

Alder's Weaving Shed
Original Building
London Township, circa 1857

Contributed by Kevin Marshall

Thomas Alder's weaving shed was donated to Fanshawe Pioneer Village in 1962 by William and Ora Alder, children of John Alder and cousins of Wilfrid Jury. The building is a post and beam structure that was built sometime around 1857 just north of Melrose on Concession 5 Lot 32 London Township.¹ Alder built the shop himself, constructing it even before building his house. As a result, he had to use a work bench built into the wall of the weaving shed as his bed for some time.² When Alder did construct his home, it was built attached to the weaving shed, and as such, the original exterior cladding on one side was missing when it was relocated to the Village.³

Much of what we know of Alder's weaving shed comes from the personal recollections of Wilfrid Jury, who often visited his grandfather in the shop. Alder apprenticed as a weaver in Gloucestershire before emigrating to Canada, bringing the steel harness for his loom with him on his journey. Jury's memories of time spent with his grandfather were some of the fondest of his childhood:

The old shop fascinated me. The steady whang of the packer as it banged home the warp, the skirl of the shuttle were like music and I watched for hours as grandfather sat upright in the loom, a tall, distinguished looking old gentleman with a well-trimmed white beard. I was so proud when he taught me to fill the bobbins and I thought of myself as his 'helper'.⁴

Thomas also continued to run a productive farming operation and typically only worked three months of the year weaving. Thomas produced a variety of products, including cloth, flannel, horse blankets and rugs. Alder had a wide range of customers from the surrounding area, from London to Chatham. While city dwellers paid cash for Alder's products, farmers often paid in livestock. As Alder's collection of livestock

increased, he purchased more land to accommodate a stable. He also planted an apple orchard, some trees of which still remain in the former Melrose area.⁵

Thomas Alder's unusual four harness barn loom is still in use today at Fanshawe Pioneer Village where a new warp is strung each year, and volunteers demonstrate the weaving of rag rugs to Village visitors. Rugs produced in the shop are used throughout the Village houses and are also available for sale in the Denfield General Store.

¹ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Alder's Weaving Shed Building Box). Sheila A. Johnson, "Section II Assignment," *Principles and Practices of Heritage Conservation*, 8.

² Ibid.

³ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Alder's Weaving Shed Building Box). Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and Tom Wey. *Fanshawe Pioneer Village Building Restoration Review*, March 1989.

⁴ Wilfrid Jury, "Alder's Weaving Shop," *Fanshawe Pioneer Village Guide Manual*, 1984 Edition.

⁵ Ibid.