

# British Home Child Group International

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October 2015

## Celebrating British Home Children - a weekend of Education

By Mike Quackenbush

LONDON – Fanshawe Pioneer Village was a host to Doors Open London within the City of London, Ontario. With over 2,000 people passing through the doors this past weekend, there was no shortage of opportunity for all to learn and interact with history to make it come alive. Fanshawe Pioneer Village was a returning venue as part of Doors Open London, but this year had a leading program facilitated by the British Home Child Group International.

Every year, Doors Open Ontario attracts large crowds across Ontario. From April to October, residents and visitors are invited to discover first-hand Ontario's hidden heritage treasures, some of which have never been open to the public. <sup>1</sup>

Located in the Purple Hill Loyal Orange Lodge, nine volunteers

engaged in excellent conversations with attendees – some who didn't know about the British Home Child program, through to others who had found home children in their families, and were looking for help with brick walls in their research.

The numerous artifacts on display this weekend, which filled all of the tables within the lodge were shared by Alan and Phyl Wright, Lorne Weston, Sandra Joyce, as well as Bob Wilkinson – in England. Thank you for showcasing such awesome items for everyone to experience. Along with Alan, Phyl, Lorne, and Sandra – Christine Woodcock and Glenna Smith-Walkden educated countless visitors on British Home Children, along with their own stories of home children. Glenna also hosted an open-mic session in the Trinity Church to allow



guests to share their BHC stories. Originally to be hosted by Dawn Heuston – due to scheduling conflicts, couldn't attend – but Dawn, you were there in spirit!

*continued on page 2*



### Inside this issue:

Celebrating British Home Children

The Ships That Brought Them

Hillary House

Upcoming Events

Trip to Ireland

## The Ships That Brought Them

The Scotsman  
By Sandra Joyce

"Women and children first!" belated Captain Shrimphire through the shrieking gale force wind and the black, dense fog. The Scotsman, the steamship he had piloted from Liverpool eight days prior, had just crashed on the rocks of Change

Island, eight miles south-east of Belle Isle, in the Dominion of Newfoundland during the early morning, September 22, 1899. These words, meant to be their salvation, sealed the terrible fate of ten women and one child. They perished.

The sleeping passengers were woken at 2:30 am that Friday morning by the fog horn, which was followed by a searing crash as the ship hit the rocks. The sea was running exceptionally high. Passengers converged on the deck clad only in their night dress.

*continued on page 3*

## British Home Child Day—Continued



*“George is such a kind-hearted gentleman, with a wicked sense of humour!”*



George Beardshaw addressing the crowd.

Karen Mahoney and I were engaged with visitors in research on-the-spot, to find British Home Children ancestors, or to break through brick walls, share tips and tricks when trying to find records in Canada as well as in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and the United States. With over 900 attendees on Saturday alone, it made a busy day for all! Sunday had a larger agenda and a larger crowd of over 1,100! With artifacts still on display, guided research continued throughout the day.

The afternoon got started with a stellar-performance by the London Firefighters' Pipe Band who played throughout the village and proceeded to draw crowds outside of Dr. Jones' Barn which allowed all visitors to make their way to the barn to kick-start the agenda. An opening address and welcome was presented by City of London Mayor, Matt Brown; followed by a personal message passed on from our Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, which I delivered.

Former British Home Child, George Beardshaw was warmly welcomed by all – including an honorable mention by Matt Brown during his address. George proceeded to share his wonderfully-positive outlook on life, and how much he loves this country for which he also fought in the Second World War. George is such a kind-hearted gentleman, with a wicked sense of humour! A pleasure to finally meet you George!

With George being such a hard act to follow, Sandra Joyce took the podium for the much-anticipated launch her third book on British Home Children, titled, “Trees and Rocks, Rocks and Trees.” Sandra shared an excellent excerpt from her book, which allowed us to envision what it was like arriving on the shores of Canada – leaving family behind in Britain. Following her presentation, many people came forward to mention that they've been following the release of each book through social media and feel that the books provide a very attention-grabbing approach to the BHC story.

PhD-candidate, Claire L. Halstead joined the agenda to bring to light a sister topic to British Home Children, and spoke on British Child Evacuees in Canada during the Second World War. Claire has created and maintains the British Child Evacuee Database – which personally, I am very interested in learning more about! As a genealogist, I feel that more people need to learn about evacuee children as this really will help underpin researching the impacts on lives and the story of family-life during this time.

Closing off the agenda was a lively presentation by the Corrigan School of Irish Dancing, which generated an even larger crowd at the doors. As the rest of the afternoon came to a close, George Beardshaw joined in at the lodge to socialize with visitors. Claire

Halstead also stepped behind the tables to help field questions from the many people who filled the hall.

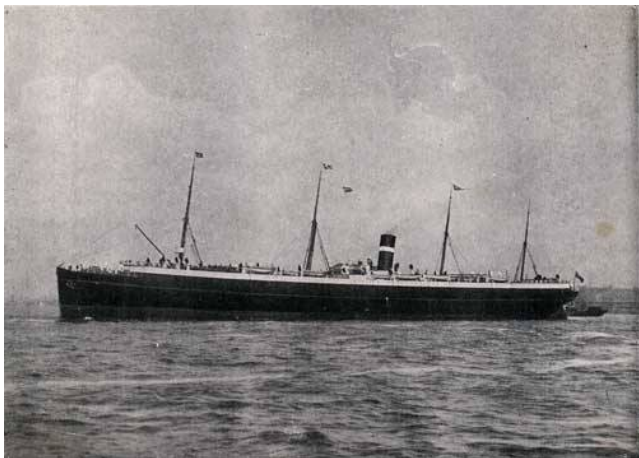
Fanshawe Pioneer Village along with coordinator, Nicole St-Cyr were very hospitable and were always on hand to ensure everything went as smooth as it did. I applaud everyone who contributed, visited, shared on social media or just simply thought of British Home Children this weekend, and on today, British Home Child Day in Ontario. It's such an important part of our heritage that we need to keep conversations alive around the world, in our province, our regions, and towns. Happy British Home Child Day – to everyone!

"The Story behind Doors Open Ontario". Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. <http://www.doorsopenontario.on.ca/The-Story-behind-Doors-Open-Ontario.aspx>. Accessed 28 Sep 2015.

\* Featured from Blog - [MikeQuack.com](http://MikeQuack.com); 28 Sep 2015

\* Photo's courtesy of Mike Dougherty

## The Ships That Brought Them—Continued



The order to abandon ship was immediately given by Captain Shrimphire, who thought that the steamship was going to topple and sink. The five lifeboats were lowered and women and children climbed aboard in an orderly fashion. The first lifeboat sank very quickly and the thirty women and one child onboard struggled for their lives in the icy water. According to one of the survivors, one of the plugs in the lifeboat was missing and the boat filled almost immediately with water. The occupants of the four other lifeboats, scantily clad and suffering from exposure to the cold, were tossed about in the unruly sea for ten hours. The Captain, fearing for their lives, called them back to the ship, which was still aground on the rocks.

In the meantime, the men had climbed down to a ledge on land, and the women who had returned to the steamship were told to follow suit. Some were lowered on chairs. Now, even though on solid earth, they were in danger of the incoming tide. To survive, they

had to climb a steep cliff to a plateau a few hundred feet above them. The three hundred passengers, some in bare feet, stayed on the plateau the rest of the day and night, singing hymns in the stark moonlight. Meanwhile, a small reconnaissance group had been sent out to search the nearby lighthouse for help. At daybreak on Saturday, the party returned. The long arduous journey to the lighthouse began and although it was only around fifteen miles, the way was covered in steep cliffs and swamps. By Monday, most of the passengers had arrived at the lighthouse, although some sadly succumbed to exhaustion along the way. The lighthouse keeper shared his scant provisions with the survivors.

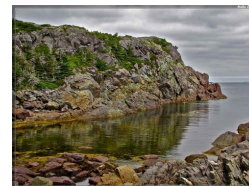
After a weekend of despair, the Elder-Dempster steamer Montfort, on its way to Montreal, was signalled to from the lighthouse. All passengers, except for about fifty, were taken on board and delivered to the port of Rimouski. While the passengers fought the elements for their very

lives, 'scabs' who had been temporarily hired to work as stokers because of a strike in Liverpool, began looting. All the passengers' effects were broken into and anything of any value at all, including personal letters, were taken. These men also broke into the steward's quarters and stole all the liquor. Their ensuing lewd behavior was more than appalling. Upon their arrival in Rimouski, detectives from Montreal arrested them with the most remarkable collection of goods ever seen by them.

All in all, twenty-four women died. The Scotsman was unsalvageable.

Built in Belfast in 1894, the Dominion line steamship Scotsman played an important part in bringing 1286 Home Children to Canada between 1896 and 1897. According to the passenger lists, the children travelling on The Scotsman were from many different organizations: Barnardo's, The Children's Aid Society of London, Dr. Stephenson, Fegan Homes, the Bristol Emigration Society and the Reverend Robert Wallace are among the groups.

\* Credit for photo of Scotsman:  
Gjenlevick-Gjønvik Archives



Change Island, Newfoundland & Labrador  
Alltravels.com

***“To survive,  
they had to  
climb a steep  
cliff to a  
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above them”***

## Hillary House

Sandra Joyce and Karen Mahoney will be featured speakers at the Aurora Historical Society on November 25th from 6:30 to 8:30 pm representing the British Home Children in Aurora's Hillary House. Their presentation called Leave no Stone Unturned, will explain the many different ways to establish a connection to the Home Children and perhaps even re-connect with long-lost family.

Built in 1862, Hillary House is recognized by the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board as one of Canada's best examples of Gothic Revival architecture. It is one of the foremost historic house museums in North America, containing the personal possessions of three generations of medical doctors who lived and worked there.

It contains a significant collection of medical instruments, books, papers, household furnishings, and equipment dating from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth century and is open to the public as Hillary House, the Koffler Museum of Medicine. Artifacts on display take us from the time of leeches and bleeding to the advent of penicillin. As the doctors' families lived in Hillary House as well, the generational change is represented in the array of furnishings, clothing and social aspirations.



**Hillary House**  
15372 Yonge St,  
Aurora, ON  
L4G 1N8

## Upcoming Events

Here is a list of events that are happening in the months of October and November. For more information and locations, please check the events page on our website. If you would like to book an event, please contact Sandra Joyce at [Sandra@britishhomechild.com](mailto:Sandra@britishhomechild.com)

Norval Women's Institute

**October 2 @ 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm**

Probus Club Caledon East

**October 14 @ 10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Stoney Creek Baptist Church

**November 10 @ 10:30 am - 12:00 pm**

Canadian Federation of University Women – Etobicoke Branch

**November 12 @ 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm**

Meaford Hall

**November 15 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm**

University Woman's Club of Toronto

**November 23 @ 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm**

Aurora Historical Society

**November 25 @ 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm**



## Thank You

The British Home Child Group International would like to thank the following sponsors for the door prizes that we were able to give away this past weekend at Fanshawe Pioneer Village.

- \* Ancestry
- \* Scotlands People
- \* Your Genealogy Today
- \* Sandra Joyce
- \* Global Genealogy





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Have you ever wanted to go to Ireland? Lesley Anderson has organized a wonderful trip to the Emerald Isle. For more information, please contact Lesley direct at [anderley@sympatico.ca](mailto:anderley@sympatico.ca) or 613-834-0401



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- ☐ Hotel accommodation based on twin bedded rooms with private bath for 15 nights
- ☐ Full breakfasts (16), includes breakfast on arrival at Glasnevin Museum
- ☐ Lunch at Eddie's Bar in Clonbur
- ☐ Dinners (8):
  - Table d'hôte dinners (4)
  - O'Connell's Restaurant with Entertainment
  - Dinner at local pub/restaurant in Belfast
  - Crumlin Road Gaol
  - Medieval banquet at an Irish Castle
- ☐ Dublin open-top bus tour with a visit and drink at either Guinness Storehouse or Old Jameson Distillery on Day 3 & 4
- ☐ Tour of Belfast with a local guide

☐ Guided walking tours of Derry, "Quiet Man" Tour of Cong, Galway and Waterford

☐ Catamaran cruise on Killary Harbour

☐ Horse-drawn car ride in Killarney Park

#### ☐ Visits and admission fees to:

- Glasnevin Museum
- National Botanic Gardens
- Trinity College (Book of Kells)
- Boyne Valley Visitor Centre with Newgrange
- Titanic Belfast
- Giant's Causeway
- Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge
- Doagh Famine Village & Visitor Center
- Donegal Castle
- Drumcliffe Churchyard
- Westport House
- Ballintubber Abbey
- Cliffs of Moher
- Blarney Castle & Woollen Mills
- Dunbrody Emigrant Ship
- Glendalough Visitors Center

☐ Hotel portage, service charges and government taxes

Contact Lesley Anderson [anderley@sympatico.ca](mailto:anderley@sympatico.ca) 613-834-0401

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