

March, 2018



# British Home Child Group International

Design and Layout by Karen Mahoney

## Black History Month by Sandra Joyce

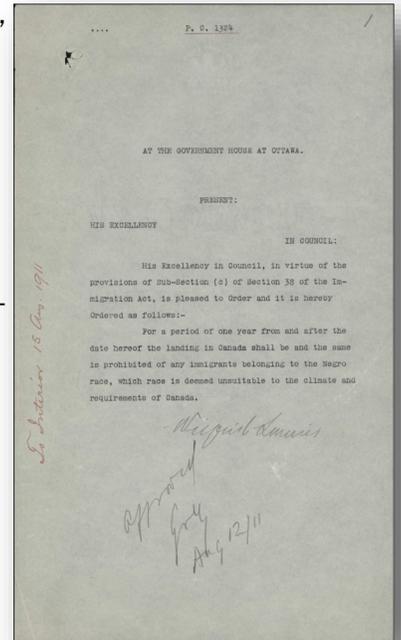
Every February, Canadians honour and reflect upon the legacy of Black Canadians, past and present, by participating in Black History Month festivities and events.

This year, the British Home Child Group International honours Oscar Lowden, one of the rare black British Home Children, who was sent to Canada as a fourteen-year-old. Born in 1894 in England, he arrived here from Liverpool via Portland, Maine in the middle of March, 1907. His destination was the National Children's Home in Hamilton, Ontario.

Oscar was placed on a farm in Tecumseh County where he is listed on the 1911 census as a servant in a farmer's household with two young children. Ten years later, on the 1921 census, we see Oscar as a Toronto tailor, married with a son.

However, contrary to Oscar's success story and the accounts of the Underground Railroad and Canada's participation in it, the immigration of black settlers in Canada was not always met with enthusiasm.

Significant to note were events that occurred in Oklahoma as it joined the United States in 1907. Black Americans were denied the right to vote, were segregated and refused entry to certain public places. There were also public lynchings especially one case where a mother and son were hanged from a bridge and photos were taken while the public looked on.



*So. Indians 18 Aug 1911*



Photo courtesy Glenbow Archives - A family in Amber Valley, AB

This caused an exodus of 1,500 black immigrants, mostly from Oklahoma to settle in Saskatchewan and Alberta between 1905 and 1912. Despite immigration being encouraged, the black Americans were met with prejudice. It was argued that black farmers were not suited to the harsh climate of Canada as well as racial tensions experienced in the U. S., would be replicated in Canada.

However, the real concerns seemed to be the depreciation of the land where the black Americans settled and white immigrants would be discouraged from settling in the areas that were predominately black.

Canadian immigration authorities limited access to immigration material to black Americans and subjected them to tougher than normal medical examinations at the border. Certificates verifying a black person's status as a farmer (immigration officials considered farmers as ideal settlers) were denied and certificates that would reduce their train fare (settlers were offered a reduced rate) were not provided.

Photo courtesy Government of Canada

## Black History Month *continued*

Increasing public pressure against black settlers encouraged Prime Minister Laurier and his Cabinet to approve an Order-in-Council on 12 August 1911, which read:

“For a period of one year from and after the date hereof the landing in Canada shall be and the same is prohibited of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.”

Although the Order-in-Council was repealed and was never put into effect, the tone toward black immigration of Canada was clear – they were not welcome.

Despite negative influences surrounding black immigration, it seems that our British Home Child, Oscar Lowden, was able to make his way in Canada in an urban rather than a rural environment. He had the good fortune to find a profession and lead a successful and happy life.



Oscar Lowden & Family - Photo courtesy Ancestry

## US Immigration Bans British Home Children



In 1895, it was reported in the international press that an American Federal Immigration Inspector, Mr DeBarry, said that he had been warned by his Federal Government about the Barnardo orphans. A resident of Buffalo, New York, Mr. DeBarry said he had been told to make sure that no Dr. Barnardo orphans from Canada be allowed to enter the United States.

According to De Barry, Dr. Barnardo, who was bringing 200 to 300 children a year to Canada, was not operating under philanthropic motives. In fact, he insisted that that idea was ‘tommy-rot’. Barnardo, DeBarry said, was a paid agent of orphan institutions and that these institutions were private and not Government-run. He went on to say that the children incarcerated in these ‘homes’ were the illegitimate offspring of the nobility and aristocracy. The children were being shipped out of Britain to get rid of the growing evidence of the aristocrats’ shame.

A few of the leading citizens of Buffalo promptly wrote letters to the press lauding the work of Dr. Barnardo, going on to say that many prominent Canadian citizens owed their start to Dr. Barnardo.

## National Day for British Home Children by Sandra Joyce



On Wed. Feb. 7, 2018, Motion 133 to designate September 28 as National British Home Child Day in Canada passed unanimously in the House of Commons. This means that those British Home Children still living and BHC descendants now have a day to celebrate the contributions they and their ancestors made to the founding of our great country.

The Private Member's Motion was initiated by MP Guy Lauzon on November 22, 2017 after the idea was brought to his attention by one of his constituents, Judy Neville, a British Home Child descendant and current President of the Ontario East British Home Child Family group.

Previously only Ontario, thanks to a Private Member's Bill passed in 2011 by Neville's brother, former MPP Jim Brownell, officially celebrated a provincial Home Child Day. Nova Scotia also celebrated a provincial Home Child Day but it has had to have the Day approved annually.

This Motion was preceded by a Motion to Apologize to the Home Children which was passed unanimously on February 16, 2017. This motion was introduced by the Bloc Quebecois and supported by all parties. MP Luc Thériault was encouraged to present the Motion by former Leader of the Opposition, Gilles Duceppe. Duceppe's maternal grandfather was a Home Child sent from Ireland to Quebec who often spoke to his grandson about the loneliness he experienced as a Home Boy.

Prior to that, the British Home Child Group International's Apology Committee had emailed all MPs with information about the home children in their language of preference and followed up by a phone call in either English or French.

As the window of opportunity was quite small to present the Motion to the House of Commons, Mr. Duceppe and MP Thériault invited Co-founders of the British Home Child Group International, Karen Mahoney and Sandra Joyce to represent the Home Children and their descendants in the House. Sandra Joyce spoke at the media scrum after the Motion was unanimously passed. Present were MP Elizabeth May, MP Jessica Kwan, MP Luc Thériault, and MP Judy Sgro. On behalf of the BHCGI and other groups, Judy Sgro had presented petitions on behalf of the Home Children and their descendants four times in the House of Commons.

In less than a year, two Motions have passed in the House of Commons, honouring the Home Children and their descendants. This part of history has finally been acknowledged by the Canadian Government and their stories will continue to be told especially on September 28<sup>th</sup>.

This year, the BHCGI will co-host the unveiling of a plaque marking the first receiving Home in Canada, opened by Maria Rye in 1869 in Niagara-on-the-Lake on our first National Home Child Day.



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