

**Harmer Sawmill**  
**Original Building, Reconstructed**  
**Fullarton Township, Perth County, circa 1885**

**Contributed by Bryan Andrachuk**

Sawmills were one of the first industries to arrive in Ontario. As mills became more plentiful, they offered alternatives to log house construction. The Harmer Sawmill at Fanshawe Pioneer Village was originally located on Lot 11, West Mitchell Road in Fullarton Township, Perth County.<sup>1</sup> The Fullarton mill was a combined grist and sawing operation that initiated production about 1885. The original building was partially destroyed by fire in 1918, and was replaced that same year. The new structure was made of timber-frame on concrete block, with a large brick chimney and metal siding. In 1924, when the original steam boiler ceased operating, the fifty-two horsepower Ruston & Hornsby diesel engine replaced the Fullarton mill's original steam power system.

In 1979, Mrs. Lorne Harmer, widow of the last owner of the sawmill, and Dr. Harold Leddermueller, the current property owner, donated the building and all of its contents to Fanshawe Pioneer Village. The shop was active until 1964 when Mr. Harmer closed its doors for the last time. The original building was "L"-shaped, with one part of the "L" housing the grist mill and the other section comprising the sawmill. When rebuilding the structure at Fanshawe Pioneer Village, the decision was made to reconstruct the sawmill portion of the building only. The following spring, the machinery was moved to Fanshawe Pioneer Village while the engine was sent to Robert Radcliffe's farm for refurbishing.

In the summer of 1980 the mill was dismantled and transported to the Village. The mill was rebuilt later that same year at Fanshawe Pioneer Village using the original timber frame, with new siding and roofing. In the meantime, Mr. Radcliffe restored and painted the engine for installation at the Village in 1981. The machinery, which arrived in

the fall of that same year, was the final piece needed to complete the sawmill. In July of 1982, the engine was started for the first time since 1964. A loud noise indicated further, unforeseen problems with the crank bearing. The engine was then taken to Carson's machine shop where Norman and Walter Smith, two brothers from Varna who rebuilt and operated Ruston engines, repaired it. Once the problem was fixed the engine was in running order for the first time in twenty years.

The official opening of the Fanshawe Pioneer Village Sawmill took place on May 7, 1983 and the building was later dedicated in the name of the Harmer family on August 26, 1990. The Ruston & Hornsby engine continues to be maintained by Village volunteers who operate the sawmill for demonstrations during special event weekends.

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<sup>1</sup> Information for this article taken from the Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Harmer Sawmill Building Box). "Harmer Sawmill FPV Site History" Folder, n.d.