

Lochaber Free Presbyterian Church
Original Building
East Williams Township, 1884

Contributed by Grace Frogley

The simple appearance of Lochaber Church hides a complex and meaningful history. The founding members of Lochaber Church were originally members of the Presbyterian Church in East Williams. Under the leadership of Reverend Lachlin MacPherson, the church remained outside of two successive reunifications of the Presbyterian Church in 1861 and 1875.¹

After MacPherson resigned due to illness in 1883, many members of the congregation joined the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the product of a union of four streams of Presbyterianism in 1875.² Twenty-seven members chose instead to begin their own church separate from the established Presbyterian Church in Canada. This group of believers, devoted to simplicity and purity of worship and the primacy of Christ over all things, founded the congregation in 1884. It was originally called the East Williams Free Church Congregation and, then from 1912, Lochaber Free Presbyterian Church.³

At Lochaber Church, the primary focus was on worship. Regular weekend services usually lasted one-and-a-half hours.⁴ Services were in held in Gaelic as well as in English until 1904.⁵ Psalms were an important part of church services, but they were sung without musical instruments, which were not permitted in the building – a custom that has been maintained at Fanshawe Pioneer Village. Unlike other Protestant denominations, at Lochaber, worshipers sat when singing, but stood for prayers.⁶

The congregation at Lochaber had pulpit supply and spiritual guidance from the minister and elders of similar congregations in Chesley and Lochalsh, while the temporal operation of the church was the responsibility of local trustees. When in 1961, the small congregation was faced with a county road-widening project which threatened the church building, the trustees worked with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority to move the Lochaber Free Presbyterian Church from its original location on the southwest corner of Lot 11, Concession 17 of the Township of East Williams to Fanshawe Pioneer Village.⁷ For many years, the Lochaber congregation continued to hold Sunday services in the church at Fanshawe Pioneer Village.

After the Church's arrival to the Village, an "L" shaped drive shed was built to replicate one that had existed at the original site. Though Fanshawe Pioneer Village's corporate records are incomplete, it is thought that a first replica driveshed was built in 1963 using salvaged materials from a driveshed in Bryanston, while a second replacement replica was erected in 1987 to store the Village's horse drawn equipment and carriage collection.

The exterior of Lochaber Church was painted sometime after 1970 in the belief that this was authentic to its original appearance. Scientific paint analysis has recently confirmed that the church had in fact never been painted prior to its arrival at Fanshawe Pioneer Village, and efforts have since been undertaken to return the building to resemble its original unpainted condition.

¹ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Lochaber Building Box #1). Unpublished report by Floyd MacIntyre, c.1945.

² Ibid.

³ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Lochaber Building Box #2). *Notes on Lochaber Free Presbyterian Church Secretary's Book & Minutes Book*, by Jenna Whalen, December 2003.

⁴ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Lochaber Building Box #2). *Notes from a Tour of Lochaber Church with Descendants of Angus Ross*, by Jenna Whalen, October 2004.

⁵ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Lochaber Building Box #2). *Notes on Lochaber Free Presbyterian Church*, Secretary's Book, Minutes Book, notes by Jenna Whalen, December 2003.

⁶ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Lochaber Building Box #2). *Notes from a Tour of Lochaber Church with Descendants of Angus Ross*, by Jenna Whalen, October 2004.

⁷ Fanshawe Pioneer Village Archives (Lochaber Building Box #2). *Land Registry Information File*.