In April 1992, the Fanshawe School Fund had successfully raised the $25,000 needed to relocate School Section #19 four kilometres down Fanshawe Park Road to its new home at Fanshawe Pioneer Village. The school, slated for demolition, was the last of a number of 19th century buildings once located in the hamlet of Fanshawe near the corner of Highbury Ave and Fanshawe Park Road.¹

The property for the schoolhouse had been acquired by purchase from Samuel Perkins on July 11, 1871. Perkins received $100 from the trustees of S.S. #19 and the brick building was built on Caesar McLeod’s farm on the fifth concession.²

The School Act of 1871 mandated compulsory attendance and a prescribed curriculum. According to the Act, essential subjects included reading, writing, arithmetic, and use of the English language. Also included were geography, history, civics, and principles of Christian morals.³ Revisions to the Act added practical subjects such as agriculture, bookkeeping and mechanical arts. Despite the School Act, most schools concentrated on reading, writing, spelling, composition, arithmetic and geography.⁴

Rough physical conditions at S.S. #19 prevailed into the early 20th century. The building was designed without consideration for proper ventilation and was often filled with smoke. In 1931, a wood-burning stove was still the sole source of heat for the building, and students had to constantly feed the fire on cold days. Also in 1931, approximately $300 was spent on the installation of “sanitary closets,” which were installed along the north wall of the school. A well was drilled in 1945, and a few years later a complete water system was installed. Electricity was not installed in the schoolhouse until 1938.⁵
In April 1954, the trustees of S.S. #19 received estimates for the cost of building a new school, but ratepayers voted down the motion. However, by the year’s end, public opinion was changing in favour of a modern school. Construction began in May of 1955 but as the school was not completed in time for the next school year, students returned to the old one-room school once more. For its final school year, the S.S. #19 schoolhouse was divided into two halves by a curtain. Ada Woods taught grades one to four on one side, while Lloyd Flannigan taught grades five to eight on the other.6

The school closed in 1955 after serving the families of School Section #19 for eighty-four years,7 though the building continued to function as a community centre.8 Larger, more centrally located facilities had replaced the network of small brick schools like S.S. #19 that still dot the rural landscape.

Many visitors to the Village remember Fanshawe School in its original location; some even recall their time spent as students in this very building or in a similar one-room schoolhouse. The building continues to fulfil its intended purpose as a 19th century schoolhouse for Fanshawe Pioneer Village’s education programs and the award winning Museum School project, where students make S.S. #19 their classroom for a week of experiential learning.

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2 Calbeck, 1-2.
4 Stamp, 7.
5 Calbeck, 27-35
6 Calbeck, 39.