

**Purple Hill Orange Hall
Original Building
West Nissouri Township, 1880**

Contributed by Kelly Lewis

The history of the Purple Hill Loyal Orange Lodge #817, chartered in 1857, is tied directly to the protestant Irish immigrants who brought Orangeism with them when they came to Canada. Many settled areas in the region of what is now southwestern Ontario had an Orange hall, including townships in the London district. These buildings were the focal point of the community, providing a place where settlers could get to know their neighbours and make contacts within the community. ¹

The Purple Hill Orange Hall is an original balloon frame structure built in 1880 on Samuel Taylor's farm, Lot 8, Concession 5, of West Nissouri Township. It was set on cedar blocks and sheathed with tongue and groove siding. The hardwood maple, installed in 1926, contributed to the hall's reputation as the best dance floor in the area. The Purple Hill Orange Hall established its reputation as a social gathering place for the community by hosting box socials, dinners, wedding receptions, and, of course, dances.

Among the events celebrated by the Purple Hill Loyal Orange Lodge was the "Glorious Twelfth" which commemorated the defeat of England's Catholic King James II by the new Protestant king William III of Orange (a province in the Netherlands) in 1680 at the Boyne River in Ireland. Orange Day parades were the focus of the festivities and the Purple Hill Loyal Orange Lodge held one of the earliest known in the area. In 1857, a group of Orangemen from West Nissouri Township paraded from Dreany's Corners (Crumlin) to St. Mary's accompanied by a traditional Orange fife and drum band.² The fife and drum band was an integral part of Orange Day parades and the Purple Hill Fife and Drum Band was recognized as one of the best in Southwestern Ontario, winning many awards and prizes.

The Purple Hill Orange Hall was formally donated to Fanshawe Pioneer Village on June 22, 1960 by John B. Carson, Middlesex Master of the Loyal Orange Lodge, and the Right Worshipful William Tatford, Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ontario.

The relocation of the building to Fanshawe Pioneer Village was not an easy task. The hall was moved as a single unit by raising it onto a flatbed trailer. The cedar blocks on which it originally sat remained on the Taylor farm.³ Telephone wires along the transport route had been stretched taught by the cold weather and raising them to move the hall underneath was difficult. When the building arrived at FPV, it was placed on new risers which were cut from utility poles in order to protect it from frost and water damage.

The exterior of the Purple Hill Orange Hall has been restored since its relocation to the Village, and although the renovations have not always been completely representative of the building's original appearance, the most recent work has focused on a return to its authentic original appearance. Today the Orange Hall at Fanshawe Pioneer Village continues to be used as a meeting space and also for the interpretation of nineteenth century social pastimes. The London Orange Hall, a generous donor to the 2006-2007 restoration project, also continues to use the building for their annual meetings.

¹ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Orange Lodge Building Box). Folder B200.06. *Fanshawe Pioneer Village Guide Manual*, 1984 Edition.

² Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Orange Lodge Building Box). Purple Hill Lodge Binder. *Building History*.

³ West Nissouri Historical Society, *West Nissouri Township, 1818 to 2000: Our Heritage Scrapbook* (2005), 309.