

Remembering British Home Children



The child emigration movement, which operated from 1869 until the late 1930s, brought over 100,000 children to Canada from the British Isles.

Why? In the late 1800s, areas of Great Britain, especially its cities experienced rising poverty rates and overcrowding.

Social and economic forces left large numbers of orphaned, abandoned and impoverished children. Churches and charity (philanthropic) organizations created orphanages or shelters for pauper children. Many believed that these children would have a better chance for a healthy life in rural Canada, where families welcomed them as a source of cheap farm labour and domestic help.

Boys and Girls?
Both boys and girls became child migrants. However, more boys were migrated to work on farms.

How? As shelter homes filled up, groups of children (by the hundreds) were prepared to board ships and cross the ocean.

After arriving in Canada, children were sent to distributing or receiving homes, assigned to a family and sent to a farm.

“Bernardos” - British Home Children are often referred to by this name, mainly because the Dr. Bernado Homes was one of the first and largest organizations, which sent thousands of children to Canada. There were several other organizations such as Macphersons, Middlemore and Fegan homes that also migrated thousands of children.

The Experience

The experience of home children varied. Some children were poorly treated and even abused by their caretakers. Others experienced a better life than if they had remained destitute.

In all cases, home children bore the scars of their frightened, troubled, or difficult past into adulthood. Some children adapted better than others to the life forced upon them.

Home Children were classed as domestic servants, most often farm labourers. In exchange for room, board and meals, the child was expected to carry out daily chores and help with the harvest. This could be hard and difficult work for a child.

Crossing the Ocean

For most home children, boarding an ocean liner was the first time they had been on a ship. It could be exciting for some, but terrifying for others, or a combination of both. Many experienced sea-sickness. The journey across the ocean took between 7 and 10 days.

In many cases, children did not know why they were being sent to Canada. Often, living parents had no idea their child was being sent away.

Organizations hosted “hiving-off” parties, in preparation for the departure of a group of child migrants. Usually children travelled in groups of 100-150 at a time.

Groups of home children were assigned to third class areas, below deck. These were very basic accommodations.

Passenger Lists are important historical records for researching Home Children. They record the children's names, age, gender, and destination.

Youth over the age of 12 were regarded as adults at this time.

Settling in Canada

When a ship arrived in Canada, children were then sent by train to a receiving or distributing home. Many of these homes were located in Toronto. From here, children would be sent to live and work for a family as “indentured” or contracted labourers. According to their contract, the children were to receive lodging, food, clothes, and attend school. They were also to receive a small allowance held in trust by the organization until they reached the age of 18.

While in the care of a Canadian family, there were supposed to be inspections to ensure children were being properly cared for, however, issues were often dismissed. In some cases, children were too afraid of their guardians to complain. Some children were able to adapt to their new circumstances, but others found it intolerable, choosing to run away or commit suicide. The level of acceptance, treatment and love were important factors in determining their experience.

About 10% of Canadians can find a Home Child ancestor in their family lineage.

Arriving in Dufferin County

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, the population of Dufferin County went into decline as citizens left for opportunities out West and in cities.

Many farm owners throughout Dufferin County took in child migrants to help keep their farms running.

Arriving in Dufferin County, their new environment was different than anything they had experienced before. Compared to crowded, loud, and polluted cities, they were now surrounded by nature and farm-scapes. Some children felt very lonely and isolated.

At least 200 home children were sent to live in Dufferin County.

About half of these children served in First World War.

Case #1 - Frederick and Ernest Whorpole



Frederick (born 1895) and Ernest (born 1897) were taken in by the Dr. Barnardo Homes in London, England. In late-February of 1907, at the ages of 9 and 11, they were boarded on a ship named Dominion bound for Canada.

Fred was sent to live with George and Helena Gabriel (Lot 1, Concession 3) in Mulmur Township. Ernest was sent to live with James and Hannah Boyle and their daughter Leana (Lot 3, Concession 2) in Mulmur Township.

Both boys enlisted for military service in the First World War. Fred served as a Gunner with the 30th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery. In a letter home on May 6, 1916 while in Belgium, Fred wrote: "If I ever have the luck to set my feet on Canadian soil once more it will be the happiest time of my life." In June of 1916, he was captured by German forces during the Battle of Ypres. He was held at a camp in Dulmen, Westphalia, Germany before being transferred to Wahn prisoner camp, and finally Limburgh camp.

During his time as a PoW, Fred was put to work building a bridge over the Rhine River. As a prisoner, he was underfed, dropping in weight from 140 lbs to just 90 lbs. He also began to suffer from heart issues and fainting spells.

Ernest enlisted with the C Company of the 164th Battalion. He was notified of Fred's PoW status while training at Camp Borden near Barrie, Ontario.

On November 25, 1918, Fred was released from the prisoner of war camp to a British hospital. He was listed to have VDH - Valvular Disease of the Heart and required treatment. He managed to recover and was sent home to Canada.

After the war, Fred married Irene Fourgoux and worked as an orderly and cleaner in Toronto. He passed away in 1979 at the age of 84.

Ernest married Esther Tomlinson and worked as a postman in Etobicoke, York. He passed away in 1984 at the age of 87.

Picture: Intake photo by Dr. Barnardo Homes, Public Family Tree, Ancestry.ca

Map: Map showing the location of Dulmen in North-West Germany. Also shows location of Munster where Fred was held as a PoW. The blue line is the Rhine River.

Image: Registration list from Dulmen camp. ICRC - <https://www.icrc.org/en/archives>.



Lfd. Nr.	Name	Birth Date	Birth Place	Home Address
x 322	Vernon	1896/1	William Kent	Shelburne
x 323	Wills	1896/1	Ernest	Shelburne
x 324	Wasson	1897/6	Charles	Ayr
x 325	Walt	1897/7	Clarence	Wellington
x 326	Walker	1896/2	Charles W.	Belfast
x 327	Wallace	1896/2	James W.	Wellington
x 328	Wallace	1896/2	Robert P.	Wellington
x 329	Ward	1896/2	Robert P.	Wellington
x 330	Walter	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 331	Warner	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 332	Watson	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 333	Watson	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 334	Watson	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 335	Way	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 336	Webb	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 337	Webb	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 338	Webb	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 339	Webb	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 340	White	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 341	White	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 342	White	1896/2	John	Wellington
x 343	Whorpole	1895/2	Fred	Shelburne
x 344	Wickham	1896/3	Charles	Wellington
x 345	Wigby	1896/3	Frederick	Wellington
x 346	Wiggins	1896/3	Joseph	Wellington
x 347	Wigzell	1896/3	Norman	Hull
x 348	Wilde	1896/3	William E.	Wellington
x 349	Wilde	1896/3	William E.	Wellington
x 350	Wilkins	1896/3	Jack	Birmingham
x 351	Williams	1896/3	John H.	St John
x 352	Wilson	1896/3	George	Wellington
x 353	Wilson	1896/3	John	Wellington
x 354	Winstanley	1896/3	Wallace	Wellington

Case #2 - The Cliffe Children

(2)

NAMES OF PASSENGERS.

2.	A.	C.	I.
Richard Bridson		1	
Charles Hendry		1	
Charles Hope		1	
William Patterson		1	
Isaac Saunders		1	
Samuel Brooks		1	
Henry Wipfman		1	
John Rush		1	
William Cliffe		1	
Harman Kerr	1		
Frank Leonard		1	
Christina Riley	1		
Margaret McBean	1		
Grace Elliott	1		
Rebecca Patterson	1		
Anne Hope	1		
Larab Hill	1		
Margaret Burman	1		
Elizabeth Cliffe	1		
Agnes Thomson	1		
Lily Garnett		1	
Elsie Hope		1	
Isabel Higgins		1	
Eva Durs		1	
Faye Pluchatt		1	
Eric Cliffe		1	
Alice Greene		1	
Robert Robinson		1	
Marie Cliffe		1	
Mrs. Kitch		1	
Miss Hopkins		1	
	12	19	

Source: UK Outward Passenger List, 1890-1960

In 1911, the James Walker and Elizabeth Jane (Lawton) Cliffe lived at 283 Crown Street in Liverpool, Lancashire, England with their 5 children and some extended family (2 brothers to James and Elizabeth's mother). James worked as a painter for a building company. He and his brothers, were the income earners for the household.

Their children were:

Elizabeth Alexandra, (1902 - 1994)

Elsie Maude, (1904-1996)

James David, born in (1906-1994)

Albert William, (1909-1984)

Marie Emily, (1911-1990)

In 1914, Elizabeth passed away (at 44 years of age). Her cause of death is unknown. It is likely that due to their mother's passing, James could not work and care for his young children, and decided to place them in the care of a children's home.

In 1915, four of the Cliffe children – Elizabeth (age 12), Elsie (age 10), William (age 6), and Marie (age 3) were sent to live in Canada on behalf of the **Annie MacPherson Homes** aboard a ship called the Scandinavian.

Upon arrival in Canada the children were sent to a distributing home located at 51 Avon Street in Stratford, ON. Following a brief stay at the Avon Street home, the children were split up. Two of them were sent to work as domestics and two were adopted.

The following is what is known about their lives after arriving in Canada:

Elizabeth became a school teacher. In 1937, she married Ross McKenzie of Caledon. At the time, she was living in Adjala Township. They soon relocated to Mono Mills to farm. She past away in 1994 at the age of 92. She rests in St. John's Cemetery, Mono Township

Elsie was living with Thomas and Jennie Mason in Ballycroy, Adjala Township in 1921. Also living there was John Butt, a farmhand and the man she would come to marry in 1930. At the time of their marriage, Elsie was living at 252 Dupont Street, Toronto. They relocated in the 1930s to Mono Township, Dufferin County where they farmed. The couple had four children. Elsie past away in 1996 (age 92). She rests in the Relessey Cemetery, Mono Township.

William was adopted by Harry and Edith (Poole) Wigglesworth, who lived in Stratford, Ontario. He attended school and went on to become an electrician and machinist. In 1938, he married Erie Agnes Marie McDonald and they remained in Stratford. William past away in 1984, age 75. He is buried at Avondale Cemetery, Stratford.

Marie was adopted in 1924 by William and Elma (Singleton) Kemp of Toronto. In 1938, she married Andrew Page (an electrician). They lived on Spadina Ave. in Toronto. She worked for a period of time as a typist. In 1971, the couple divorced. Marie passed away in 1990 at the age of 78.

Case #3 - Ada and William Lamb



William (1898-1916) and Ada (1903-2004) Lamb were born in Hull, East Yorkshire, England. Abandoned by their father and eventually step-father, their mother Ada was left to raise them on her own. Forced to find work, she had to leave the children alone during her shifts at a local factory. With nearly all her earnings going to paying the rent, she could barely afford to feed or clothe her children. She soon fell behind on her rent.

A neighbour reported the children to the authorities and social workers recommended the children go to the Dr. Barnardo Homes.

At the age of 5, William was sent to live with a foster family, the Watson's house in Brandenham supported by the Salvation Army. Ada soon was sent there as well. There they were provided food, clothing and schooling.

In 1907, at the age of 8, William was removed by the Barnardo's, taken to London, then sent to Canada aboard the Dominion. In 1913, Ada (age 9) would also be sent to Canada aboard the Corinthia. She experienced constant seasickness on the 10 day journey.

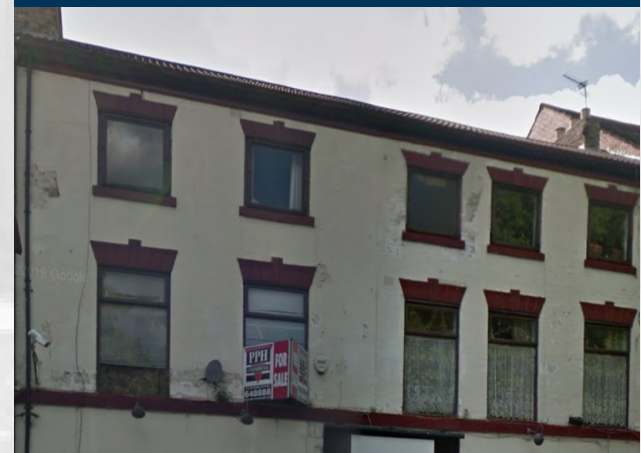
Following arrival in Canada, William was sent to live with the Fraser-Carr family of Dundalk.

When Ada arrived in Canada, she was taken to Peterborough (Hazelbrae House) and then to Toronto. She was asked if she would like to go North to be near her brother in Dundalk. She was sent to Shelburne by train. Ada recalled feeling like a lost dog when they reached the station in Shelburne. She was met

Hull was built up around industries such as whaling, fishing and shipbuilding. Opportunities for work led people to move into the area, but not necessarily to a better life. Hull soon declined into one of the worst slum conditions in all of England. Overcrowding led to increased violence, crime, hunger, and sewage issues. This led to starvation and illness, most notably cholera and smallpox outbreaks. Many people in Hull lived in conditions we can scarcely imagine today.

In an attempt to address issues, hospitals, asylums, workhouses, and prisons were set up. These places, however, tended to have a dark side of their own.

One option for struggling families was to send their children to rescue homes like Dr. Barnardo's Home For Children. One such house, known as "Ever Open Door" was located at 39 Beverley Road in Hull, Yorkshire. More information on this home, including pictures are available [here](#).



39 Beverley Street, Hull, England as it is today. The building is mostly unchanged from when it was a Barnardo rescue home.
Source: Google Streetview

by Mr. John Reburn, who took her to his brother's home on Owen Sound Street for dinner, then home to his farm in Whitfield, Mulmur Township, where she would be introduced to Mrs. Reburn (Little).

As time went on, Ada became close to the Reburns. They treated her like a daughter, however she always called them "Mr. and Mrs. Reburn." Ada worked on the farm — milking cows, canning vegetables and fruit, splitting kindling, making maple syrup and cooking. Mrs. Reburn taught her how to crochet, knit and quilt.

She attended school in Perm (S.S. No. 8). It just so happened a boy who came over on the same ship was also there. She took piano lessons in Dundalk (15 miles away). John would take her to her lessons by horse and buggy. She excelled at piano and was asked to play at church services.

William did not enjoy his time living in Canada. To escape, he enlisted for military service in the First World War. While awaiting deployment, his camp was struck with typhoid fever. William and several other soldiers became ill and died. He is buried in Ventry Cemetery in Proton Township, Grey County.

During WWI, Ada received a letter from her mother. She wanted to come to Canada. Ada refused to bring her over. She was too hurt by everything that had happened to her as a child and did not wish to be reunited with her mother.

Ada went on to marry William Lester Stinson in 1931. After their marriage, they moved to Orangeville where they took in boarders. They had two daughters – Helen and Isabel.

Following Mr. Reburn's death, Ada and Lester moved back to work the farm. Upon Mrs. Reburn's death in 1964, Ada was supposed to inherit the farm, however, relatives contested the will. Since Ada was never formally adopted, the courts awarded the farm to the relatives. Determined to have the farm, she bought them out and stayed.

Lester passed away in 1981. Ada lived to be 101, passing away in 2004 at Dufferin Oaks Long Term Care Home in Shelburne. Some of their descendants still live in Dufferin County.

Helen remembers her mother's trunk always being in their home, but they were forbidden to look in it. One day, Helen decided to peek in the trunk. It was in this moment, she discovered the history her mother never wanted to talk about — she was a British Home Child. Among the possessions was a Bible given to her by the Watson's twin daughters and a picture of her mother.

Ada did not want to apply for her files from the Barnardo homes, but it was only after receiving them that her daughter was able to talk to her about her experience. Helen said, "No matter how painless people try to make it, uprooting a child causes pain." She added that her mother was "never able to show affection" and that "broken relationships in childhood cause trauma that seldom mends completely."

Despite the trauma of her early life, Ada wrote in her memoir, "I feel that I was very lucky to get in a home like I did."

Ada's trunk was donated to the Museum of Dufferin in 2018.



Information about this document:

This document was prepared by the Education Department at the Museum of Dufferin.

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