

Overall Fanshawe Pioneer Village Storyline

Fanshawe Pioneer Village tells the story of rural communities¹ in Middlesex County in the former townships of Westminster, London, West Nissouri, Lobo, North Dorchester, and Delaware (the present Middlesex Centre and Thames Centre) from 1820 to 1920. This chronological framework starts at the time of initial settlement within the Upper Thames River watershed, follows the development of farms and then crossroads, villages and towns, and ends during a period of migration to cities that brought dramatic change to rural communities.

Themes

Theme 1 - Landscape Change

- OVERALL – FANSHAWE PIONEER VILLAGE 1820-1920 = Waterways, climate, the quality of the soil, and other geographic features are critical to the opening for settlement of this part of central Upper Canada, later Canada West and then Ontario. However, the increasing scale of agricultural activity and poor agricultural practice exacerbated erosion, strips nutrients from the soil and eventually leads to crop failures. The conservation movement in rural Ontario is initiated in response to such farming practices.

Theme 2 - Becoming Canadian - Development of a “Canadian identity”

- OVERALL – FANSHAWE PIONEER VILLAGE 1820-1920 = Political, economic, and social conditions in Britain, Europe and the United States promote immigration to Canada and into southwestern Ontario. Although predominantly from common origins in the British Isles, 19th century Middlesex County residents display unique patterns of work, education and socialization that are frequently divided on the basis of class, religion, gender, or ethnicity. However, over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries there is a gradual mix or melding of cultures and values, not without conflict, that contributes to the ongoing evolution of a “Canadian” identity in Middlesex County.

Theme 3 - Farms, Farmers and Farming

- OVERALL – FANSHAWE PIONEER VILLAGE 1820-1920 = The children of the FIRST immigrants, the second generation who remain on the farm from 1850-1890, experience improvements in technology, transportation, communication, sanitary conditions, and nutrition. These farmers are part of and contribute to a period of rapid agricultural development that sees Middlesex County move from a wheat staple economy to mixed farm economy and then, toward the end of the century, to a concentration on livestock and diversified crops. Middlesex County is built on a foundation of agriculture. The importance and prosperity of the region in the 19th and early 20th centuries is based largely on dairy and beef farming, on winter wheat, oats, soybean, tobacco, and field corn. Agriculture develops from a means to feed one’s self and family to an indispensable industry. Groups like local agricultural societies and later Women’s Institutes contribute to agrarian reform through their educational and political activities.

• Theme 4 - Towns & Villages

¹ Definition of community – A group of people living in the same area who work together for mutual or public benefit.

- OVERALL FANSHAWE PIONEER VILLAGE 1820-1920 = In the years 1840 to 1880 villages and towns in Middlesex County flourish as centres of economic, social, political, and religious activity. The importance of and reliance on agriculture spawns a support system of manufactured goods and services. Human habitation begins to concentrate in these communities, which are often located only a few miles apart and served the needs of their immediate areas. Focus on the importance of agriculture, its support system and their symbiotic relationship brings opportunity to those who have vision and perhaps more importantly the means to exploit the economic relationships of the period. As towns and villages grow they attract men with capital to invest and enrich those who were already there.

The growth of London is directly tied to and the result of the western expansion of settlement in Upper Canada. Rich agricultural lands of this southwestern peninsula attract sophisticated settlers at the beginning of the 19th century. London is established as the administrative centre for the region, is chosen as the garrison town, and grows to be the urban focus of the southwestern peninsula of Ontario. Thriving farms and villages support the growing urban population. By 1920 London is the processing and distribution centre for agricultural production, the manufacturing centre for agricultural implements and equipment, and a source of labour as people from the surrounding farms and villages move into the city.

Theme 5 - In the context of a changing world ...

OVERALL – FANSHAWE PIONEER VILLAGE 1820-1920 = Many first- and second-generation immigrants, both farmers and villagers, are technologically sophisticated people familiar with the rapid change happening worldwide. Through newspapers, monthly magazines, and improved transportation, they are aware of innovations in science, literature, and art as well as new technology like railways, canals, and the telegraph, and later the telephone, automobiles, and electrification. This connects residents to and draws them into the larger world, both mentally and physically. 1860 to 1900 is a period of transition as focus shifts from self-reliant, self-produced goods to purchased manufactured goods due to changes in transportation, technology, literacy, and the economy. Divisions among farmer, villager, and city dweller become more evident.