

Child Migration

The Canadian Experience

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History of Child Migration to Canada

The story of emigration is the story of Canada's founding and growth into Nationhood. For one such group of people their story is largely untold and unknown to most Canadians. They are generally described as the Home Children from England.

By the 1870's, Canada through early emigration and settlement had progressed to a rapidly developing farm based economy society. The third generation of emigration were now farming on their own farms and a shortage of farm labor was being felt, consequently this slowed Canada's development.

Meanwhile in England their farm-based economy was purged and devastated by the industrial revolution. Steam engines and electricity, allowed factories to spring up all over England and products were being "Manufactured" and shipped all over the world. The effect was to cause immense hardship to farmers, farm laborers, guilds workers and all their families who for centuries had been the backbone of the English economy.

During that time families found it more and more difficult to care for their children. With the problems in England and the need for labor in Canada the two Governments implemented the "Juvenile Farm Immigration Policy". This agreement encouraged and allowed young English boys and girls from all parts of England to be sent to Canada to work as laborers on Canadian farms.

In the beginning, developing religious and social groups became involved in the program and they sent less fortunate children in groups to Canada. As the years passed, a wider selection process was used to meet the ever increasing demand from Canada. At the height of the program there were four applications for every available child in England.

The program dwindled down in the 1930's as the depression was gripping North America and there was no longer a demand for farm labor of any kind. Unemployment had created a surplus of individuals to carry out the work of the child laborers.

Approximately 100,000 children were sent to Canada from 1869 to 1935. Their descendants number 3,500,000 or approximately 12% of the Canadian population. Their contributions to the shaping of Canada as a nation are endless although never acknowledged.

It only became known much later on what exactly the sending agencies were doing and how they obtained the children to be forcibly migrated to Canada.

Home Children

Home Children have been ignored to date for their contributions in shaping Canada as a nation. They were the largest organised migration to Canada. These children fought in all wars and conflicts, educated our children, built our railroads, healed our children all the while asking for nothing in return. Even though 66% were abused they managed to survive in our country after being removed from their own country. The circumstances surrounding their departures from their homes varies from child to child. Some were enticed to come to a better life in Canada only to find out this was not the case. Many were placed in homes in the UK by their parent or parents for financial reasons. When the parents returned for their children they were told their son or daughter was dead. In many cases a number of siblings were sent together only to be separated on their arrival in Canada. This usually occurred right on train platforms where children were literally ripped apart from one another and sent in different directions. The stories are sad but true and to date Canada as a nation has not acknowledged their contribution to this great country.

Many to this day still do not know their real name as many names were changed either before they left England or after their arrival in Canada. More than anything else all they want is to know their names and true identities. Secondary to that is to locate living relatives in the UK and to discover where they came from. These are things as Canadians we all take for granted as most of us know our names and who our parents are, and where we were born.

These children gave up so much, contributed more than their share so as a nation isn't it time to recognize their contributions to Canada. When 3,500,000 Canadians are affected by this it is up to us as a country to acknowledge them for what they have endured and for their contributions to Canada. As a nation we owe it to them. We also must assist those who do not even know they are a Home Child or a descendant in any way we can.

Most of these Canadians can't hop on a plane to search for their roots in the UK. Therefore there must be a site to assist them in their search and to celebrate what they have done for us as a nation.

These children were sent to every area in Canada some even before Confederation. They have spread to every province and territory in Canada. What better location than the Birthplace of our Nation, Prince Edward Island to recognize their contribution to our country.

Through our work we discovered that the children and descendants are so happy to finally have someone to assist them in their search for family information or even just a sympathetic ear to listen to their stories. There should be dedicated site to honour their memory, particularly this Historic Farm in Cavendish. Since most Home Children were sent to Canadian Farms, having a farm site dedicated to their memory will produce a sincere emotional response. There are those who believe such a location will be treated as a shrine particularly those since so many lie in unmarked graves.

Perceptions & Perseverance

For many years the people of England were led to believe that these children who were being sent to Canada were waifs, strays and street urchins. It may have been true in a small number but most had parents, brothers sisters friends and other family. Time and circumstances were against them. They were not able to defend themselves against the Governments and sending agencies to prevent themselves from being taken advantage of.

We now know that the parents, children and siblings were all lied to. Children were told their parents did not want them or that after a period of time in a home that their parents were dead. These are only a few of the tactics used to coerce may children to come to Canada. Those who still did not wish to leave England behind were forcibly migrated with not thought of the children.

What were the motives, humanity, concern for the children, we do not believe so. The agencies eventually received payment for their work in shipping children to Canada. It also allowed them to solicit funds from the general public to carry out their work.. Then there is the question as to where the money intended for the children went. Each child who worked on a farm was considered an indentured worker in which the farmer agreed to pay so much a month to the children. It was to be kept in trust until their service was up. Who took the money from the children and what was it used for. Although the program may have began for a perceive need it quickly deteriorated leaving a wake of distrust and anger.

There is no question that some children were paid some form of wages. The number is infinitesimal compared to the number of children who received nothing as payment other than destroying their childhood.

After all these children suffered it is amazing what they have accomplished in their lives, for those who survived their ordeal as many did not live through it. Many even died at the hands of their keepers. Even then little was done as in the eyes of society at the time they were not real people.

Care Of The Children

For the most part in England the children were fed and clothed by the societies charged with their care. Many however were mistreated and worked very hard until their shipment to Canada. The fact that so many of the children have passed on and kept their life experiences from their families little is known exactly how well they were treated in the UK.

Upon their arrival in Canada the acceptance and treatment of children varied widely throughout the country. Some work has been done in this area over the years beginning with inspections of the receiving homes and the farms the children were to be placed on, to Government sponsored fact finding missions and reports. The accuracy of these reports has to be called in to questions as further research has shown that 66% of all former child migrants were abused in some form. This was either at the hands of the receiving homes or farms they were placed on. The societies had full control of who was sent to Canada as long as they passed a Military Parade style inspection by an official of the Canadian Government.

It was only in 1898 when by an Act of the Ontario Legislature entitled

“An Act to Regulate the Immigration into Ontario of Certain Classes of Children”

Did a more rigorous inspection occur of the children. Mr. P. Byrne an agent for the Ontario Government inspected the children in Liverpool. These inspections and interviews have to be suspect as Mr. Byrne states “emigration is universally popular with the children”. This we now know was not the case as many of the children certainly did not wish to leave their homes.

Without going into too much detail the abuses suffered in Australia by the Children were similar in Canada. The rapes, beatings and torture were all prevalent here in Canada. We have even begun to document cases of what was called at the time manslaughter. The major difference was that while the children sent to Australia were institutionalized, children who came to Canada went to individual farms.

Children as young as two were sent to farms even though the landowner specifically requested a strapping lad to help out on the farm. What purpose did this serve other than to rid England of another child and to populate Canada with British stock. The motive we may never know the full details as so much has been concealed from the start, the truth may never be uncovered.

It was uncommon for the children to be legally adopted by Canadians and since the

Societies receive funds in trust for the children who responsibility was their care. It would appear that the Children to this day were British Citizens cast aside by the Government and the sending agencies. We feel that the bulk of the responsibility is the Government of England for failing to care for these children and allowing the agencies to do as they saw fit.

The Government of Canada must also be held accountable for turning a blind eye to these children. The allowed 100,000 children to be taken advantage to the greatest extent one could imagine. The Government of Canada ignored their own laws and allowed basically the trafficking of children to Canada and to this day refuse to assist them in any way.

The societies bear their share of blame as well for the sheer disregard of the children safety and well being. Also for the lies and deceit told to the children and their families about each other. But especially for the refusal to this day to release documents to the surviving 10,000 to 12,000 children and their families. Barnardo's has stated recently of the 48,000 children that passed through their care to Canada and Australia, they have only released 100 complete files or 0.2% in the last 50 years. Is that cooperation we do not believe so, at this rate it would take in excess of Twenty Four Million Years to release all the complete files. Of course this is not realistic but to date we have not seen much movement on their part to help former child migrants.

Assistance in Canada

The Government of Canada has not acted upon the recommendations of the British Government to help former child migrants in the quest for their identities. To date the extent of help is that the Government has asked that the Department of Immigration fast track requests of Home Children for information. The only problem is that unless they are in the main database (which most are not) almost nothing can be done to find a record of them. That is the extent of the level of assistance provided to Canadian Home Children.

The Government does not offer counseling for former migrants and really has yet to acknowledge they exist.

The Canadian Government response to our request for help in locating surviving relatives is and I quote “ the challenges faced by Home Children in tracing their heritage are common to the majority of Canadians, and it is clearly a personal decision whether an individual seeks to identify their historical roots”. This quote is from correspondence from the Hon. Lloyd Axworthy Minister of Foreign Affairs who are the supposed lead department for Home Children.

It would appear then that the Government of Canada holds the view that all Home Children should have no problem locating their heritage or that most Canadians were forcibly migrated to Canada. It is clear through the lack of knowledge that the current Prime Minister and their Government has no interest in helping Home Children.

The Canadian Centre for Home Children

The organization was formed in 1990 and incorporated in 1991. It is a nonprofit organization devoted to helping AHOME CHILDREN® and their descendants locate their roots and attempt to locate living relatives in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia as well as other countries.

During this time the Centre has been in contact with thousands of descendants from across the world. We had calls and letters from every province in Canada, and from as far away as, Arizona, South Africa and Australia.

The Centre has been successful in obtaining various types of information depending on the request. Some people request birth certificates, of what home their family member was sent from to what year they were sent. Some individuals just pass on their family members history or just call to have someone who understands the situation to talk to.

Through the work of the Centre we have brought Home Children story to national attention through television and print media.

The Centre also operates a Family and Genealogical Research Centre for Home Children and their descendants. At the Centre we also have a historical display to educate the public on the subject of Canadian Home Children. The display is located in Cavendish PEI on Route Six next to Rainbow Valley. We have operated out of another location and over the past three years has attracted in excess 40,000 visitors.

The Centre continues to try and educate and inform the public about Home Children. Our Chairman has spoke to a wide range of groups from Rotary, Genealogical Societies and the like to get the Home Children story out to them. The response is always the same : what a sad but wonderful story we never even new anything about, is there anything we can do to help. Yes there is tell everyone about Home Children and have them contact us.

The Centre is Canada=s only National Organization devoted to Home Children. Currently we are in the process of setting up an advisory board consisting of two representatives from every province. This will provide a much broader base for what is needed to help Home Children and will provide a contact point in every province to make the Centre and its services more readily available.

Currently the Government of Canada does not see that Home Children have any more difficulty locating family information than other Canadians. The fact that many Home Children were kidnapped from their families and forcibly migrated to Canada has no bearing on the Government's position. Apparently there is no difference in coming of your own free will or being lied to, manipulated and forced to emigrate to Canada then treated with disdain and 66% of abused in numerous ways including being beaten to death by their so-called Guardians.

The Government is mistaken when they say that Home Children face the same problems the rest of Canadians face in relation to their family history. Most Canadians know who their parents are and where they were born and if they have siblings. Home Children for the most part do not know why they were sent to Canada and do not know who their families are in the UK.

The Government of Canada has in the past helped many immigrants but for some reason the largest single group brought to this country at our Government's request they refuse to help. Is it the fact that they were severely abused by their keepers or that the sending Agencies and Government Departments falsified records, or is it the fact that the Government paid \$2.00 per child for this labour to work on Canadian Farms due to the shortage of labour.

The children certainly did not have any say in the matter. When you are four years old and forced to clean after animals, chop and lug fire wood and if you complain you are beaten. You soon learn to do as you're told and not ask questions. By the time you are ten or eleven you have forgotten your home and family or you have pushed it back in your mind as you cannot believe a parent would subject a small child to this.

How did they get away with the abuse? The Government wanted labour and labour alone what some farmer did to his property was his business, even if his property was a small boy or girl. We have all failed to support Canadian Home Children and each and everyone of their descendants. All they want is what was stolen from them by the Sending agencies and the Governments of Canada and England.

There is approximately 10,000 to 12,000 surviving Home Children of the original 100,000 sent to Canada. In Australia there is about 7000 Home Children in total but the UK Government has provided in the neighbourhood of \$500,000 per year for the Childs Migrants Trust to Assist Home Children in Australia or \$72.00 per child. In Canada they have spent about \$10,000 or Ten Cents per child. What makes Home Children in Australia more important, nothing they all were treated the same as slave labour. It is the fact that the Australian Government insisted that the UK Government do something to help Home Children and the Children Migrant Trust. Which is the exact opposite of what the Government of Canada has done.

The Government of Canada feels that it is the responsibility of the Home Child to locate their identity that was stolen by the Government of Canada the Sending Agencies and the

UK Government. All of these parties were involved in misleading families on the whereabouts of their children and the children were lied to and told their parents were dead. So each of them have a responsibility to help Home Children but they refuse to do so in Canada.