

## They Were But Children: The Immigration of British Home Children to Canada

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### Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, a number of benevolent and religious organizations in Great Britain began transporting children to Canada for the purpose of providing child labour, often with little regard for the well-being of the children involved. For about sixty years, between 1869 and 1930, these philanthropic societies, often called *child-savers*, arranged for anywhere between 80,000 and 100,000 British children to be brought to Canada (Kohli, 2003; Murdoch, 2006; Parr, 1980/1994; Sherington, 2003). Some of these children were homeless and found on the streets. Most, however, were from "broken," single-parent, and/or poverty-stricken homes and families. The intention of the child migration schemes was to remove children from what were believed to be unhealthy and socially and morally unacceptable living conditions in England, and place them in Canadian homes, farms and families. Here, it was expected the children would learn skills and become productive members of the working class, training as helpers of some sort; house servants, child companions, and farm labourers were the most common. These child migrants came to be known as "Home Children" (Harrison, 1979; Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994; Waldock, 2012).

My paternal grandmother, Grace, was one of these children. The search for my grandmother's story, her family, and, ultimately, my own family roots and history, was challenging and emotional. Grace's story was one she never told her own children, friends, or grandchildren. It is told here. Some Home Children, like Grace, also chose to remain silent. Some did not live long enough to tell their own stories. Other children, however, decided to share their stories so that this part of English and Canadian history—a history that is relatively unknown—would be remembered.

Understanding these children's stories requires an understanding of the history of the child migration movement that took place between Britain and Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That history is examined here from several different, yet fully interrelated, perspectives. The first is the social and political climate that enabled child labour and child migration between Britain and Canada to take place, and which ultimately reshaped the laws for children both living in and entering Canada. Next are the perspectives of some of the most well-known organizations that were given financial and political support to remove children from Britain and relocate them to Canadian homes and farms as inexpensive labour. Finally, this paper presents some of the realities of life in Canada as experienced by the children themselves—children whose perceptions were often radically different from the perceptions of governing bodies, of relocation organizations, and of Canadians as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the premise of this paper is that the political and social culture in Britain and Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries allowed the development and implementation of child migration schemes that were frequently harmful to the children involved, and that the experiences of the children who came to Canada were vastly different from the expectations promoted by the benevolent organizations that brought them to this country.

<sup>1</sup>Although Home Children from Great Britain were also sent to Australia, with similar results, that history is not

specifically addressed here.

## Annie Macpherson: A Woman of Note

The year was 1867. Annie Macpherson, a young Scottish woman, had dedicated her life to working “among the poor in London, in the East End, where, for an entire population, life was a burden of unending desperation, disease, and crime from which the only release was death itself” (Bagnell, 1980, p. 19). One evening changed not only her life, but also the lives of thousands of children, most yet unborn, and set the stage for a child migration scheme that lasted well into the twentieth century. According to Bagnell (1980), on this eventful day, Annie Macpherson walked into a filthy, dark house in which several young children lived. She heard voices from the attic and, upon opening a hatch in the ceiling, found over 30 little girls, “their arms thin as broomsticks, at work making matchboxes” (p. 21). Most were between the ages of 8 and 10, but some were even younger. One slice of bread was the daily meal—a meal for which each child paid out of her meager wages of a penny a day (Bagnell, 1980; Kohli, 2003).

Two years later, in 1869, Annie Macpherson had raised enough public awareness and money in both England and Canada to send the first of hundreds of groups of children to what was believed would be a better home, with opportunities to have an education, to develop work skills, and to lead a healthy and productive life (Bagnell, 1980; Bean & Melville, 1989; Corbett, 1981, 1997/2002; Harrison, 1979; Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994). What was happening in England at that time that created the opportunity for the creation of a child migration movement—a movement that was carried out by Macpherson and other philanthropic individuals over the next 60 years? Part of the answer is the Industrial Revolution.

## The Climate of the Times in England

The arrival of the Industrial Revolution in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the single most important factor in the development of benevolent societies and the eventual migration schemes that sent young children, without parental accompaniment, to Canada (Corbett, 1981, 1997/2001; Kohli, 2003). Corbett (1981) points out that once the feudal system—peasants working the land of privileged owners—“snapped” (p. 13), families began to move to the large cities, especially London, seeking work. Often, there was little or none to be had. Machinery had taken over jobs that a pair of human hands would have accomplished at an earlier time. The result, for many people, was poverty—subsisting from day to day (Bean & Melville, 1989; Kohli, 2003; Murdock, 2006; Parr, 1980/1994). Corbett (1981) states that “masses of humanity sought to bury their despair in the cities’ gin parlours, brothels and rat infested alleys. Families disintegrated” (p. 13). Some children were abandoned and left to fend for themselves on the streets. Some were sold into prostitution; others were sold to, or taken in by, employers looking for inexpensive labour (Bean & Melville, 1989; Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994). By all accounts, it appears that thousands of poor and destitute families were living in squalor in one of the wealthiest countries in the world:

The human spirit sickened of injustices, bestiality, oppression and inequalities. The Evangelical and Humanitarian movements swept...across the British Isles. The philanthropic movement was born, shining light into the caves of despair, making paths straight in the wilderness, creating Ragged Schools, free hospitals, missions, Y.M.C.A.’s and Y.W.C.A.’s (Corbett, 1981, p. 14).

A less kind view of children in poverty was put forward in the 1820s by a police magistrate named Robert Chambers, who complained of the increasing delinquency in Britain (Bagnell, 1980; Parr, 1980/1994). His recommendation was that “the children that cluttered the streets [of London] should be gathered up and shipped to Canada” (Bagnell, 1980, p. 23). He obtained support from government officials in other communities in the United Kingdom, all of whom suggested that “children who were down and out...should be sent to Canada, where they were badly needed, to be apprenticed to persons who...would be glad to receive them as workers on the land” (p. 23). Not only would this group of children include “abandoned children—street Arabs, as history would name

them—but...the many thousands of children who lived with their parents in the misery of workhouses” (p. 23). A common theme that arose and persisted was that “the Mother Country could only benefit from the absence of young paupers, the future inmates of our workhouses, our trampsheds and our jails” (Pinchbeck & Hewitt as cited in Parr, 1980/1994, p. 28). It was a theme that would eventually lead to resentment by Canadians towards the British Home Children and the organizations that brought them to Canada (Bagnell, 1980; Bean & Melville, 1989; Corbett, 1981, 1997/2002, Kohli, 2003).

Shortly thereafter, however, in 1834, the Poor Law Act was passed in Britain, and seemed to solidify the trend toward child migration. This law permitted raising funds to support the emigration of persons, including children, who were living in poverty (Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994; Sherington, 2003). During this period, workhouses, for those who could not pay their debts, were on the rise. They were intended as temporary places, and offered little in the way of comfort or opportunity. Widowed, abandoned, and indigent mothers and their children were often among those forced into workhouses.

These institutions were cold and draughty and often had high stone walls around them in a prison-like style. The inmates were not to be clothed or fed any better than the lowest class found outside the institution. In short, life in the workhouse was to be made as undesirable as possible (Kohli, 2003, p. 7).

Kohli (2003) further describes the workhouse as a place where all family members lived, with basic necessities, sleeping on mats of straw and often in separate areas of the building. Usually, each person, regardless of age, carried out some type of work to help pay for his or her keep. The future was grim, especially for children (Kohli, 2003).

At the same time, church groups set up financial relief funds to assist parishioners of good moral conduct (Bagnell, 1980). By the late 1860s, many of the religious and community benevolent organizations that had arisen in Britain agreed that emigration to Canada was a viable solution to the problem of poverty-stricken children, typically called orphans or “waifs and strays” (Snow, 2000, p.13). Although it took another few years for the movement to begin in force, the child migration seed had been planted. Send them to Canada! For the boys, placements on farms, as agricultural labourers, were viewed as ideal. Girls could be trained as servants or other domestic help and also could be companions to a family’s children. The expectation was that the children would be breathing in Canada’s fresh country air and doing a good day’s work while earning wages and receiving some schooling (Bagnell, 1980; Bean & Melville, 1989; Corbett, 1981, 1997/2002; Kohli, 2003; Murdoch, 2006; Parr, 1980/1994; Rose, 1987; Snow, 2000).

Despite the growth of government and societal supports, economic difficulties in Britain continued, and not only in the larger centres; Parr (1980/1994) states that rural areas of England were also affected. Throughout the country, death and disability resulting from illnesses such as cholera, from accidents, or from war, left some families with only one income. Frequently this was not enough to support the entire family (Bean & Melville, 1989). Parr (1980/1994) goes on to say that children as young as 5 and 6 years of age were expected to help with the family income, especially if there was only one living parent: “Youngsters surrendered to their mothers the proceeds of bottle collecting, dragging barrows and carts in the market” (p. 19). Children up to the age of 12 also might have worked in the home “with their parents making Lucifer matches, paper bags, flowers and clothing. Young children were valued in this work for their agility and quickness” (p. 18). Thus, child labour was not only expected to support one’s family, but accepted within British society. Yet, when a family could no longer sustain itself, when neighbour and family supports, if any, had all been exhausted, when the relief from the local churches was no longer available, the final solution for a family was most often to enter a workhouse.

For some families, however, this was not an option. One alternative was to give up one or more children to a benevolent society—an organization such as the one started by Annie Macpherson—that professed to offer the children a better life. Meet Margaret, my great

grandmother. She was one of the parents who refused the workhouse. In 1899, she was a recent widow with seven children between the ages of 2 and 11 years and pregnant with her eighth child. The following are excerpts from the Medical Officer's report on her case:

This case was brought to the notice of the local Branch of the N.S.P.C.C. [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children] last October, by the Rev. Dr. Allan, Vicar of St. Mary's, Bungay, who is also a Poor Law Guardian. He suggested that an enquiry should be made with a view to prosecute the mother for neglect, in order that some of the children might be removed from her influence and example, she having, before the Board of Guardians "unblushingly acknowledged" that she resorted to immorality to provide for her children with food. Her out-door relief had been stopped on that account, but she refused to go into the workhouse...a step which she stubbornly refused to take...but, owing to her condition, coercive means could not be resorted to. [She was] promised temporary relief. Notwithstanding her neglect, the mother seems genuinely fond of, and unwilling to part with any of [the children]. [Following the birth of her eighth child]...the mother's consent was obtained to get some of the children into Homes. The mother wished and intended to live respectably, and support her family by honest work, [but] also said that it was impossible for her to provide unaided for eight children and herself (Barnardo's, 1902-1907, p. 1).

In the end, according to the same document, Margaret gave up four of her daughters between the ages of 3 and 9. Two were sent to an orphanage, one went to live with a neighbour, and Grace, my grandmother, went into care at Dr. Barnardo's (Barnardo's), the most well-known organization for child migration.

### Child Migration: Individuals and Organizations

Barnardo's was one of numerous individuals, churches, societies, and organizations that undertook to send children to Canada, especially between 1869 and 1930. The three most well-known were Maria Rye, Annie Macpherson, and Dr. Thomas Barnardo. Others included Fegan Homes, The Roman Catholic Church, the Orphan Homes of Scotland, Qaurriers Homes, and Middlemore Homes (Bagnell, 1980; Bean & Melville, 1989; Corbett, 1981, 1997/2002; Department of Health, 2004; Harrison, 1979; Kohli, 2003). In most organizations, some types of records were kept on the children, even before it became law to do so. For example, Barnardo's kept records on a child's family circumstances, if known; had an initial medical report on each child; and kept records of the child's departure from Britain and arrival in Canada. Although sometimes sporadically, Barnardo's also kept records on the child's placements, health, and progress in Canada until the child left the organization's care, usually at the age of 18 (Bagnell, 1980; Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994; Partridge, personal communication, 1992; Rose, 1987).

**Maria Rye.** According to Bagnell (1980), over a 25-year period beginning in 1869, Maria Rye brought an estimated 5,000 children to Canada, primarily young girls. Rye set up a receiving home in the old jailhouse near Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, renaming it Our Western Home. From there, she placed the children in homes and farms in southern Ontario. Rye was a centre of controversy almost from the beginning. "Having been persuaded that child migration was worth pursuing, she wrote to *The Times* [in London] urging support for the scheme which she said, would remove the 'gutter children' from Britain's cities to Canada" (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 51). The term "guttersnipe" began to be used unkindly and almost immediately for all migrant children, and would have negative consequences in the future for both migration schemes and the children involved (Bean & Melville, 1989). Further, Rye refused to keep financial records or records of the children she transported, and she did not carry out follow-up visits with the children, once placed. This led to an investigation and the ultimate condemnation of her practice by the London Board of Governors. Despite this, Rye continued to bring children to Canada until the turn of the century (Bagnell, 1980; Bean & Melville, 1989; Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994).

**Annie Macpherson.** According to Bagnell (1980), Macpherson and her family members brought an

estimated 14,000 children to Canada, most of them in their early teens. Bagnell (1980) describes McPherson as the “example for scores of similar workers in England in her time who would set up similar programs in Canada” (p. 27). As part of the Evangelistic movement in England, Macpherson “played an active role in seeking out the children” (Kohli, 2003, p. 11). Kohli (2003) goes on to say the children were brought to the organization’s Home in London, and that “while they were in the Home, they underwent a thorough education and discipline” (p. 23). Once in Canada, the children were placed almost immediately in family homes and on farms, typically in Ontario. Female volunteers made “friendly visits (unofficial visits) to see how the children were progressing” (p. 24). Reports were kept in both the Homes in Canada (which included Ontario and Nova Scotia) and the main Home in England. To her credit, Macpherson was always prepared to make necessary changes set out by the government in order to provide the children with the best care (Bagnell, 1980; Kohli, 2003).

**Dr. Thomas Barnardo.** Dr. Barnardo’s organization migrated close to 30,000 children between 1882 and 1939, with the majority arriving in Canada before 1924 (Department of Health, 2003). Barnardo’s set up two Homes in England—one for boys and one for girls—where the children were first taken after being removed from their parents, or the streets. Some children were then placed with couples or families in England for anywhere from a few months up to a few years before being transported to one of Barnardo’s receiving homes in Canada. Barnardo also opened a farm for boys in Russell, Manitoba. Barnardo’s is the most well-known of the child migrant organizations and is still in existence today.

These and similar organizations were accepted, at first, by Canadians and also by the British groups who financed them. Within a few short years, however, suspicion and accusations of financial gain, child neglect, and false promotions arose on both sides of the Atlantic.

### Canada: Acceptance, Suspicion, Accusations

The various government officials who oversaw child migration in England, as well as some of the philanthropists, viewed Canada as

...a frontier society unburdened by class distinctions where their youngsters would have free schooling and opportunities, despite their working-class parentage, to rise to the ‘highest levels’ of Canadian society...children were expected to learn a ‘spirit of independence.’ Barnardo [and others] emphasized particularly the equality within Canadian households, arguing that because servants shared the table and sitting room with the colonial employers their young wards would be treated as family, sharing with the farmer’s own family work and food, school and play (Parr, 1980/1994, p. 46).

At first, there was a favourable response in Canada from some of the local governments, wealthy or well-placed individuals, and churches and social organizations to the various British philanthropic organizations bringing Home Children to Canada. Whether or not these Canadian individuals and organizations agreed with the view presented above is not clear; however, there was initially an enthusiastic welcome. For example, a rent-free house, later called Marchmont, was given to Annie Macpherson by the town of Belleville, Ontario, to be used as a distribution home—a place where the children came when they first arrived in Canada (Bagnell, 1980; Kohli, 2003). Maria Rye, who actually brought the very first group of children over to Canada, just months before Macpherson, was readily welcomed in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. There was also interest from farmers in rural areas and households in urban areas, particularly in southern and southwestern Ontario; Nova Scotia; and the Eastern Townships, an English-speaking area of Quebec (Bagnell, 1980; Corbett, 1981, 1997/2002; Kohli, 2003).

Before long, however, the enthusiasm of Canadians towards the child migration movement began to change, especially once stories began to circulate of children running away; attacking their hosts; stealing food; or found starving—or, in one case, dead. What was happening to these children? Just who were these children who were brought over from England? Canadians became mistrusting and

wondered if England was ridding itself of the lowest of the low: guttersnipes, idiots, the ill, and children with criminal intent (Bagnell, 1980; Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994; Rose, 1979).

Concerns were expressed on both sides of the Atlantic by the same organizations and governments that had initially supported child migration. In 1875, Arthur Doyle carried out an investigation sanctioned by the London Board of Governors, who oversaw the Poor Law Act of 1834 (and, consequently, child migration). Doyle interviewed Rye, Macpherson, and their fellow workers; community organizations; and the children themselves. He expressed concerns regarding the lack of financial recordkeeping by Rye, especially of donated funds, since there had been suspicion she was profiting financially. Doyle also expressed concerns about Rye's lack of records of the children and of their Canadian placements, as well as the fact that there were few or no regular follow-up visits with either the children or the families in which they had been placed. Doyle's report, much of it later disregarded, cast a lasting shadow on all of the "Home Child" organizations, but most particularly on Maria Rye, Annie Macpherson, and eventually the children themselves (Bagnell, 1980; Beal & Melville, 1989; Kohli, 2003; Rose, 1979).

Another question—a suspicion raised by Ontario politicians, Canadian newspapers, and the London Board of Governors—focused on the intent and honesty of these organizations (Bagnell, 1980, Kohli, 2003; Sherington, 2003). Dr. Barnardo, for example, had photographs taken of children posed in ragged clothes and appearing unclean, untidy, and shoeless. He advertised them as urchins or orphans living and surviving on the streets. It came out, however, that some of these photos were actually faked. The children who posed were often from poor homes and the parents simply could no longer support them. They were not living on the streets at all (Kohli, 2003; Sherington, 2003). Aware of the growing discontent, Dr. Barnardo, on his 1884 visit to Canada, provided a six-clause guarantee about the children who would be sent to Canada through his organization. This guarantee was intended to reflect new requirements that had been set out by the Ontario government; it was also meant to allay the public's fears and concerns, and to alter the increasingly negative view of Home Children and the child migration movement. Barnardo's agreed to send only children who were not vicious; who were in excellent health with no tendency towards a disease; who had received rigorous industrial, moral, and religious training; who were the very best of the children; and who would be sent to well-selected homes with regular visits by Barnardo's staff. If a child did not continue to meet all of these criteria once placed, he or she would be immediately removed and returned to the Barnardo's Homes (Bean & Melville, 1989). Despite such assurances by Barnardo's and other child migration organizations, and the requirements set out by the London Board of Governors, unfavourable views and suspicions of child migration continued within Canada. Bean & Melville (1989) explain:

Until 1890, child migration was still smiled upon in Canada but then there was a slow build-up of hostility to migrant children...In these years, when jobs were scarce and the scheme was criticized, supporters turned against it...the criticisms weren't directed towards the way the children were exploited but the social problems they were said to create (p. 73).

The children became victims of this hostility. A bitter, angry, and accusatory attitude toward them took the place of the earlier, more welcoming and benevolent feelings of Canadians. By the end of the 1880s, as Bean & Melville (1989) point out, the children were viewed as "the offal of the most depraved characters in the cities of the old country...[and] morally unfit to become companions of other children. Other Canadian children, that is" (p. 73). In addition, the common belief was that "much crime, drunkenness and prostitution was the result of the child migration scheme...[and a child's] poor background would have a bad effect on the Canadian race" (p. 73).

One observer, a Dr. Clarke, who had been on the same train as a group of boys going to farms in the west, commented that he was "depressed at the sign of degeneracy that was so obvious in these children, and said that the authorities were guilty of criminal neglect to allow them into the country" (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 74). His voice, as a professional, held some weight. Further,

some claimed these children carried some dark defect in their bones which would lead to crime or insanity or both...families were warned about taking in waifs in case they infected their own children...the panic was stoked up by wild accusations from the local press. Whenever and wherever a child was involved in a crime, the criminal was immediately said to be a child migrant. Even [migrant] children who committed suicide were seen as having criminal genes. No thought was given as to why they were led to such a desperate act or whether others were perhaps responsible (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 74).

Indeed, Rye's early comments about "[removing] the 'gutter children' from Britain's cities to Canada" (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 51) had come back to haunt not only her organization, but others as well. There was such concern that by 1924, the Canadian government stepped in and barred the entry of youngsters under the age of 14 who were unaccompanied by their parents. Although this law came many years after the initial rush of child migration, it led to an almost immediate decrease or elimination of child migration to Canada by some organizations, including Barnardo's (Department of Health, 2004; Parr, 1980/1994). By then, however, a negative perception of Canada's Home Children had been deeply established by the very people who initially invited them into this country and into their homes. The children themselves lived with this knowledge. For some, the perceptions and realities of their early life experiences were never shared. For others, it took a lifetime to tell the story.

## The Children

*Guttersnipe! Pauper! Orphan! Street Arab! Imbecile! Idiot! Home Children!* These are just some of the labels attached to the child migrants on both sides of the ocean. Even a designated day, set aside by Barnardo's, to raise funds and awareness of children in need may have perpetuated the idea that the children were the most down-and-out of British society. Called "Waif Saturday" (Rose, 1979, pp. 229, 236), the name itself became a constant reminder to Home Children of the perception society and their Home organization appeared to have of them. Despite assurances that the children coming to Canada would thrive, the actual experiences of many children were ones of sadness, loneliness, tragedy, abuse, and shame (Bagnell, 1980; Corbett, 1981,1997/2002; Harrison, 1979; Kohli, 2003; Parr, 1980/1994).

Bean & Melville (1989) wondered what it would have been like to be a child migrant; to have been taken from one's place of familiarity, whether it was from within a family, or from a workhouse or slum; and to travel by ship to a distant and foreign land, with all contact with friends and family members discontinued. What, they wondered, was it like

to find yourself in an isolated Canadian farmhouse, sometimes working sixteen hours a day out in the fields...what was it like to find that it's merely a luck of the draw whether you ended up with caring foster parents or being cruelly and systematically abused...to discover that because you have come from a Home in Britain you are regarded as trash? (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 9)

Such questions posed by Bean & Melville (1989) were not ones they constructed themselves. Rather, they were rhetorical questions, posed only after a long study of the lives of the children who lived the experience. "From the start the child migrants were mostly aged between four and fourteen and were usually rounded up and accompanied by a Poor Law guardian or representative" (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 2). Although called orphans by the various benevolent societies, "the vast majority of child migrants were not orphans; they were far more likely to have been abandoned, illegitimate, or come from broken homes. They came from all sorts of backgrounds and classes and were by no means all poor" (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 4). The term orphan, however, was effective as a way to attain financial assistance. As Bean & Melville (1989) suggest, "people's hearts were touched by orphans and they contributed funds for their welfare" (p. 4). Another phrase used to describe these children was 'waifs and strays.' According to Snow (2000), "organizations saw the children as only living things—a little more intelligent than animals. They treated them accordingly, and the children learned to regard themselves as things. The 'Waif and Stray' label reinforced these

attitudes" (p. 13).

Meet Florence. Bean & Melville (1989) introduced 12-year-old Florence who was placed on a farm in Ontario with a family who had two small boys:

It was called a foster home...they were good to me...I never played with the other kids, we were just Home kids you weren't supposed to have any feelings. You weren't considered as good as the rest of the kids, because you have no home and no parents of your own. You don't know what this does to you. I have never gotten over it...as a home child, you have no say in anything (p. 11).

Florence goes on to say that the family had made a request to adopt her, but Florence's mother refused to allow the adoption: "No way, you took her to Canada, but you still don't own her" (p. 11). Shortly after, Florence was removed from the home with no explanation and was placed on a farm in another community.

It was a dreadful place. I had a life of hell there. The man had a vicious temper and he used to beat me up if I forgot something or didn't do it right. I was just a bundle of nerves. You see, I was the hired man and a housemaid, too. I worked my heart and soul out...[One time] he beat [me] up but good, bashed me round the head. I was nothing but a nervous wreck. It seemed I had forgotten to grind up the turnips that morning for the young cattle (p. 11).

Meet George:

We were the cheapest slave labour the farmers ever had. I was wondering how you [Harrison] even got to thinking of such people as us. I thought we were long forgotten as we were only Home boys and it didn't matter much about what happened to us. We were of no importance (Harrison, 1979, p. 81).

Meet Ellen. She talks of her husband, William. Born in a workhouse in England, William came to Canada at the age of 8.

The...place he was sent to was owned by a beast who used to beat his wife and my husband whenever he was drunk and that was often. Finally [William] ran away but they found him and took him back for more beatings...It seemed to my husband that the farmer knew when the representative [from the Home] would be coming around and would send him out to the barn or way down by the creek and tell him not to come until they called. My husband was very bitter. I have seen him break down when he told me some of the stories, and it is hard to see a man do that. Thank God we had a happy life together (Harrison, 1979, p. 86).

Meet Charles:

Those were seven years of hell. I was beat up with pieces of harness, pitchforks, anything that came in handy to hit me with I got it. I didn't get enough to eat...I had to have the cattle home by 5:30 in the afternoon. If I was late I got beat up...I never had a coat if it was raining. Just a grain sack over my shoulders...they would buy me shoes that didn't fit. I used to cry with the pain. My feet are still crippled over that (Harrison, 1979, p. 91).

Meet a person who withheld her name:

I got more beatings in Canada than I ever got. I was punished for things I didn't know what for sometimes. One spring we were rounding up the cattle and the cattle didn't get into the right place between me and the farmer. He took the bamboo rod to me, not only then, but several times. I have a spinal injury and I blame it on that man...Many times I would come in from working in the fields or barn and go to bed with my clothes and all on...and him trying to get into bed with me and him putting his hand over my mouth so I



couldn't yell...I fought...If I had four children and no way to support them I would have slit their throats and mine before I'd let them suffer the heartbreak and loneliness that I've known (Harrison, 1979, p. 88).

Meet Grace, my grandmother. The following is an excerpt from her record at the Barnardo Girl's Home in Barkingside, London, England:

- Admitted: 7th May, 1900, Age 7 years, 10 months.
- Date and Place of Birth: 19th June, 1892, at Bungay [Suffolk, England]
- Religious Denomination of Parents: Church of England
- Full Agreement, with Canada Clause, signed by mother.

(Barnardo's, 1902-1907, p. 2)

The same record further described Grace as 3 feet, 5 inches, with brown hair, brown eyes, a dark complexion, and weighing 44 pounds. She was also described as shy, quiet, and polite. Within a few months, she was sent to a small village to live with an elderly couple with whom she lived for 2 years. [Grace had a small prayer book given to her by this family that she kept all her life. It was one of only four items that she kept from her childhood.] She did not remain there permanently, because Grace's mother had signed the Canada Clause. This was a clause that gave Barnardo's the right to send a child to Canada and place him or her according to where there was need (Partridge, personal communication, 1992).

Grace was sent to Canada in 1902 to become a companion to the daughter of a well-to-do family and was with them for 3 years. Although they had wanted to adopt Grace, it was not permitted by Grace's mother. When the family moved, Grace was unable to go with them and she was sent to live with an elderly artist for several months. She then lived her final years under Barnardo's care with another well-to-do family [Mrs. R.] who oversaw her education, and at the same time, trained Grace as a domestic servant (Partridge, personal communication, 1992).

Except for one brief period, the reports for Grace were excellent and visits by Barnardo's staff occurred at least once a year. The last comment in Grace's record by a member of Barnardo's staff states:

good health, very pretty girl, black eyes and hair and good figure. Nice girl, well spoken of in this village—keeping company with a respectable young man—a clerk in a hardware store. Has decided to go to the Telephone office after the New Year (Barnardo's, 1902-1907, p. 3).

The final comment on Grace's record, however, is from Mrs. R., with whom Grace maintained contact for many years: Grace "is a splendid girl and a credit to the Home [Barnardo's]" (Barnardo's, 1902-1907, p. 3).

Unlike the stories of many other Home Children, Grace's story was a positive one. Yet, when she spoke of her childhood experiences to her nephew nearly 50 years later there was a lifetime of doubt and hurt. "When Aunt Grace told me she was a Barnardo's girl, she cried. She said she was so ashamed that she could never tell her own children. All of her life, she thought she wasn't as good as other people" (Hewitt, personal communication, 1992).

Grace had no contact with any of her family, until, at the age of 14, she asked if she had any family in England. Barnardo's then assisted Grace to make contact with her mother (Barnardo's, 1902-1907, p. 2). She subsequently made and kept written contact with some of her siblings who had remained with their mother in 1900. According to a diary kept by Grace, after 63 years of separation and seven years of planning, she fulfilled a lifelong dream and traveled to England in 1965 where she was finally reunited with six of her seven siblings, and two step-siblings.

## The Story of Grace: What Her Children and Grandchildren Knew

"Showing courage, commitment, and a capacity for hard work, most Home Children went on to lead successful lives as productive citizens in all professions, making a significant contribution in every part of Canada" (Young, 2012, p. 9). My grandmother, or Granny, as she was called, appears to have been one of the children of whom Young speaks. In 1914, at the age of 22, my grandmother married William, a civil engineer, whose work took him across Canada and into the untamed, undeveloped, and unpopulated areas of this country. Grace went with him, every step of the way, in their 60 years of marriage. In the earliest years, it was traveling by canoe; living in canvas tents in all seasons; carrying a rifle over her left shoulder; and wearing a knee-length Hudson's Bay coat, matching gloves, and a muskrat hat on her head. On her feet were the mukluks and snowshoes made by the Ojibwa of northern Manitoba. Before the river froze one early winter, she traveled for days in a canoe to reach Winnipeg to give birth to her first son, my father, only to return upriver in the spring thaw, her infant son strapped to her back, so she could be back home with her husband. Over the next 40 years, this child immigrant from Britain, my grandmother, was at the very sites where her husband helped plan and build some of the largest dams and bridges from Alberta to New Brunswick. With each place, with each experience, she brought something forward to her future grandchildren many years later: her stories, her photos, her diaries, her address books, and a map.

During the depression years, the family house sat adjacent to the Canadian Pacific Railway lines in northwestern Ontario. The roof had been marked with a big yellow X by the hobos riding the rails. That X could only be seen from the train cars, and it meant my grandmother's home was a place where anyone could stop, take a rest, and be well fed. Baked macaroni and cheese was her specialty. During the Second World War, she regularly shipped food and clothing to her English siblings. She saw her three children survive that same war, return to Canada, and build successful lives. As she became older and she and my grandfather moved around less often, Granny was able to live a life of some comfort. Occasionally, she had tea with the wives of diplomats and business moguls; she enjoyed "Ladies' Luncheons" and dinner parties; and she played excellent hands of whist and duplicate bridge.

Grace was a person of strong Christian faith and became a member of her local church and several benevolent groups no matter where she resided. Her love of music led her to sing in church choirs and attend operas and musicals in New York, Toronto, Montreal, and even London, England. When William retired and the two of them settled in their final home together, Grace fulfilled another lifelong dream by purchasing a small organ for herself. She was finally able to play from all of the sheet music she had been collecting and carrying with her from place to place since the early 1920s.

Following my grandfather's death, my grandmother sold her home at half the assessed value to what she referred to as a nice young couple starting out in life. She never turned an adult or child away from her door whether they were selling papers, cookies, or pretend chocolate pies made out of mud; and she made it possible for me to go to Europe with my school group because, she said, every person should have the opportunity to travel and experience the world.

Grace lived in 56 different places throughout her married life and marked them all on a map that she had taped to her kitchen wall. She was a woman who presented every indication of having enjoyed life, of leading a good life, and of giving to others; yet, she was a woman who, even after 50 years, felt the shame of being a Home Child (Hewitt, personal communication, 1992). Positive comments on her Barnardo's reports appear not to have been powerful enough to have erased the emotional pain caused by those earliest derisive perceptions of all Home Children. Little Grace was not an imbecile, nor a guttersnipe. She was not a waif nor a stray nor an orphan; but she lived her life with the knowledge and belief that she was thought of as different from many other children she had known and was not as good as other people (Hewitt, personal communication, 1992). My grandmother was not alone in her despair. Florence, George, Charles, Ellen, and thousands of others shared it with her.

## The Legacy of the Children

In some ways, the children are now being remembered. A handful of books have been written, particularly since the 1970s. The growing popularity of family history has made many people curious about their ancestral roots; for many Canadians, this curiosity has led or will lead to a Home Child. Barnardo's is still operating in England, although its primary mandate is now the support of people with intellectual disabilities across Great Britain. However, another of its primary roles is the After Care Department, which helps living child migrants and the descendants of those who are deceased access original Barnardo's admission records. Also housed in the Barnardo After Care archives are the surviving records from Maria Fry and Annie Macpherson and their child migration organizations (Department of Health, 2004; Partridge, personal communication, 1992).

In recent years, organizations and groups across Canada, such as the Ontario Genealogical Society and the British Home Children's Organization, have created branches, groups, and online resources specific to Home Children. Their purpose is to provide a place where Home Children, descendants of Home Children, and other interested parties may learn more about the societies that brought children to Canada, or learn how to research a Home Child. For many, such as this author, these are places where we may come together to celebrate and commemorate a shared set of events in history and the thousands of children who lived through those events.

Another way in which the children have been remembered was when the Canadian government "declared 2010 the year of the British Home Child to commemorate the thousands of poverty-stricken children sent here from Britain between 1869 and 1948" (Canada's History Magazine, 2010, n.p.). Also, Canada Post issued a commemorative stamp to honour the Home Children (Canada's History Magazine, 2010, n.p.). Yet, according to Richard Foot (2010), a writer for the Ottawa Citizen, "the descendants of 100,000 child labourers brought to Canada want more than a commemorative stamp" (p. A4). He goes on to say that some would like the Government of Canada to provide resources and financial support to living child migrants and/or their descendants to help them carry out searches and to help reunite families. Foot (2010) quotes John Willoughby, a Home Child descendant: "We have thousands of people in this country who have lost their homeland, their identity and lost their families...would you be satisfied with a stamp?" (p. A4).

Canada, however, did not go as far as Great Britain or Australia. In 2009, Kevin Rudd, the Australian Prime Minister, formally apologized to the Australian Home Children—children who had been called the Forgotten Australians: "Today, and from this day forward, it is my hope that you will be called the Remembered Australians" (Canada's History Magazine, 2010). The following year, on February 24, 2010, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Gordon Brown, extended a formal apology to Australian and Canadian Home Children and their descendants. Surviving Home Children and descendants of Home Children from both countries were also invited to attend a remembrance ceremony in Britain (Canada's History Magazine, 2010), but no apology has been forthcoming from the Canadian government.

Finally, more tangible reminders of Home Children are scattered around the country. A cairn stands in Russell, Manitoba, the location of Barnardo's first training farm for boys. Another memorial, a plaque dedicated to Home Children, is located in our nation's capital, "in the Ottawa area of Wellington Street, near Holy Rosary Church, which was the site of St. George's Home" (British Home Children in Canada, n.d., n.p.), one of the receiving homes for boys. What may become the most significant of the physical monuments, though, are imposing blocks of polished granite erected on the site of what used to be the Barnardo's Hazelbrae Home for Girls in Peterborough, Ontario. Unveiled in 2011, the monument is engraved with the names of over 9,000 girls, my grandmother being one of them, who made Hazelbrae their first home in Canada before being sent to a new life (British Home Children in Canada, n.p.).

The greatest memorial or legacy, however, lies in the descendants of those 100,000 Home Children who arrived in this country, often alone and bewildered. Young (2012) points out that, in Canada today, there are over 4 million descendants of Home Children. That is close to one eighth of the

present-day population of Canada. I am but one. Yet, many other descendants are unaware of the early life and beginnings of one of their ancestors. This history and these stories are an important part of Canada's past, and are worth investigating. I am proud to be the descendant of a Home Child!

## Conclusion

The cultures of Great Britain and Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were based on certain values and expectations with respect to moral, religious, political, economic, and social behaviours. These values and expectations overlapped or interacted in ways that led to the development of laws and socio-economic structures that affected the rights of both organizations and citizens. The Industrial Revolution, child labour, The Poor Law, workhouses, and benevolent societies are just some of the phenomena that contributed to child migration from Britain to Canada. 100,000 children from poor or broken families were taken from their homes in Great Britain and placed in the homes of strangers in a new and different land in Canada. Whereas child migration organizations originally expected Home Children to be educated and treated like family members in their new homes, in addition to being trained for employment, this was not always the case. As discussed in this paper, the welfare and well-being of many of these children were disregarded at the time, and, until recently, history has disregarded them as well. This essay is but one small contribution to the discovery, remembrance, and honour of this group of children whose stories are finally being told, and whose place in history must not be forgotten nor diminished.

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