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British Home Child Group International

The National Children's Home - Canadian Branch by Sandra Joyce

Design and Layout by Karen Mahoney



One of the founding members of the National Children's Homes in England, Dr. Thomas Bowman Stephenson was a Wesleyan Methodist minister. He was so impressed by other British philanthropists emigrating destitute children to work in Canada that he was inspired to open a home there.

In 1872, Dr. Stephenson visited Canada to look for a location. With the help of local Wesleyan ministers and the Canadian populace, he was able to purchase what he described as a 'pleasant place' in Barton township (now Hamilton, Ontario) on about eight acres of arable land on which grapes, peaches, strawberries and more sta-

ble vegetables were growing in profusion. This was known as the Canadian Branch of the National Children's Homes and the first party of children arrived there in 1873.

The well-built brick Home on the property was to serve three purposes. First of all, it was meant to receive the young emigrants upon their arrival. Their dormitory, dining room and lavatory were located in a large wooden house behind the brick house. The Home was also open to shelter any child who was returned from their placements; and it was a residence and office for the supervisor, who corresponded with the children and visited them at regular intervals.

Once a party of children arrived in Hamilton, a notice was placed in the local newspaper. When the applications for the children were received, each applicant was sent a questionnaire to fill out including 'the sort of boy or girl he desired to have'. This had to be returned with a certificate of character signed preferably by a Christian minister or magistrate.

Children were divided into three categories: those who were younger than five or six years old were to be adopted; those who were eight or nine were to be 'raised' by families - receiving regular schooling and proper clothing - in return for doing light work around the home and those older children who were to work on a farm, in a shop or in a house for a negotiated sum, in addition to board and lodging.

In all cases, the agreement reserved the right to withdraw the child if he was improperly treated.

At first, both boys and girls were sent out, but by the end of the 1890s, mostly boys were sent.

The Home in Hamilton at 1050 Main St. East closed in 1931 after an estimated 3400 emigrated British Home Children passed through its doors.

According to Library and Archives Canada, almost 500 former N.C.H. boys enlisted for service in the First World War. Eighty-five percent of the children stayed in Canada. The others either went back to England or migrated to the United States.



Senator William Eli Sanford by Sandra Joyce



One of the major champions of the British Home Child emigration movement in Ontario was Senator William Eli Sanford. Senator Sanford became aware of the scheme in 1872 when he met the Reverend Doctor Thomas Bowman Stephenson in Hamilton, Ontario. Stephenson was in Canada to establish a Canadian branch of the British National Children's Homes in order to distribute the little immigrants into farms and homes in the area.

Loneliness was no stranger to the Senator. Born in New York, he himself was orphaned at the age of seven and was sent to Hamilton to live with his aunt Lydia Ann Sanford and her husband, Edward Jackson, a wealthy businessman and well-known Methodist churchman. Sanford's wife, Emmeline, who was also his cousin and the Jackson's only daughter, died only 18 months later after giving birth to a child who also did not survive.

Sanford believed that the Home Children were the best of immigrants because they had no established bad habits and could quickly assimilate into Canadian society and become the most reliable class of people. He was the treasurer of the Canadian Branch of the NCH and was responsible for receiving and banking the children's earnings. He also followed the home children during their placements and acted decisively in cases where a child was either mistreated or neglected. He considered the program a resounding success and had harsh words for its critics.

He was also well-known for the establishment of a summer home, called Elsinore on Burlington Beach for the sick and destitute children of Hamilton. It was non-sectarian and built entirely from the Senator's personal funds. Just six years later, the original policy was changed to include the aged poor. It was maintained entirely at Sanford's expense.

Sanford made his fortune through the textile business, becoming a Canadian pioneer in the ready-to-wear clothing business and his business soon grew into being the fourth largest employer in Ontario and the largest in the clothing sector in 1871. He was known as the Wool King of Canada. He had the Sanford estate built and had it named Wesanford. It occupied most of the block bounded by Caroline, Jackson, Hunter and Bay streets in Hamilton and was described as one of the most magnificent and luxurious homes in the Dominion.

At first, Sanford was a staunch (Reform) Liberal supporter but after unsuccessfully arguing that duties should be increased on 'shoddy' British clothing that was flooding the market, he began to back the Conservatives and Sir John A. MacDonald and his National Policy. Two years later, when the Conservatives returned to power, Sanford's sales doubled under the protection of the National Policy.

MacDonald called Sanford to the Senate in 1887 in recognition of his tireless work and generous contributions to the Conservative party as well as his leadership in the Methodist church.

However, as an employer of hundreds, Sanford considered himself a benefactor by merely employing them. He did not consider how his profits gave him such a luxurious lifestyle while his workers, in comparison, scratched out a meagre and uncertain existence in his sweatshops.

Sanford drowned in a boating incident at Lake Rousseau in Ontario in 1899. His body rests in a mausoleum built in the style of a Greek Temple on the shores of Lake Ontario.



Lost at Sea - The S.S. Labrador by Sandra Joyce



Built in 1891 at the Harland and Woolf shipyard in Belfast, Ireland, the SS Labrador was purported to be the finest four-masted steamship of her day. Owned by the Mississippi and Dominion Steamship Line, she was primarily built to convey emigrants to North America. There was room for 100 first class, 50 second class and 1000 third class passengers. She was also a Royal Mail Ship licensed to carry mail by the British Post Office.

In 1892 she made eleven voyages across the Atlantic and 1893 she made ten. Normally, her voyages took between ten and twelve days, depending on the weather, except for one done in six and a half days.

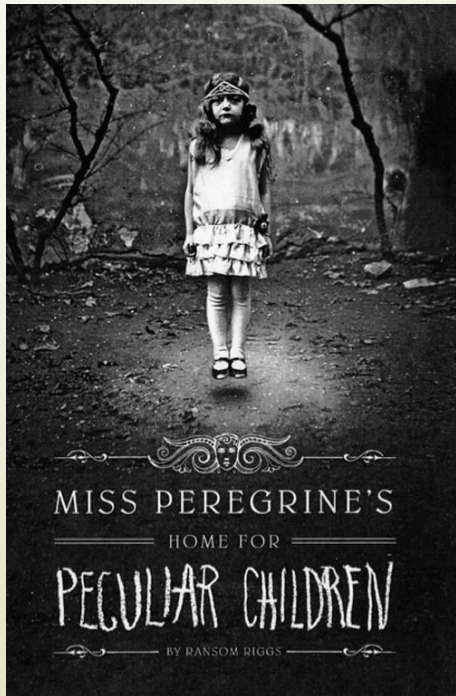
In all, she carried, according to the Library and Archives Database, 2,000 British Home Children to their destinations in Canada.

It was on a return voyage to Liverpool from St. John, NB and Halifax, NS in 1899 that the SS Labrador met her fate. Carrying only 74 passengers, a crew of 92 and 17 horses, she ran into a haze which soon turned into a thick fog. The ship had to be navigated by 'dead reckoning' –which is the process of calculating one's current position by using a previously determined position over elapsed time and distance. For three days, regular sightings could not be taken.

Captain Erskine estimated that she was off the northern coast of Ireland when she was in fact sixty miles further north. It was seven in the morning when she ran aground on the north-eastern side of McKenzie's Rocks. McKenzie's Rocks are a remote group of rocks that are a known hazard to shipping, and some 15 miles to the west of the nearest landfall at Hynish, Tiree, Scotland.

Upon examination it was determined that the ship was taking in a lot of water and all eight of the lifeboats were lowered. Passengers and crew members filled them in an orderly manner. The horses were set free. The sea was exceptionally rough and the boats were full of water 'up to their knees' as one passenger remarked. The sailors pulled with all their might but had an extremely hard time rowing. Finally, a Norwegian coal ship called the Viking, who was also off course due to the fog, was able to pick up seven of the lifeboats. The eighth lifeboat was able to land at Skerryvore Lighthouse on the island of Tiree.

As the grain that the Labrador was carrying became swollen with the water, it split the ship into two. Regarded as a total loss, the ship was largely salvaged for scrap. The fate of the mail is uncertain: some say none was salvaged, others say different ships were able to pick up some. There is no mention of the fate of the horses.



Did you know that the Barnardo Boys are mentioned in the successful novel Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children. The film, of the same name, was released earlier this year and is directed by Tim Burton.

"All I can say is that they weren't your regular sort of orphan children - not like them Barnardo Home kids they got in other places, who you'll see come into town for parades and things and always have time for a chat. This lot was different. Some of 'em couldn't speak the King's English. Or any English, for that matter."

The BHCGI was once again honoured to have taken part in the Remembrance Day Ceremonies at Queens Park in Toronto, Ontario.





Our new [apology petition](#) is up and running! Please note we can sign this petition even if we have signed a previous one! Anyone who is a Canadian Citizen or Resident can sign!



Have you seen our YouTube presentation on [British Home Children?](#)



*British Home Child Group
International*

By email: connect@britishhomechild.com

By regular mail: 97 Dagmar Ave., Toronto, ON, M4M 1V9

Our website: www.britishhomechild.com

To book a speaker: sandrajoyce@rogers.com

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