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British Home Child Group International

Brantford, Barnardo's and Ignatius Cockshutt by Sandra Joyce

Design and Layout by Karen Mahoney



Barnardo's, as well as other organizations that supported sending child migrants to Canada, depended greatly on the support of wealthy philanthropists on both sides of the ocean. Most of the philanthropists were highly religious and believed that it was their moral obligation to help the poor. One of the wealthiest men in Canada during his lifetime, Ignatius Cockshutt, was no exception. A founding father of Brantford and a member of the Inghamites (a Methodist sect), Cockshutt believed it his Christian duty to help others who were not as fortunate as he was. Not only was he a regular financial contributor to Barnardo's, he also offered to help place British Home Children in the Brantford area.

The Cockshutt family emigrated to Canada in July 1827 when Ignatius was sixteen. Originally, his father, James Cockshutt, had planned for the family to move to Pennsylvania but on their journey across the ocean, a friend convinced James to go into business with him in York (Toronto). This lasted only one year as James then decided to become a general merchant. In 1829, he opened a branch of his business in Brantford which was still part

of the Six Nations reserve. Ignatius was to run the store. It failed after only one year, as white settlement in the area was slow. Caucasians were viewed as squatters.

Two years after the town-site was taken over by the crown, Ignatius persuaded his father to reopen the branch. As the population in the community increased, the Brantford location became immensely successful.

Ignatius proceeded to accumulate real estate and was Brantford's largest property holder at the time of its amalgamation in 1847. He invested in the Railway, constructed a toll-road and was President of the Brantford's Gas Works for some time and the Waterworks company for almost 20 years. By 1880, he owned 41 rental properties in Brantford and 21 farms in the Township, as well as his business and his own domicile.

Along with his son James, in 1877 he founded the original Cockshutt factory, the Brantford Plow Works in Brantford. Some British Home Children found employment at the plant.

In 1882, the business was incorporated as the Cockshutt Plow Company, with son James G. Cockshutt as president and Ignatius as Vice-President. At that time, they employed about 50 workers. After James' untimely death from tuberculosis in 1885, the company was operated by three of Ignatius' sons in succession and by a Cockshutt family member until 1957, when outside interests gained control of the company.

In 1882, Ignatius also left the running of his merchant business to his sons and became President of the Craven Cotton Company of Brantford. During the cotton overproduction crisis of 1883, he joined the Canadian Cotton Manufacturers Association to try and set production quotas. This proved to be difficult and eventually Ignatius sold the company. *Continued on page 5.....*

Madge Gill by Sandra Joyce

Madge Gill, a celebrated British Outsider and Visionary artist, was a British Home Child sent to Canada by Barnardo's in 1882.

Born illegitimately in the East End of London as Maude Ethel Eades, Gill was sequestered from the outside world until taken to Barnardo's orphanage in Barking in 1882. At the age of nine. At the age of fourteen, she was sent to Canada to work as an indentured domestic servant on a series of Ontario farms. At the end of her indenture, she returned to England to train and work as a nurse. She worked at Whipps Cross Hospital in Leytonstone and lived with her aunt Kate, a spiritualist and medium.

Madge married Tom Gill, her Aunt Kate's son in 1907. The two cousins had three sons, one of whom was lost to the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918. Madge had a still-born daughter in 1919 and came close herself to dying. In the illness that followed, she lost her left eye which was replaced with a glass one.

It wasn't until the following March, that Madge became 'possessed' by whom she insisted was her spiritual guide. Named Myrnerest, the guide at first frightened and overwhelmed her, according to her son, Laurie. However, under Myrnerest's influence, Madge created thousands of drawings, wrote, knit, crocheted, wove and played the piano.

It wasn't until she was fifty that Madge took part in the Whitechapel Gallery showing for the first time, at an annual exhibition of art by East End amateurs. Her work was called Reincarnation, which was a calico roll densely drawn in coloured inks. It attracted national press coverage.



After her husband's death, Madge lived with her two sons and her brother-in-law, who followed astrology. She also became well-known in her neighbourhood as a medium in the 1930s. She organized seances and did people's horoscopes. Her artistic work continued at a rapid speed throughout this period. Although her primary artistic form was ink-drawing on postcards, paper and calico cloth, she also made cushions, quilts and dresses. Myrnerest was often the signature that appeared on her drawings.

According to Gill biographer, Roger Cardinal,

"Gill's frenetic improvisations have an almost hallucinatory quality, each surface being filled with checkerboard patterns that suggest giddy, quasi-architectural spaces. Afloat upon these swirling proliferations are the pale faces of discarnate and nameless women, sketched perfunctorily, albeit with an apparent concern for beauty, and with startled expressions. It is tempting to interpret them in relation to Gill's biography: is she referring to her lost daughter, her beloved aunts, or to some feminine ideal? Are these in a sense self-portraits, or rather: attempts to stabilize her own fragile being, as it were through fleeting snapshots?"

Madge Gill continued.....

Madge rarely sold her work, as she repeatedly said it was not hers to sell. It belonged to Myninerest. Although she continued to participate in the Whitechapel Gallery showing annually, it seems as if she turned down other exhibits. Until her passing in 1961, most of her work was stored in her East Ham house at the age of 79.

At the time of her death, Cardinal said, "thousands of drawings were discovered in her home (and) the collection is (now) owned by the London Borough of Newham and is in the care of the borough's Heritage and Archives Service. Her work has been exhibited internationally at venues including The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, USA (1992), Manor Park Museum, London (1999), The Whitechapel Gallery, London (2006), Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava (2007), Halle Saint Pierre (Musée d'Art Brut & Art Singulier), Paris (2008, 2014), Kunsthalle Schirn, Frankfurt am Main. (2010), Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne (2005, 2007). From October 5, 2013 to January 26, 2014, Gill's work was displayed at the Orleans House Gallery. A major trilogy of exhibitions, showing over 600 of Gill's work, many previously unseen, took place at The Nunnery Gallery in London. It opened in May 2012 and lasted until January 2013.

Some of her drawings are on permanent view in The Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities, Fine Art & Natural History, whilst others are held by the London Borough of Newham Heritage Service."



Next year between June and September, the William Morris Gallery Greater London, England (Walthamstow) will be organising a series of events, workshops and a retrospective exhibition to celebrate Madge Gill's work.

The William Morris Gallery, opened in 1950 as the only public museum devoted to English Arts and Crafts, won the National Prize for Museum of the Year in 2013.

On 8th March 2018, a blue plaque commemorating Gill was erected at 71 High Street, Walthamstow, where she was born in 1882 and lived until 1890.



Home Boy

This is a poem submitted to us by one of our members, Georgiaday Hall, whose father was not a British Home Child but put into care in Canada. He came to Canada from Britain with his siblings to join his father. When his father was unable to continue homesteading, he was placed on farms in Saskatchewan as a British Home Child would have been. He was 12.

A window on the farm home slowly opens
and the small body of a boy tumbles out.

The moon casts his shadow as he hurries
Toward the tall grasses that will hide him.

Run Little George Run!

The moonlight will light your way.

Calm your fears of the dark.

Imagine the world full of sunshine, laughter and life.

Listen! The crickets cheer for you.

The frogs are croaking their beautiful chorus.

The gentle breeze moves the tall grass forward

Run Little George Run.

The coyotes are quiet tonight.

Soon you will be safe.

Be brave. There is no other way.

Some call you an orphan – a Home Child.

But in your heart are Mama, Grandma Eliza and...Papa,

Sister Dorothy, brothers Little Stan and curly haired Frank.

A way over yonder is a place where you can find shelter

From hard work and broken promises.

Your days will be forever sunny.

A way over yonder is a place you have seen in your dreams

Maybe tomorrow...

Something tripped little George,

Shiny Boots lifted him up and returned him to Farmer X at Doonside.

As Shiny Boots turned to leave Mr. X reached for the horse whip...

Little George was beaten!

Farmer X was fined for ... preventing Little George from attending Doonside School

George was soon placed with a farmer four miles west of Fairlight, Saskatchewan.

Farmer Y had made promises of care and an education for Little George at Prairie Bell School

But soon he too kept Little George from school and instead gave him difficult farm work.

He was even given a hoe to clean a field of weeds.

For two years the little boy slaved without wages.

A child seeks friendship. Often George slipped out at night – walked the four miles

To the curling rink in Fairlight, Saskatchewan.

These people became his friends and he would always remember them.

Farmer Y was afraid of him meeting the wrong people.

Once again Little George attempted an escape.

Soon he found himself placed with Farmer Z at Craik, Saskatchewan.

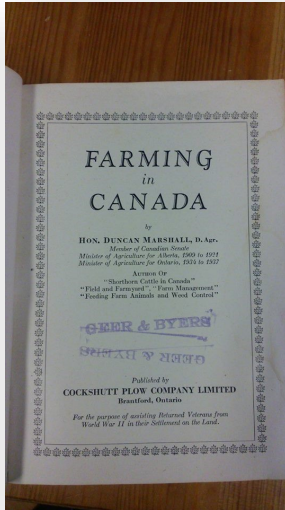
He was paid well for a few months and then nothing.

The last escape was well planned, and he was never captured again!

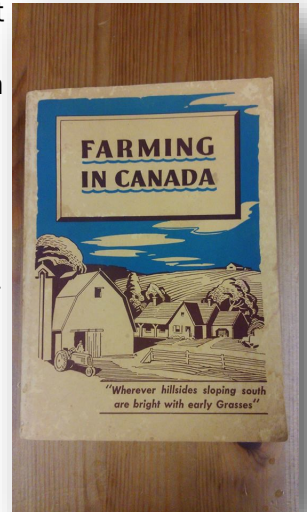
I am proud to be the daughter of George. A man of optimism, strength, kindness and values.

Brantford, Barnardo's and Ignatius Cockshutt continued....

Of Ignatius' nine children who survived childhood, two went on to become very prominent Canadian citizens. Henry became an alderman and then Mayor of Brantford in 1899. He then went on to become Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario from 1921 to 1927. Son William became an MP for the Brantford on three general elections: 1904, 1911 and 1917. William's success was particularly interesting as he had been sent to an asylum by his father when Ignatius had disapproved of his son's choice of wife. William was only released when he acquiesced to his father's wishes.



Ignatius' strong work ethic and austere nature aided his economic enterprises. However, he also devoted himself to several charities. He helped support the YMCA, the YWCA and the Women's Christian Temperance movement. As well, he established the Widow's Home in Brantford and, with Thomas Strahan Shenston, opened the Brantford Orphan's Home, the operation of which Cockshutt took over entirely in 1879. This building was meant to provide a safe haven for all vulnerable children in the area. He also supported the Brant County House of Industry and two missions in Jamaica.



Along with Barnardo's, Cockshutt supported other British Home Child institutions like the Middlemore Homes and even became a guardian to some of the Home Children that he supported. According to the Library Archives and Database of Canada, Ignatius' children continued Ignatius' legacy of supporting the child migrant institutions, not only financially and but also by helping place children in the area.



*British Home Child Group
International*

By email: connect@britishhomechild.com
Our website: www.britishhomechild.com
To book a speaker: sandrajoyce4343@gmail.com

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