

May, 2016



British Home Child Group International

Apology Petition by Linda Granfield

As with any petition put forth there is lively, emotional discussion about whether or not to support and sign. While there has been great support shown for [Petition e-257](#) regarding the British Home Children/Child Migrants there have also been some who feel it is unnecessary or unrealistic to ask a current government to apologize for the way the children were treated long ago by those who are no longer with us.

It's true—it would be impossible to, let's say, find an Ontario farmer who in 1910 left a Home Child to freeze to death sleeping in a barn loft. And those of us who support the Petition know that. Apologies such as the one



Francis Albert Proudler

requested via this Petition are very real, and very symbolic. When a government apologizes today there is recognition of past wrongs and a demonstrated commitment, by the government and we, Canada's citizens, too, to never see such events and treatment tolerated or repeated. A change in outlook and behavior can provide a model for understanding, tolerance, and diligence for future generations.

My family had two British Home Children (via the Barnardo Homes) in Canada. Francis Albert Proudler arrived in Canada in 1907, only ten years old; his brother Thomas Ivan came three years later, age eleven. Both worked on farms in Ontario. When the First World War began, Thomas, only 16, fibbed and joined the army. In April 1917 he died at Vimy Ridge and is buried in a town near Vimy, France. He was only 18 when he died—barely a boy, hardly a man. Albert also served in the war but he survived and came back to Canada to farm in Alberta.

Two years ago, I stood at Thomas's grave. It was a symbolic visit filled with meaning for me and for my family who could not be there—with us, Tom and me. Certainly I knew he wasn't there, that he couldn't know me, separated by so much time and history as we are. He is of the past, just as those other Home Children and those who mistreated them are. Yet I paid tribute when I stood beside Thomas. Symbolic gestures, be they

cemetery visits, tokens of love, or apologies for past injustices are important and

necessary parts of our lives. They redeem us as caring humans and inspire us to break new ground.

I trust that the British Home Children will be embraced by all of us who have learned their stories of toil and heartache. I know that the Canadian government will help BHC families heal and move forward.

A chapter of Canada's history will be remembered and silent voices of the past will be "heard" again.



Thomas Proudler



Linda Granfield is a historian who has written thirty books for both adults and young

readers. Her next title will be about the Vimy Oaks, in honour of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge in 2017. www.lindagranfield.com

Sheriff Atcheson Thompson by Carol Bateman

This is the story of my father, my home child and the middle child of the three Thompson Boys. Also the shortest, as an adult, his nickname was Shorty. I was in my mid-teens before I knew his name was Sheriff.

He was born in England in 1903, lived with his mom and dad until 1908 when his mother died of consumption. She knew she was dying and had asked her spinster sisters to take her three boys and care for them. Their dad would have kept them but would have put them to work in the mines. So Henry 7, Sheriff 5 and Richard 3 were taken to live with their G'ma, a great



The Boys - Middle Henry, sitting Richard, standing on the Right with G'ma, Sheriff

aunt, two aunts and an uncle in Southport, Lancashire.

The Aunts found it very trying to look after so many during this difficult time in England and so upon the death of the boys' father in 1910, which made them orphans, Aunt May and Uncle Will placed them in Fegan's Ramsgate Orphanage. The boys were 9, 7 and 5.

After four years in Fegan's, Henry and Richard were sent to Canada, arriving in Halifax on April 11, 1914 but my dad was left behind as he had scarlet fever and could not travel. He spent another year in Fegan's on his own, without his brothers. He was sent to Canada on the SS Missanabie and due to rough seas, they could not dock, and so he arrived at St John, New Brunswick on April 18, 1915. He was taken to 295 George St., Fegan's Receiving and Distributing home in Toronto, Ontario. A Mr. Kirby picked him up there and took him home to Port Perry, Ontario. He took ill right away and Mr. Kirby took him back to George St. where they discovered his appendix had burst. He was hospitalized and they offered Mr. Kirby another boy. He refused, saying he wanted to wait for Sheriff. I can't imagine how good it must have felt for dad to know that someone wanted him. He stayed with the Kirbys till 1920. He did not know where his brothers were and had asked Mr. Kirby about them. Mr. Kirby found his brother Richard in Janetville with the Andersons, 18 miles away at the other end of Lake Scugog. Both Dad and Richard (aka Dick) were treated well. Uncle Dick would tell the story of how dad and him on Sunday afternoon would walk the 9 miles and meet in the middle, have a short visit and head back. But now they had each other. Another story told by my aunt, mom's sister, was on one Sunday, dad was at church with the Kirby family, he heard his name Sherry! Sherry! This was his nickname in England and Fegan's. He turned to see a friend from Fegan's, Art Matthews, and they climbed over the pews to get to each other. The loneliness this story tells is so profound. They knew Henry (aka Harry) was in Uxbridge but didn't

see him until they were free. 1919/1920. Uncle Harry had been badly abused by his first farmer, it had an effect on him all of his life. It took 11 months before he was moved to Mr. & Mrs. Jamison's, one of the best homes in the Province according to his records. He did well there and stayed until 1919. Henry made a trip back to England but soon discovered he was not wanted there. At the same time, in Canada, Home Children were subject to stigma that was generated, in part, by some of the officials involved in the very government migration schemes designed to assist children. The stigma stuck. Yet, here in a country that scorned them, and despite the odds, the three boys made a good life. The brothers decided to travel West in 1926. When they were in Manitoba, Uncle Harry decided to go back East but Uncle Dick and Dad came right to Vancouver and the Pacific Ocean, heading back to Ontario in the spring.

Dad wrote the aunts in 1935 asking for family history. He was told: *stay in Canada, there is nothing in England for you; and to have a bright, happy and prosperous future, filled with the things of life that really mattered like truth, honesty, sobriety and cleanliness in every shape and form. From this, they continued, comes great Happiness and Joy.*

Continued on page 3.....

Sheriff Atcheson Thompson *continued....*

The Aunts made a deal with him. They would send pictures and information once he started writing and sending pictures. They had a picture of his mother and the group picture featured above, as well as a picture of the three boys. As a child, I remember every Christmas, Dad would put a package together for his aunts filled with sugar, home made fruit cake, tea, pictures, letters from my sister and I and probably other items that I don't remember. He did this until he died. Cancer took him in 1960.

The three brothers met their future wives, married and had children. My father talked about his trip west in 1926 to BC and told us about walking along English Bay in his shirt sleeves in the winter, he loved the Pacific Coast. When I was 5 years old, once again Dad and Uncle Dick got the urge to travel west, they packed up their families and started their journey, stopping in Manitoba for one and a half years before heading to and settling in BC. In about a year's time, Uncle Dick and family decided they wanted to head back to Ontario. Dad asked Mom if she wanted to go back but like him, she loved the west coast and so we stayed.

Dad was a dedicated, loving husband and father, so proud of his wife and girls, family of his own, loved and belonging at last. We had many good family times, creating memories to last us a life time. We loved him for who he was and for all that he gave to his family and friends. He was well liked. He left a great heritage for us.

I have written this brief history of our BHC father on behalf of my sister, Sherry Flinn and I. He was loved, and left us far too soon. Carol Bateman



The boundary marker in Lloydminster.
Uncle Dick in Alberta and Dad in Sask.

Montreal and Gilles Duceppe

The highlights of our trip to Montreal included not only the two [CTV](#) interviews which were aired on the twelve, six and eleven o'clock news but also meeting Gilles Duceppe, former Bloc Québécois leader whose maternal grandfather was a British Home Child.



Mr. Duceppe, his sister Louise and cousin Monique met with us to discuss the British Home Child play that they will be showing next year at the Théâtre Jean Duceppe, named "Ne m'oubliez pas" from the 15th of February to 25th of March. They mentioned that they were thinking about showing Sur Titles in English for some dates. Mr. Duceppe is supporting our Apology epetition and has some ideas on how to proceed in getting this story more well-known especially in Quebec. In 2009, he made a motion in the House of Commons to support an Apology.

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Empress of Ireland by Sandra Joyce



The Empress of Ireland, sometimes referred to as 'Canada's Titanic' was responsible for carrying 918 British Home Children to Canada between 1906 and 1914. Of the larger organizations, the Fegan Homes sent 436 children on the Empress and Mrs. Birt of the Liverpool Sheltering Homes brought 69.

According to Canada's Library and Archives database, some Home Children travelled alone or in small groups with no apparent escort. The children had destinations anywhere between New Brunswick and British Columbia.

Eleven British Home Children were on the last incoming voyage of the Empress in 1914. Just seven days later, in the early hours of May 29, 1914, she sank in the cold waters of the Saint Lawrence River in just fourteen minutes on her way to Liverpool from Quebec. Of the 1477 passengers and crew onboard the Em-

press, about 70 percent were lost at sea. The total deaths surpassed any other Canadian Marine accident during peacetime.

Of the 217 passengers who survived was G. Bogue Smart, Inspector of British Immigrant Children and Receiving Homes, who was on his way to England to bring back a group of Home Children. As in the Titanic disaster, more first class passengers survived than second or third. Built in Glasgow, Scotland, the Empress was owned by Canadian Pacific Steamships (part of Canadian Pacific Railways). She was launched in 1906 and provided four classes of accommodation. On her maiden voyage she was considered both fast and reliable.

On her last voyage, she left Quebec City at about 16:30 on the 28th of May, under the hands of Captain Henry Kendall, who had just been promoted and was on his first trip down the Saint Lawrence in command of her. The ship reached Rimouski in the early hours of the morning on the 29th and a Norwegian collier, the Storstad, was sighted. However, fog soon rolled in and the ships lost visibility. They had to resort to fog whistles. At about 02:00 local time the Storstad crashed into Empress' starboard side. The Empress immediately began flooding and listed to starboard. There was no time to shut the watertight doors. Those on the lower decks drowned quickly as the water rushed in. Those on the upper decks were woken up by the collision but there was only time to fill some lifeboats. Ten minutes after the collision, the ship lurched to starboard, allowing some passengers and crew to climb out of portholes on the port side. This reprieve lasted only a minute or two until the stern rose out of the water and the ship sank, throwing those who had crawled out into the freezing water. There was no time to think or act. In comparison, the Titanic sank in two hours and forty minutes.

The Storstad and boats from nearby villages rescued survivors in the darkness, but hundreds died in the frigid water. Those who were alive were clothed and sheltered by the villagers. Only four of the 138 children aboard the Empress survived and the remains of hundreds of people are still entombed in her wreck. Days after the accident, searchers recovered bodies from the river, though many of the dead could not be identified and were buried in Rimouski. Soon, family members from across Canada began to arrive to claim their loved ones. The Salvation Army, which had dispatched 170 of its members on the ship to a rally in England, lost 141 of its members. Since then, an annual remembrance ceremony is held at Toronto's Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

As the reports of the two captains conflicted as to who was at fault, Lord Mersey, who had presided over the inquiry of the Titanic, headed this inquiry. Convened in Quebec City on June 16, 1914, the Storstad was found to be at fault. The Norwegian Consulate General in Montreal also held an inquiry and exonerated the ship and its captain, Thomas Andersen. Andersen claimed the Empress caused the collision by turning northwest into the path of the collier. The two conclusions are irreconcilable. Both captains went on to serve in the First World War.

Three incidents happened that had the superstitious shaking their heads. The first was that the Empress' sister ship had been rammed by a Norwegian collier ship near the same spot two years prior. The second was that the ship's cat ran away from the ship, was caught and ran away again – a sailor's sure sign of a bad omen. The third was that one of the crew members who survived was William Clark. He had also survived the Titanic.

The Empress of Ireland still lies beneath the waters of the St. Lawrence and many divers have plundered her over the years. However, in 1999 the wreck was declared a site of historical and archaeological importance and is protected under the Cultural Property Act and listed in the register of Historic Sites of Canada. This was the first time that an underwater site had received this status in Quebec.



Montreal and Gilles Duceppe *continued...*

Mr. Duceppe, his sister and cousin were also extremely appreciative when Karen Mahoney, BHCIG's President and top genealogist handed them a dossier prepared by her for their family. They didn't know exactly where their grandfather hailed from and when Karen told them he was from Poplar in London, Monique was especially excited because that is the area where the story of the popular Call the Midwife TV series was based.

After meeting with the Duceppes and doing the CTV interviews, the requests to join our Families of British Home Children/Child Migrants group were staggering. Many people also sent us emails with queries about their families.

Vice-President Sandra Joyce's presentation given at the Atwater library the next day was a tremendous success with more than double the usual amount of attendees. The talk focussed on the children sent to Quebec – the Knowlton Homes, Gibbs Homes in Sherbrooke and especially the many Catholic children sent to farms all over Quebec.

Catholic children were particularly placed in Quebec with French Canadians because of their religious beliefs. Sometimes, children were placed with farmers who spoke no English. Mr. Duceppe told us that the wife of the farmer his grandfather was placed with spoke English and so he was lucky he had someone to communicate with.

Carolyn Perkes, BHCIG's Secretary and our gracious host, helped us navigate our way through Montreal and found us some very charming restaurants to visit. All in all, a most enjoyable experience!



Upcoming Events

Connect Charter School

May 2 @ 9:00am-11:00am

The Manor Village at Garrison Woods

May 2 @ 1:30pm-2:30pm

Canadian Federation of Women—Calgary

May 2 @ 7:00pm-9:00pm

Knights of the Round Table

May 3 @ 11:30am-1:00pm

Calgary Library—Signal Hill Branch

May 3 @ 7:00pm-8:30pm

Probus Club Brampton

May 18 @ 10:00am-12:00pm

Ontario Genealogical Society Conference

June 3 8:00am to June 5th 5:00pm

Lanark County Genealogical Society 3rd Annual Bus Tour

June 4 @ 12:00pm-1:30pm

Essex County Branch of the OGS

June 13 6:00pm—8:00pm

Morrisburg Library

June 15 6:30pm—8:00pm

Lancaster Library

June 16 6:30pm-8:00pm

Long Sault Library

June 16 2:30-4:00pm

Private Event



*British Home Child Group
International*

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