

December, 2015



# British Home Child Group International

## *Pier 21*

*By Sandra Joyce*

On Canada Day in 1999, a National Immigration Museum was opened at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Pier 21 was Canada's official primary port of entry for forty-three years, finally accepting the last passengers through its gates in 1971. One million people passed through its doors on their way to becoming Canadians.

Although not officially opened until 1928, Pier 21 began accepting immigrants as early as 1924. The prior immigration shed – Pier 2 – had been badly damaged during the Halifax explosion of 1917. It was restored, but increasing waves of immigrants necessitated the use of the new building. Assisted passenger schemes delivered many men to the shores of Halifax in the 1920s and women and children fol-

lowed when the men had earned enough for their families to join them. Many families crossed in this way and so, Pier 21 had special facilities to assist them.

Another immigration program and perhaps the largest, was that of the more than 100,000 British Home Children who were to Canada. Although this scheme started in the mid-1860s, most of the final immigrants passed through Pier 21's shed.

In the 1930s, immigration slowed almost to a halt as the Great Depression reared its ugly



head and only one third of European applicants would be granted permission to sail to Canada. Of those, many became disillusioned and returned to their countries.

*Continued on page 2.....*



Female Yeoman Warder Moira Cameron at the Chapel of The Tower of London

## *Finding Family* *by Moira Cameron*

I met Sandy and her fiancé Ron when they came to London after visiting my Father and Uncles in Scotland. I was quite excited about meeting new family members.

We sat down at the end of the working day and chatted and the story began to unfold. It made me sad and angry to hear about the treatment of my Great Uncles and the saddest thing of all is that they lost contact with each other as well.

That night, which is nearly two years ago now, I could see the similarities between Sandy and one of my Uncles and since then I have met her sister Lynda who reminds me a lot of my Grandma too.

*Continued on page 2.....*

## *Pier 21, continued*



*Welcoming Canadian troops home in 1945*

From the moment Canada entered the Second World War, the Department of National Defense took over Pier 21. Halifax became the lifeline for supplies and personnel to Britain.

During the first year of the War, over 3,000 children were evacuated to Canada from war-torn Britain as part of Operation Pied Piper. This came to an abrupt halt after a German U Boat sunk the *City of Benares*. Seventy-seven children were lost.

Almost all of the 494,874 Europe-bound service personnel embarked from Pier 21 during the War. Fifty thousand did not live to return.

After the war was over, 48,000 British War Brides and their 22,000 children arrived in Canada to take their places in Canadian society. The largest

influx was in 1946. Other displaced persons were not accepted for two years after the war until MacKenzie King unveiled his immigration policy showing a shift in preferred ethnic groups. The busiest years at Pier 21 led up to the mid-fifties when many refugees arrived from the Baltic States, followed by Dutch immigrants seeking farmland and other immigrants from European countries. At this time the largest ethnic groups immigrating to Canada were the British, American, and European. The Colonist Car - a carefully constructed replica of an immigrant train car at Pier 21

The Colonist Car - a carefully constructed replica of an immigrant train car at Pier 21

21 cars, Italians, Germans and the Dutch. The Colonist Car - a carefully constructed replica of an immigrant train car at Pier 21



*The Colonist Car - a carefully constructed replica of an immigrant train car at Pier 21*

As flying became the preferred way of travelling in the 1960s, it became less and less justifiable to keep the facilities open at Pier 21 and so, it was closed.

Pier 21 has just opened its doors once again after an extensive renovation. Doubled in size, there are now exhibits

## *Finding Family, continued*

Earlier this year we all met up with another cousin Alan, who looks just like one of my Uncles, and another link in the chain was formed.

There definitely is a connection between us all and the other good thing about it all is it has made me think of my Grandma more often, which is never a bad thing.



Newly found cousins of sisters Sandra Joyce and Lynda Joyce: Alan Doig and Moira Cameron



## *Remembering the fallen across Canada*

The British Home Children were represented across Canada as wreath bearers took part in Remembrance Day Ceremonies.



Susan Brazeau, Lloydminster, AB



Linzey Davis, Paris, ON



Hazel Perrier, Claresholm, AB



Ian MacLeod, OEBHCF Parliament Hill Ottawa, ON



Karen Mahoney, President of the British Home Child Group International at the Ontario Provincial Parliament, Toronto, ON

## **Upcoming Events**

### **December, 2015**

Probus Club of Oshawa

December 8th 10am-12pm

### **January, 2016**

Probus Club of Brampton

January 18th 10am-11am

Hamilton Branch of the OGS Webinar

January 21st 7pm

Norfolk Museum

January 28th 7pm-9pm

# Christmas in the Workhouse

By George Robert Sims

It is Christmas Day in the workhouse,  
And the cold, bare walls are bright  
With garlands of green and holly,  
And the place is a pleasant sight;  
For with clean-washed hands and faces,  
In a long and hungry line  
The paupers sit at the table,  
For this is the hour they dine.

And the guardians and their ladies,  
Although the wind is east,  
Have come in their furs and wrappers,  
To watch their charges feast;  
To smile and be condescending,  
Put pudding on pauper plates.  
To be hosts at the workhouse banquet  
They've paid for — with the rates.

Oh, the paupers are meek and lowly  
With their "Thank'ee kindly, mum's!"  
So long as they fill their stomachs,  
What matter it whence it comes!  
But one of the old men mutters,  
And pushes his plate aside:  
"Great God!" he cries, "but it chokes me!  
For this is the day she died!"

The guardians gazed in horror,  
The master's face went white;  
"Did a pauper refuse the pudding?"  
"Could their ears believe aright?"  
Then the ladies clutched their husbands,  
Thinking the man would die,  
Struck by a bolt, or something,  
By the outraged One on high.

But the pauper sat for a moment,  
Then rose 'mid silence grim,  
For the others had ceased to chatter  
And trembled in every limb.  
He looked at the guardians' ladies,  
Then, eyeing their lords, he said,  
"I eat not the food of villains  
Whose hands are foul and red:

"Whose victims cry for vengeance  
From their dark, unhallowed graves."  
"He's drunk!" said the workhouse master,  
"Or else he's mad and raves."  
"Not drunk or mad," cried the pauper,  
"But only a haunted beast,  
Who, torn by the hounds and mangled,  
Declines the vulture's feast.

"I care not a curse for the guardians,  
And I won't be dragged away;  
Just let me have the fit out,  
It's only on Christmas Day  
That the black past comes to goad me,  
And prey on my burning brain;  
I'll tell you the rest in a whisper —  
I swear I won't shout again.  
Keep your hands off me, curse you!  
Hear me right out to the end.

You come here to see how paupers  
The season of Christmas spend.  
You come here to watch us feeding,  
As they watch the captured beast.  
Hear why a penniless pauper  
Spits on your paltry feast.

Do you think I will take your bounty,  
And let you smile and think  
You're doing a noble action  
With the parish's meat and drink?  
Where's my wife, you traitors -  
The poor old wife you slew?  
Yes, by the God above us,  
My Nance was killed by you!

'Last winter my wife lay dying,  
Starved in a filthy den;  
I had never been to the parish, -  
I came to the parish then.  
I swallowed my pride in coming,  
For, ere the ruin came,  
I held up my head as a trader,  
And I bore a spotless name.

'I came to the parish, craving  
Break for a starving wife,  
Bread for the woman who'd loved me  
Through fifty years of life;  
And what do you think they told me,  
Mocking my awful grief?  
That 'the House' was open to us,  
But they wouldn't give 'out relief.'

'I slunk to the filthy alley -  
'Twas a cold, raw Christmas eve -  
And the bakers' shops were open,  
Tempting a man to thieve;  
But I clenched my fists together,  
Holding my head awry,  
So I came to her empty-handed  
And mournfully told her why.

'Then I told her 'the House' was open;  
She had heard of the ways of that,  
For her bloodless cheeks went crimson,  
And up in her rags she sat,  
Crying, 'Bide the Christmas here, John,  
We've never had one apart;  
I think I can bear the hunger, -  
The other would break my heart.'

'All through that eve I watched her,  
Holding her hand in mine,  
Praying the Lord, and weeping,  
Till my lips were salt as brine.  
I asked her once if she hungered,  
And as she answered 'No,'  
The moon shone in at the window  
Set in a wreath of snow.  
For the love of God!' she groaned.

'Then the room was bathed in glory,  
And I saw in my darling's eyes  
The far-away look of wonder  
That comes when the spirit flies;  
And her lips were parched and parted,  
And her reason came and went,  
For she raved of our home in Devon,  
Where our happiest years were spent.



'And the accents long forgotten,  
Came back to the tongue once more,  
For she talked like the country lassie  
I woo'd by the Devon shore.  
Then she rose to her feet and trembled,  
And fell on the rags and moaned,  
And, 'Give me a crust - I'm famished -  
For the love of God!' she groaned.

'I rushed from the room like a madman,  
And flew to the workhouse gate,  
Crying, 'Food for a dying woman!'  
And the answer came, 'Too late.'  
They drove me away with curses;  
Then I fought with a dog in the street,  
And tore from the mongrel's clutches  
A crust he was trying to eat.

'Back, through the filthy by-lanes!  
Back, through the trampled slush!  
Up to the crazy garret,  
Wrapped in an awful hush.  
My heart sank down at the threshold,  
And I paused with a sudden thrill,  
For there in the sil'ry moonlight  
My Nance lay, cold and still.

'Up to the blackened ceiling  
The sunken eyes were cast -  
I knew on those lips all bloodless  
My name had been the last;  
She'd called for her absent husband -  
O God! had I but known! -  
Had called in vain, and in anguish  
Had died in that den - alone.

'Yes, there, in a land of plenty,  
Lay a loving woman dead,  
Cruelly starved and murdered  
For a loaf of the parish bread.  
At yonder gate, last Christmas,  
I craved for a human life.  
You, who would feast us paupers,  
What of my murdered wife!

'There, get ye gone to your dinners;  
Don't mind me in the least;  
Think of the happy paupers  
Eating your Christmas feast;  
And when you recount their blessings  
In your smug parochial way,  
Say what you did for me, too,  
Only last Christmas Day.'



## British Home Child Group International

### Stay in touch!

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*The Board of the  
British Home Child  
Group International  
wishes a Merry  
Christmas and a Happy  
New Year to all.*

