

Blacksmith Shop Replica Built 1958

Fanshawe Pioneer Village's blacksmith shop is a reproduction, designed by Park Superintendent Rex H. Bishop, and constructed in 1958 by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. The blacksmith shop was one of the original four buildings on site when the Village opened on June 26th, 1959 and is named for William H. Weir (1853-1934), who after apprenticing with Thompson's Carriage Works in London, settled in West McGillivray Township.¹ Weir's horseshoes won many awards at local fairs and some of these are preserved in the Fanshawe Pioneer Village artifact collection.

Blacksmith shops were an essential part of any early community: shaping metal parts for farm implements such as plough points and repairing or sharpening these same items when needed, crafting domestic tools for use in the home, shoeing horses and mending wheels. Both Rex Bishop and Wilfrid Jury understood that the Village setting must include a blacksmith shop in order to accurately represent an early Middlesex County community. Since no original blacksmith building could be acquired, a replica was instead built on the Village site. The building construction features large front doors, which permitted an entry for horses and wagons and also provided better ventilation for the smoke and heat, and, minimal windows, as darkness facilitated the blacksmith's view of the hot metal.

Bishop also constructed the shop's bellows using leather donated by, John McHale, Chairman of the Parks Advisory Committee, and original bellow sides donated by Jury. The 350 pound anvil in the blacksmith shop was brought to Canada aboard a wooden sailing ship by Donald Davidson in 1850. Davidson used the anvil when he farmed and worked as a blacksmith in Mornington Township, near Newton, Ontario.²

Today, Village visitors can still see the forge and bellows in action as they watch our Village blacksmith crafting items for site use and for sale in our Denfield General Store.

¹ McGillivray Township History Book Committee, *McGillivray Township Remembers 1842-1992* (1992), 305.

² London Free Press, "Century-Old Shopping Plaza Feature of Pioneer Village," March 21, 1961.