

CHAPTER SIX

THE PIONEER VILLAGE

In 1956, when the Authority's annual meeting endorsed a proposal to establish a Pioneer Village at Fanshawe, the site chosen was but a plot of unused ground. By 1968 it had become one of the show places of the district, steeped in history and lore.

The Parks and Recreation advisory board, headed by Grant Sutherland, wanted the village to be a complete example of early Canadian living and working. To help fulfill their aspirations, the board members turned to Dr. Wilfrid Jury, whose reputation as an authority on early Canadiana was well established. Dr. Jury was director of the University of Western Ontario Museum of Indian Archaeology and Pioneer Life. Not only did Dr. Jury agree to become technical supervisor of the project, but promised to make available many relics of the past as soon as the Authority had buildings to house them. Dr. Jury and his father, the late Amos Jury, over the years had amassed a treasure of articles used in the pioneer days of this country, and the buildings on their farm in Lobo bulged with them. Many had already been donated to the university, but lacking a suitable place to display them the university, through the good offices of Dr. Jury, gave them to the Village on permanent loan.

The advisory board set up a 10-year development program, which was approved by the Department of Planning and Development. Financial assistance was also obtained from the Ontario Archaeological and Historical Sites Board. People of the area were encouraged to donate articles and the response was most generous.

It seems fitting that the first building erected on the site was a log cabin, as a shelter for his family would be about the first thing to concern a pioneer when he decided to settle. The logs for the cabin, completed in 1957, came from the Weekes farm in West Nissouri, and were said to be more than 125 years old. The cabin was taken apart log by log and reassembled in its new location, under the supervision of Gordon Cochrane of London, a pioneer woodsman and teamster. During the construction period groups of students visited the site to see workmen using the old-fashioned adze and other primitive tools.



Log Cabin and Stable



Interior of Log Cabin

Between 1957 and the date of the official opening of the Village on June 26, 1959, a stable, a combined store and meeting hall, a blacksmith and a carpenter shop had been completed and the area enclosed by a fence of split rails and stumps. Material for the stable came from the Elgie farm in West Nissouri and the meeting hall, known as the Purple Hill Orange Hall, came from the same township. The blacksmith and carpenter shops, including the bellows, were designed by Park Superintendent Rex H. Bishop and were erected by the parks staff, using materials gathered from the district.

Official opening day was a gala occasion. Dr. Richardson turned the key in the lock of the log cabin, while Dr. Jury gave a brief history of the Village. Mayor Allan Johnston of London and John White, MPP for South London, extended congratulations. Members of three Middlesex Women's Institutes demonstrated the art of weaving, spinning and soap making and held a quilting bee. The blacksmith shop was in operation, and pigs and chickens wandered around the enclosure near the stable. Women's Institute officials attending included Mrs. George Wilson, RR 6 St. Marys, national public relations director; Mrs. James D. Hossack, Embro, zone representative and Mrs. Earl Boyes, representing the South Perth WI. Three members of the Middlesex Museum Committee, Mrs. J. L. Lawton, of Dorchester, Mrs. Lorne Crinklaw, of London and Mrs. Gordon Culver, of Komoka, were also present. J. J. McHale Jr., was master of ceremonies.



At the Opening, from the left, Dr. and Mrs. A. H. Richardson, Mr. and Mrs. J. J. McHale, Jr., Mrs. G. W. Pittock, Mr. Pittock, Dr. and Mrs. Wilfrid Jury, N. A. Bradford, Mrs. John White, Mr. White.

*Roy Bain, in the
blacksmith shop,
demonstrates his skill
by shoeing a horse.*



The Quilting Bee.



*Mrs. George Zavitz,
Ilderton,
sells old-fashioned
candy in the
General Store.*



*Mrs. Frank Baker,
Fanshawe,
demonstrates her
skill in spinning.*

While the century-old Orange Hall was in place for the official opening, the formal handing over ceremony did not take place until June 22, 1960. Led by the Hackett Lodge and Young Conquerors Bands, the members of Middlesex Lodge marched from the park entrance to the Village where T. J. Dolan accepted a Union Jack from County Master J. B. Carson. The keys to the hall were handed to Grant Sutherland by William Tatford of Sarnia, Western Ontario Grand Master of the Orange Lodge.

In 1960 a log barn on the Colbert farm in West Nissouri was dismantled and brought to the Village, where it was reassembled in 1962. During the winter of 1960-61, a row of four shops was built by the parks staff and furnished as a saddler's shop, a gunsmith's shop, a barber shop and a general store. Some of the material going into the shops came from an old harness shop on Ridout Street, London, opposite the court house and from an old army officers' mess in London. Old tools were obtained from the Rigney harness shop in London and guns from W. H. Soper, London's pioneer gunsmith. Robert Fontaine, owner of a well-known London barber supply shop, provided a barber's chair. About the same time a 350-pound anvil was brought from Mornington Township, near Newton, for the blacksmith shop. This anvil was brought to Canada in 1850 by Donald Davidson, who used it when he farmed and smithed in Mornington.



Adding much to the success of the Village opening were these Women's Institute members. Standing, left to right, Mrs. George Wilson, Kirkton; Mrs. Lorne Crinklaw, London; Mrs. Frank Baker, Fanshawe; Mrs. Neil Campbell, Lobo; Mrs. George Zavitz, Ilderton; Mrs. Clarence Lewis, Granton; Mrs. Frank Hardy, Lucan; Mrs. Richard Jensen, Willow Grove; kneeling, left to right, Mrs. Carman Dann, Bryans-ton; Mrs. J. A. Lawton, Dorchester; Mrs. Gordon Culver, Komoka; Mrs. John Davis, Ailsa Craig.

In 1961 the Village obtained the old Lochaber Free Presbyterian Church, which was located near the village of Nairn. The sale, for one dollar, was arranged through Mr. and Mrs. Max Campbell, with the stipulation that the building remain as a church and that the congregation be allowed to use it for up to three services a year. In the same year a maze was planted, patterned after the Hampton Court maze in England. A driveshed, behind the church, was completed in 1963, using material from an old driveshed at Bryanston.



Lochaber Church on Original Site.

Late in 1962 a weaver's shop was brought to the Village from the Jury farm in Lobo and was refurbished the following year. This shop has been used for more than 110 years and is capable of making full cloth, horse blankets and carpets. It was first used by Thomas Alder, grandfather of Dr. Jury. The same year, a steam traction engine was received from L.S. Johnson, RR 4, St. Thomas.

In 1963 the Authority was offered the former home of the famous London artist, Paul Peel, but a financial problem arose — the cost of moving, estimated at \$1,250. The house was located on Richmond Street, London, and was owned by C. E. Isard and Ben Baldwin. It was offered to Orlo Miller, well known writer and historian, on condition that it be moved. Mr. Miller, now a Church of England priest, gave valuable assistance to the Authority in early park planning at Fanshawe and wanted to see the Peel house become part of the Village. Mayor Vincent Barrie of St. Thomas came to the rescue by sparking a drive to raise funds to move it. The house arrived at the Village in March, 1963.

So many buildings and articles had been added to the Village since it was officially opened in 1959 that another ceremonial opening took place May 22, 1963 in the Lochaber Church. Guest speaker was John K. Elliott, editor of The London Free Press, and an honorary member of the Village advisory board. Demonstrations were given in the blacksmith shop and the weaver's shop, and the East Middlesex Women's Institute set up a display of pioneer articles in the hall.

A fire hall was constructed in 1964 and houses an ancient horse-drawn hose reel wagon, placed there on permanent loan by the city of London, at the suggestion of Fire Chief M. C. Mathers.

Later acquisitions, obtained in 1967, were the old Dorie Miller house, moved from Wildwood, and a replica of the first home of The London Free Press, dating back to 1848. The Miller house, a frame structure, is typical of the architecture in the Wildwood area around 1865. Reproduction of the pre-Confederation Free Press building, fully equipped with old presses, old type and old type cases, was that newspaper's contribution to London's Centennial celebration. Extensive research was done to assure that the plant was authentic in every way.

A forward step was taken in 1967 when the Authority engaged Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Hossack, of Embro, as supervisors of the Village. Mr. Hossack was the Authority's representative from Embro from 1957 to 1966 and a former warden of Oxford County. Mrs. Hossack was active in Women's Institute work for many years and their interest in the Village assured its orderly maintenance and future development.

The Authority is indebted to the organizations and individuals, too numerous to list, who have contributed to the development of the Village, and to the University of Western Ontario for its continued interest. All have brought enjoyment to the countless number of persons who have signed the guest book.

The Village comes under the direction of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.