

July, 2017



# *British Home Child Group International*

Design and Layout by Karen Mahoney

## Happy Birthday Canada!

I am proud to call my beloved Canada home. Proud and lucky to live in a country that represents freedom. Yet my father, a British Home Child, who came to Canada as an indentured farm worker, had to grow to love this country. He was stigmatized in the community meant to foster him, and separated from his family in the country of his birth.

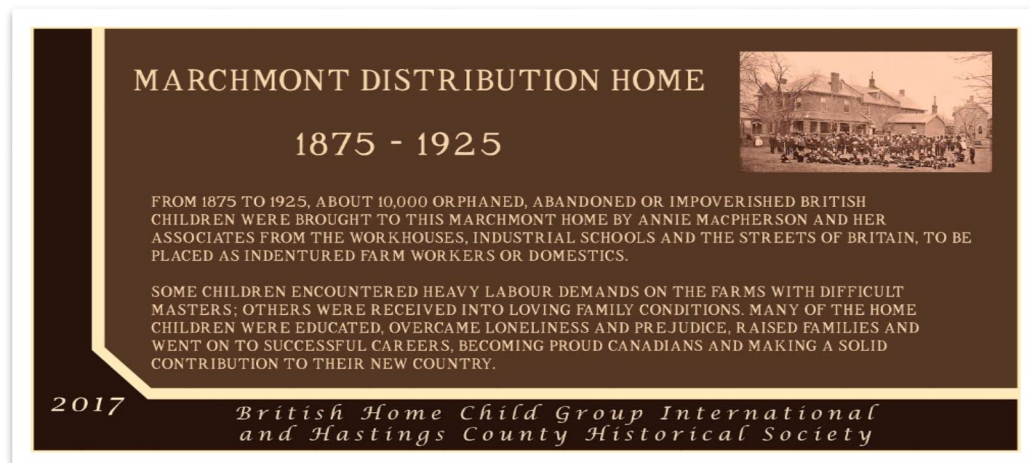
In the end, his bitterness was directed towards the country that he felt had rejected him. As he never told us about his childhood or how he came to Canada, we wondered about his resentment towards the UK.

When searching for a way to celebrate Canada's sesquicentennial, we felt it fitting to draw attention to the British Home Children by helping to erect a historical plaque on the site of the Marchmont Home in Belleville. A collaboration between the British Home Child Group International and the Hastings County Historical Society, the plaque will be unveiled on September 28th, 2017, at 2 pm.

The Marchmont Home run by Annie MacPherson from 1870, deserves to be marked for four reasons. It bears the name of the second British Home Child Receiving Home to be used in Canada. Secondly, over 10,000 children were brought to Canada under its auspices from various different organizations including Barnardos and Quarriers. It is still in use today as an apartment building, yet there is no marker to explain its historical significance and it is difficult to find. The address is currently 159 Yeomans Street.

We hope you will join us on September 28th to celebrate the lives of our British Home Children!

For further information please click [here](#)



Text written by Jim Gilchrist, Sandra Joyce and the Hastings County Historical Society



## Our Western Home - The Matron's Cottage by David Hemmings



In 1817, just 200 years ago, Alexander Cameron (1779-1820), a lawyer and Captain of Provincial Incorporated Artillery, built a house on the edge of the Military Reserve in Niagara. After the War of 1812, Cameron was appointed Clerk for the Land Claims Commission. Forever in debt, he died intestate in 1820 leaving a widow, Catherine Butler Cameron (1787-1854) and two young daughters, Ann Jennet and Anna Deborah.

The Cameron House was sold, and the new owner added a stable and carriage-house. In 1871, it became a part of Our Western Home, run by Miss Maria Rye for poor children who were sent from Peckham, London to Canada to get them off England's city streets. It was the home for

Emily Bailey, Miss Rye's Matron, and the residence for those children who were returned by their employers to Miss Rye. She wanted to ensure that returning children with bad experiences did not mix with those immigrant children not yet assigned to farms. Recent renovations have identified outside bolt plates to lock the children into the building.

Our Western Home was closed shortly before World War One, when this house became officers' quarters for the Polish Army in training at Camp Niagara. A later owner of this house was the eminent restoration architect, Peter John Stokes (19xx-2013), himself a British Home Child. Details of Our Western Home are described in a Bygones Publishing book "Caught between the Walls" by Sharon Frayne. The Matron's house remains a private residence today.

*David is VP of the Niagara Museum and Niagara Historical Society; member of the Municipal Heritage Committee; member of the UNESCO Committee; Author of 10 local history books (Bygones Publishing on Kindle).*



*Photos courtesy of Niagara Historical Society*

## Our Western Home - Receiving Home Niagara-on-the-Lake by Sandra Joyce



Owen Staples, 1910. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library

Our Western Home was the name Maria Rye gave to her Receiving Home for the British Home Children she brought to Canada. The Home was a former county gaol and courthouse and it was converted by Rye after she purchased it in 1866. Rye brought mainly girls to Canada from the workhouses or those already living at her Home in Peckham in South-east London. Workhouse children were thought to be prime candidates for emigration because it was felt that they would benefit greatly from the fresh air and farm life that the area around Niagara could provide. In addition, their passage to Canada was paid by the UK Board of Guardians (supervisors of the workhouses).

Opened on December 1, 1869, the Judge's court was made into a dormitory for a hundred little girls, and small beds were placed also in the spectators' gallery, while the butter and other provisions were kept in the condemned cell.

According to the London Illustrated News in 1877, "Neither outside nor inside does it in any way betray the fact that its walls were originally those of the gaol of the district; for it stands in a garden and orchard where the trees are literally breaking under the weight of peaches and plums, and the vines are loaded with hundredweights of grapes; and its general appearance, as well as all its internal arrangements, were completely changed when it passed into the hands of its present owner and was adapted for its present use-as a receiving-house, the 'Western Home'... Cleanliness, space, and airiness are the characteristics of the house that most strike the visitor on first entering; and the arrangements, if simple and inexpensive, are admirably adapted for their several purposes."

Up to 4,000 children from the streets and workhouses of England, passed through the doors of Our Western Home while run by Miss Rye. After being placed, some of the girls 'fell', some were 'returned' because of 'temper and insubordination' and quite a few were 'lost track of'. A few died from natural causes and they are buried in plot in St. Mark's Anglican Church, located at 41 Byron St, Niagara-on-the-Lake. Many, however, flourished.

When Maria Rye was forced to retire because of ill health, she donated her Homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake and Peckham to the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society in 1895. Our Western Home remained in operation under their auspices until 1913 and was demolished in the 1920s.

Today, the Rye Heritage Park is located on the site and the entrance can be found between 698 and 710 Rye St. The nearby Matron's Cottage, in which the Matron of Our Western Home stayed in as well as any 'returned girls', is located at 708 King Street, at the corner of Cottage and King Streets.



## The SS Victorian by Sandra Joyce

To compete with the Canadian Pacific Line for the growing transatlantic trade, the Allan line commissioned the SS Victorian to be built in 1903 by Workman, Clark & Co. Ltd. of Belfast. Finished in 1904 and launched in 1905, the SS Victorian became the first three-shaft ship and the first turbine liner in Atlantic service. That same year, with her powerful engines, she set a five day, five-hour record, travelling eastbound from Rimouski, Quebec to Ireland.

A month after her maiden voyage, the SS Victoria brought her first shipment of British Home Boys, sent by the Church of England's Waifs and Strays Society to the Gibbs Home in Sherbrooke, Quebec. A total of 1649 British Home Children came to Canada on her decks.



The S.S. Victorian had three full decks and was fitted to carry 240 second-class passengers on the main and upper deck and up to 940 in third class. There were passenger accommodations and public spaces for 470 first-class passengers on the bridge and promenade decks. The ship could also carry 8,000 tons of cargo and had refrigerated space for fruit and dairy products of Canada when going east-bound.

Following the outbreak of the First World War, the SS Victorian was converted to an armed merchant cruiser and commissioned into the Royal Navy, joining the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron. She was assigned to escort duty but also transported troops and cargo.

In 1917, the SS Victorian was taken over by the Canadian Pacific Line and after the war ended was reconditioned by Cammell Laird. She resumed Liverpool-Quebec-Montreal service in April 1920. There was accommodation for 418 passengers in cabin and 566 in third class.

In 1922, she was converted to oil fuel from coal and had new turbines installed by the Fairfield Co. Ltd. in Glasgow and was renamed Marloch. Under that name she brought 56 British Home Children to Canada.

The Marloch (SS Victorian) collided off Antwerp in 1926 with the British steamship Whimbrel and was towed to Southampton. In 1929, she was sold to Thos. W. Ward and broken up at Pembroke Dock, Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire.



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