

**Colbert Log Barn  
Original Building  
West Nissouri Township, 1840**

**Contributed by Diana Dicklich**

The Colbert Log Barn is the oldest structure at the Village and one of its first acquisitions. The barn is a rare example of an early pioneer barn from Middlesex County. While there is little documentation about who built the barn and where, Robert Berry is credited with raising the barn about 1840.<sup>1</sup> It is believed that sometime after 1890 the barn was dismantled and moved from its original location to the Colbert family farm on Lot 14, Concession 3 in West Nissouri Township, near Thorndale. Still in use as a hay barn, Jack Colbert sold it to the Village in 1960 for two hundred dollars.

The barn is forty feet by thirty feet and eighteen logs high.<sup>2</sup> Over ninety rock elm logs went into its construction. After dismantling and moving the structure to the Village, workmen started to raise the barn in the summer of 1961. Visitors to the Village were provided with an opportunity to observe a pioneer barn in its building stages. Unfortunately, six of the original logs proved to be too damaged to re-use. A call went out to the community asking for assistance in locating “weathered” logs to replace them.<sup>3</sup> It was feared without appropriately aged logs work on the barn would come to a standstill.<sup>4</sup> There is no record of how the call was answered, but the barn was re-erected and opened to the public in 1962.

The interior of the barn was modified to permit the display of the Village’s horse drawn carriage collection. In addition to the removal of several original beams, a forty foot by twenty-four foot concrete slab floor was poured and stairways added.<sup>5</sup> On the lower level, to each side of the central driveway, were stalls for livestock. In earlier times, the central driveway floor, wide enough for a wagon and horses to pass through, would have been used for threshing.

Remarkably, the Colbert Barn has survived both a move from its original site and its re-erection at FPV with its corner logs still relatively plumb.<sup>6</sup> This building is a testimony to the workmanship and skill of the original unknown builders and their simple tools of axe and adze. The hand hewn logs used to construct the barn, though weathered, remain primarily intact. The trees the logs came from were so well formed that there is little difference in size between opposite ends. Due to Dutch elm disease, rock elms no longer grow to their previous height and uniformity so the logs themselves are a reminder of days when these trees were plentiful and tall.

In 1986, the building was closed to the public as a display area because of concerns regarding structural integrity. In 2008, the Village completed necessary reinforcements to the building and plans to complete a full restoration as part of the current Capital Campaign Project. The barn will be a functional farm building and agricultural demonstration area.

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<sup>1</sup>Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Colbert Barn Building Box). *Building History – Land &Property File*.

<sup>2</sup> West Nissouri Historical Society, West Nissouri Township 1818-2000 Our Heritage Scrapbook (2005), 35-36.

<sup>3</sup>London Free Press, “*Park Workmen Want Old Logs.*” August 25, 1961.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, Annual Report, 1963.

<sup>6</sup> W.G. Trestain, “*Thorndale Log Barn More Than Century Old Still Being Used*” in London Free Press, February 20, 1939.