/?sp=23)

2. **"Prominent Residents and Interesting Views in Town of Cassopolis," photographs, ibid.**

> *"No. 2, the late Charles O. Harmon, founder of the Cass County Pioneer association, standing, and Peter Eby, caretaker of the museum, seated, before the Log cabin which houses the relics assembled by the society"*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn87055779/1930-06-07/ed-1/?sp=23)

3. **L. H. Glover, ed., *A Twentieth Century History of Cass County, Michigan* (Chicago: Lewis, 1906), p. 621: "Gabriel Eby"**

> *"The record is as follows: Catherine, the widow of John B. Harmon and a resident of Cassopolis; Peter, who is mentioned on another page of this work; ... "*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/twentiethcentury00glov)

4. **Glover, ibid., pp. 537–538: "Peter Eby"**

> *Peter Eby, of Porter Township, "born on the 9th of August, 1848. He is the eldest son of Gabriel and Caroline (Wagner) Eby."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/twentiethcentury00glov)

5. **Obituary of Charles O. Harmon, Cassopolis, *South Bend News-Times*, 29 March 1928, p. 5**

> *"He was born in Porter township, Cass county, March 6, 1866, the oldest of four children born to John B. and Catherine Eby Harmon."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn87055779/1928-03-29/ed-1/?sp=5)

6. **Marcia Gaskin, comp., *1923 Pioneer Log Cabin Museum Searchable Donor List* (Cassopolis, 2012), donor list, log No. 144**

> *"Art Nixon for Nixon Estate Cassopolis," the last numbered entry.*

Pioneer Log Cabin Museum, Cassopolis; scan at the Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/pioneer_log_cabin_museum_text_searchable1a)

7. **Alfred Mathews, *History of Cass County, Michigan* (Chicago: Waterman, Watkins & Co., 1882), Penn Township, biography of John Nixon**

> *"He 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."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/historyofcasscou00wate)

8. ***Jones and Related Families: A Genealogical Compilation* (1951), Eighth Generation, p. 189: children of Phineas Nixon (no. 726, son of Esther Jones Nixon)**

> *"Arthur K. b. 4-1883 Cassopolis, Mich., m. 6-8-1926 Till Wieland-Mater. He was a farmer and under Sheriff of Cass County. Res: Cassopolis, Mich., 1949, where they supervised Cass County Historical Museum"*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/jonesrelatedfami00jone)

9. ***Museums Directory of the United States and Canada* (1961), no. 1762, and (1965), no. 2055**

> *1961: "PIONEER LOG CABIN, S. Broadway, Mrs. Arthur Nixon, Dir."; 1965: "PIONEER LOG CABIN, South Broadway, Director: Mrs. Arthur Nixon."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/museumsdirectory0000unse)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The cabin's keeping after Harmon's death is no longer anonymous. Its caretaker around 1930 was, almost certainly, Harmon's own uncle, an eighty-year-old Porter Township farmer; and the couple who supervised the county's museum by 1949 and directed the cabin in the 1960s were Arthur K. Nixon, who gave its last numbered log, and his wife Till. Through Arthur the cabin's keeping runs back to John Nixon, whom the county history of 1882 called the Pioneer Society's father.

LIMITS

That the caretaker was Gabriel Eby's son Peter is a reading: the 1930 article gives no parentage, and the Eby family had more than one Peter. The genealogy of 1951 does not name the museum it calls the "Cass County Historical Museum"; that it was the Pioneer Log Cabin rests on the later directories. The link from "Art Nixon" of the donor list to Arthur K. Nixon rests on the name and on Cassopolis; the line from Arthur to John Nixon rests on the 1951 genealogy, which descends through Esther Jones Nixon. Mathews's word "father" is a tribute, not an office: Nixon is not on Glover's list of the Society's presidents.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The cabin's booklet of 2012 (Gaskin); the Cass County Historical Society's and the cabin museum's pages; Wikipedia; articles of 2003–2013 in the *Leader* (Dowagiac); the Village of Cassopolis parks page; Mathews (1882) and Glover (1906); the museum directories of 1961 and 1965; Chronicling America for Peter Eby and the cabin, 1924–1931; the Internet Archive's full text for Arthur K. Nixon; web searches. None names a

caretaker or a keeper of the cabin between Harmon and the 1970s, or connects the giver of log No. 144 with John Nixon.

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

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

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WORKS CITED

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

1. Michael Urbanski, “The cabin a county built,” *Project Scroll* (2026), Part 2 of the series on the Cass County Pioneer Society. https://projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/
2. Michael Urbanski, “The caretaker was Harmon’s uncle,” *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/the-caretaker-was-harmons-uncle/

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The cabin a county built (projectscroll.com/news/the-cabin-a-county-built/). In the discoveries register:

- `eby-caretaker-uncle` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#eby-caretaker-uncle)
- `nixon-last-log` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#nixon-last-log)
- `nixons-museum-1949` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#nixons-museum-1949)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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