

Peel House

**Original Building
London, circa 1850s**

Contributed by Lauren Burger

Paul Peel (1860-1892), the London-born and world-renowned artist, lived in this home during his childhood.¹ The house was originally located at 230 Richmond Street, south of Horton Street.² Paul's parents, John and Amelia Peel, bought the house in 1865, when Paul was five years old. The family resided at this house for approximately two and a half years. In 1868, the Peel family moved to a house at 167 Oxford Street where Paul lived for the remainder of his adolescent years.³

Built circa 1850, the Peel House is of timber frame construction⁴, a method rarely used for dwellings beyond this era.⁵ Subsequent owners' renovations have significantly altered the original structure of the house, however, and the building currently reflects changes made to it in the 1890s. The house was moved from its original location in 1963 when it was threatened with demolition. When developers planned to build a strip mall on the site, then owners C.E. Isard and Ben Baldwin offered the house to well-known historian and writer, Orlo Miller, on the condition that it be saved from demolition.⁶ Miller, a Church of England priest, offered Peel's childhood home to the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. It was Miller's hope that the building could become part of Fanshawe Pioneer Village.⁷

The Conservation Authority's budget did not, however, allow for the \$1,250.00 projected cost to move Peel House to the Village.⁸ Aware that developers would demolish the house if Miller could not raise sufficient funds, Mayor Vincent Barrie of St. Thomas, Ontario, started a fundraising drive.⁹ Barrie began a foundation for this purpose, and donated \$100 personally towards the effort. Donations eventually raised the funds required for the move, and workmen prepared the house for its relocation to the Village.¹⁰ To make the building lower and easier to haul, crews removed architectural elements such as the building's roof, windows, siding, veranda, porch, and interior plumbing prior to hoisting the house upon wooden planks, and separating it from its basement. A transport truck pulled the house, atop a trailer, to the Village in March 1963.¹¹ After renovations to the ground floor were completed in 1972, the house was opened to the public in 1973.¹²

A full structural restoration to the house in 1983-1984 included stripping the building to its original timber framing, moving it to a new foundation, rebuilding most architectural elements such as the roof, fireplace, veranda and back kitchen, and including a new electrical service.¹³ Such restorations prepared the house for the Parks Canada 1983 installation of a plaque commemorating Paul Peel.¹⁴ M.P. Jack Burghardt and Peel's great-niece Patricia Brooks-Hammond unveiled the plaque at the August 20th public ceremony.¹⁵

Since its complete restoration, Peel House's subsequent upkeep has included repainting, re-roofing of a section of its summer kitchen, new period fencing, and landscape work.

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- ¹ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Peel House Building Box). File Folder B100.02.
- ² Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Peel House Building Box). File Folder B100.07.
- ³ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Peel House Building Box). *Paul Peel House Consolidated Research Portfolio* (2004).
- ⁴ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Peel House Building Box). File Folders B100.12 and B100.03.
- ⁵ Fanshawe Pioneer Village, *Guide Manual 1984 edition*.
- ⁶ T.J. Dolan, *Twenty Five Years of Conservation on the Upper Thames Watershed: 1947-1973* (Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, 1973), 79; and, Fanshawe Pioneer Village, *A Commemorative Look at the Creation of a Village* (1999), *The Peel House*.
- ⁷ Dolan, *Twenty Five Years*, 79.
- ⁸ Ibid; and, "Peel House May be Doomed," *London Free Press* May 8, 1963.
- ⁹ Dolan, *Twenty Five Years*, 79.
- ¹⁰ "Artists Home Set for Move to Fanshawe," *London Free Press* March 12, 1963.
- ¹¹ Ibid; and, Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Peel House Building Box). *Paul Peel House Consolidated Research Portfolio* (2004).
- ¹² Fanshawe Pioneer Village, *Guide Manual 1984 edition*.
- ¹³ Tom Wey .*Fanshawe Pioneer Village Building Restoration Review*, 48 (1989); and, Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Peel House Building Box) File Folder B100.02.
- ¹⁴ "Public Notice" (Parks Canada public invitation to plaque unveiling ceremony) *London Free Press* August 17, 1983.
- ¹⁵ "Restored House, Plaque Momentos of Paul Peel," *London Free Press* August 22, 1983.