

## **“The Caverhill Farmstead”**

### **Original Buildings**

**House – South Dorchester Township, 1867**

**Stable – West Nissouri Township, c.1860**

**Woodworking Shop - London-Lobo Township Line, c.1870s**

### **Contributed by Grace Dungavell & Shanna Dunlop**

The story of the Caverhill farmstead is the story of a second generation farming family in Middlesex County during the 1880s. A second frame house was constructed by this time, and the original log home was typically in use as a granary or barn. At Fanshawe Pioneer Village, the original “Stirton House” is now interpreted as the Caverhill family’s second home, and the former “Weekes Log House” as a stable.<sup>1</sup>

Stirton House was constructed around 1867 on Lot 3 Concession 7 South Dorchester Township. William Stirton purchased this property in 1924 and lived in the house for over sixty years with his son George. In 1993, the building was donated to Fanshawe Pioneer Village by Gwen and Robert Tracy, the last owners of the home. Photographs of the Caverhill family’s first frame house illustrate strong design and construction similarities with the Stirton house, suggesting the possibility that they may have been constructed by the same builder.

The former Weekes log house was built in 1865 in West Nissouri Township, and was later used as a granary after a new frame house was constructed.<sup>2</sup> The Weekes Log Stable was the first building erected at Fanshawe Pioneer Village in 1957. The owner, Horace Weekes, agreed to sell the building to the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) for \$100.

Unfortunately a neighbouring log house owned by Michael Elgie was mistaken for the Weekes home, and partially dismantled before the error was realized. With the acquisition of both the Weekes and Elgie buildings, Fanshawe Pioneer Village decided to interpret one as a pioneer home (the Elgie Log Cabin) and the other as an early barn. When the Colbert Barn was rebuilt on the FPV site in 1962, the Weekes house was reinterpreted and used as a stable. It was moved to its present location at the far end of Concession I in 1993.

The Caverhill woodworking shop was donated to Fanshawe Pioneer Village in 1972 by John Caverhill and John Renny. The shop was built in the early 1870's on the Caverhill family property, located in the area of Vanneck on the boundary of London and Lobo Townships. William A. Caverhill was a local farmer and a carpenter whose work encompassed everything from furniture to houses.<sup>3</sup> He is known to have taken part in the building of Knox Presbyterian Church in Komoka, and his work is also evident in Vanneck United Church. He constructed many barns and outbuildings in London and Lobo townships, and was also responsible for the fine trim work on homes on Richmond Street North in London, Ontario.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the machinery that is on display today in the woodworking shop was handmade by William including a band-saw and table saw. In its early working years, the machines in the shop were run by a four arm sweep with up to eight horses powering the line shaft.<sup>5</sup> It was this horse-power which caused the only major accident in the shop's history. In 1883, William's younger brother, James, was killed when startled horses caused a pulley to fly apart, fatally

striking James in the head. A January 10, 1883 article in the *London Advertiser* recounted the accident, noting that the unfortunate event had cast a gloom over the entire community.<sup>6</sup> In the 1930's the horse-power system was replaced by a Case "C" tractor.

After William Caverhill's death in 1933, the shop was used primarily for storage and for odd woodworking jobs. After inheriting his grandfather's land and shop, John Caverhill sold the land to John Renny with the understanding that the shop itself would be donated to Fanshawe Pioneer Village. The shop was officially donated in 1972, and by 1988, John Caverhill had also donated one hundred and nineteen woodworking pieces, tools, and patterns.<sup>7</sup>

As several original support beams were decaying, a team of SWEEP (Students Working for Environmental Enhancement Program) students reconstructed the original two storey shop as a one storey building, and the interior layout of the shop was also rearranged to accommodate the change. Prior to moving to the Village, the woodworking shop had once had a blacksmith shop attached. When the woodworking shop was relocated on the Caverhill property in 1933, the blacksmith shop became the sugar shanty in the family's maple syrup bush. As such, the existing woodworking shop at Fanshawe Pioneer Village appears without the blacksmith shop addition.<sup>8</sup>

The Caverhill Shop has had two locations within the Village, initially on Miller Street and in its present location on Proof Line Road. The shop will be relocated one final time to the end of Concession I to complete the "Caverhill Farmstead".

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<sup>1</sup> Though research has been conducted by Fanshawe Pioneer Village staff on all site buildings, little information exists on the “Weekes” log house and the “Stirton” house”. The original builders of these structures are unknown, and ownership information in the FPV archives is limited to later property holders.

<sup>2</sup> Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Log Structures Building Box #2), Jenna Whalen file.

<sup>3</sup> Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Caverhill Shop Building Box). Interview by Shanna Dunlop, *John Caverhill and Everett Robson*, Jan. 21, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Caverhill Shop Building Box). Unpublished article *William A. Caverhill Carpentry Shop*, by *Jeremy Robson*, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Caverhill Shop Building Box). Interview by Shanna Dunlop, *John Caverhill and Everett Robson*, Jan. 21, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> *London Advertiser*. “A Fatal Accident: James Caverhill of Vanneck Instantly Killed,” Jan. 10, 1883.

<sup>7</sup> Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Caverhill Shop Building Box). Letter *Michael Baker to Mr. John Caverhill*, Oct. 27, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Caverhill Shop Building Box). Interview by Shanna Dunlop, *John Caverhill and Everett Robson*, Jan. 21, 2004.