



Home Children Canada Spring 2025 Newsletter

Welcome Spring!

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Albert Middleton: 1915 - 2005

A Life of Service, Strength, and Survival

Albert Middleton, a British Home Child who arrived in Canada in 1929, lived a life marked by hardship, resilience, and service. At the time of his passing on February 12, 2025, just weeks shy of his 110th birthday, he was believed to be Canada’s oldest surviving Second World War veteran—and the oldest known surviving British Home Child in Canada.

Born on March 11, 1915, in London, England, Middleton was sent to Canada at the age of 14 by the National Children’s Home and Orphanage, part of a child migration scheme that placed thousands of vulnerable British children into indentured labour across Canada. His early years were tough: he first worked on an apple orchard near Brantford, Ontario, to save money for his journey west, and later endured a harsh winter in Kapuskasing. It was during this time he learned to look out for himself—a survival instinct that would follow him throughout his life.



Albert with the HCC wreath last November in Victoria. HCC arranged for a special commemoration to be read at the wreath laying service earlier that day.

During the Second World War, Middleton volunteered for the Royal Canadian Air Force, serving in Europe from 1943 to 1946. He described those years simply as “dodging all the bullets,” but his service was a testament to his courage and commitment to his adopted country.

After the war, he purchased a 26-hectare hobby farm and worked full-time in Ontario factories to support his family. He was married twice, widowed twice, and raised three children. His family remembered him as a quiet but wise man who had endured far more than most.

On Remembrance Day in 2024, his remarkable life was honoured during Victoria’s official ceremonies when his daughter laid a special wreath on behalf of Home Children Canada. It was a powerful moment that paid tribute not only to his military service but also to the difficult path he walked as a British Home Child.

Albert Middleton’s story is a reminder of the strength and sacrifice of those who were brought to Canada as part of the child migration programs. His life, long and full, serves as a symbol of perseverance and quiet heroism.

Anne Euphemia Dorrington Dempsey: A Keeper of the “Home Child Secret”

Anne Euphemia Dorrington Dempsey, born in 1880 in Islington, England, was one of thousands of British Home Children sent to Canada under a program often shrouded in secrecy and stigma. Orphaned young and separated from her siblings, Annie arrived in Canada at the age of eight and, like many others, kept her past hidden—even her obituary omitted the truth of her early life. Yet her story is one of resilience: she found kindness in her placement, pursued education, became a teacher, and built a family of her own. Her strength and quiet determination left a lasting legacy for her descendants. The full story of Annie’s remarkable journey can be found on page 3 of this newsletter.



“Elbows Up” By Our Andrew Simpson Author of “The Ever Open Door”

British Home Children the story from Britain Visit Andrew's Blog: <https://chorltonhistory.blogspot.com/>

One television series heaps of history and a reflection on having Canadian cousins
It has been another turbulent month here in Europe, and the parallels with the 1930s continue to topple over themselves.

The increased support for the extreme far right in elections in Germany, the surge in antisemitism across the Continent and now the actions of the “Coalition of the Willing” to look at devoting more spending on armaments to combat a perceived threat from an aggressive power in the east is all too familiar.

As an antidote to the gloom many of us have been watching the return of a popular television series set in the 1950s, focusing on the stories of British families who settled in Australia.

They were the “Ten Pound Poms” who migrated from Britain with assistance from the Australian Government who levied a £10 administrative fee.

The policy began in 1945, with New Zealand adopting a similar scheme two years later, and was based on the Government's aim of increasing the Australia's population while also adding to the pool of skilled workers.

Adverts at the time relied heavily on the promise of a better way of life, which started with the subsidized cost of travel and offered affordable housing and a guarantee of work.

The reality was less promising, and the TV series draws on the disappointment and hardships encountered by the new settlers. These included being placed in migration hotels and having to settle for jobs which often fell short of the optimistic publicity.

The stories are a mix of happy and sad and explore the adjustments to a new country, highlighting the cultural differences as well as the prejudice towards the indigenous population.

And one very strong theme running through the three series has been the migration of children from Britain to Australia, promoted by the Catholic Church.

We follow one unmarried mother who was forced to give up her baby and then chose to migrate to Australia to find him, which she does with a heap of expected and unexpected consequences.

I suspect for a British audience this is still a revelation, despite the work of Margaret Humphries, the book she wrote, and the subsequent film along with the Child Migrants Trust she established.

And it is much more so when confronted with the Canadian experience.

People will vaguely acknowledge that they were aware of the Australian migrations but look blank when told that young people had been migrated to Canada in huge numbers.

But the Australian experience is still within living memory and those who were sent, as well parents and those engaged in the business can be interrogated on television.

That said the Canadian story is now becoming better known, with British social media sites and the involvement of historians in developing BHC into a

serious area of study.

And in the same way the “Ten Pound Poms” raises that other piece of social engineering which is the promotion of emigration with its purpose of increasing the population of the host countries and assisting their economic development.

For me the jury is out on whether this was the main purpose of migrating so many young children to Canada, but the Australian Government's policy has echoes back into the last century with The Empire Assisted Scheme. It also echoes the even earlier attempt by various Poor Law Unions to persuade unemployed agricultural workers in the 1840s to seek a new life in Canada.

And here I must confess an interest. My great uncle Roger was migrated in 1914 by Middlemore on behalf of the Derby Union, and eleven years later his sister, my great aunt travelled from Liverpool to Canada on the Empire Assisted Scheme, which for our family is a double whammy.

It also makes me and my family a lot closer to Canada than many, and while I have been watching events unfold across my continent, I am minded to close with those two words Elbows Up.

Pictures of Northern and Western Australia, 1984 and 1964, courtesy of June Pond

*Ten Pound Poms is a British historical drama television series created by Danny Brocklehurst for BBC One and Stan



Anne Euphemia Dorrington Dempsey: A Keeper of the “Home Child Secret”

By Martha Musgrove

Two events occurring in rapid succession during the life of my grandmother Anne Euphemia Dorrington (1880 – 1951) must have resulted in profound trauma for her. Yet by all accounts, she suppressed these incidents so successfully throughout her life that many in her immediate family never knew her whole story. In fact, when her obituary was published in the newspaper of the town where she lived much of her life, the text containing a significant falsehood was allowed to stand. No acknowledgement was made that years earlier her birth family had surrendered her to the Canadian Home Child program.

Anne Euphemia – always known as Annie by her family – came from humble beginnings. Since at least the 18th century, the Dorrington family had lived in the village of Cheshunt, Middlesex just to the northeast of London. The Dorrington men worked as labourers associated with stagecoaches, and the women as laundresses.

Yet Annie’s parents both had some education. Her father Henry worked in a skilled trade as a print compositor and her mother as a machinist in the garment industry. Thus, they were able to aspire to some upward class mobility, and Annie started out in life with reasonable prospects.



*Elizabeth and Henry Dorrington with
children William (standing),*



*Anne Dorrington's wedding
portrait, 1907*

She was born on January 17, 1880 in Islington, Middlesex and baptised on April 25th at Holy Trinity Anglican Church. She had three siblings: William, David and Amy.

As the photograph at the left shows, the Dorrington parents had achieved sufficient material success in the early 1880s to take what appears to be a seaside holiday.

However on May 13, 1887, the first disaster struck the Dorrington children. Their mother Elizabeth died of tuberculosis. Their father Henry died of typhoid, aggravated by asthma, on June 19th, about a month after his wife.

Although Henry’s will clearly indicated his wishes that his children be cared for by his brother, a year after his death his children were separated and scattered. Both Henry and Elizabeth came from large families that while not affluent were not destitute, but apparently no one was willing to take on the responsibilities of raising

four orphans. The two boys were sent to different orphanages outside London, Amy went to live with an aunt, and at age 8, Annie was sent to Canada as a Home Child.

Much has been written about the privations suffered by Home Children. Perhaps the cruelest aspect of child migration is that the children were taught to view themselves with shame. To admit that you were a Home Child was to confess that you came from a family too poor, too debased, or too indifferent to care for you. Regardless of their actual backgrounds, Home Children were considered an inferior species, physically and mentally stunted by life in the teeming slums of Britain. Completely unfounded perceptions proliferated that at best, these children were suited only for manual work; at worst, they were carriers of vermin and disease. Most Home Children simply never acknowledged this aspect of their past.

Annie seems to have taken the common approach of hiding her past from all but a few family members. Her obituary claims that she had been “raised by an aunt and uncle” in Uxbridge, but this cannot be true. Rather, Canadian immigration records clearly indicate that she was a Home Child, sent to Canada on the *Vancouver*, along with a group of 47 other girls ranging in age from 6 to 17, by the St. Mary’s Union in Islington.

Setting sail from Liverpool on June 28, the girls landed at Quebec on July 7, 1888, before being sent on to an orphanage that had been established in Hamilton, Ontario by Dr. Thomas Bowman Stephenson, founder of the National Children's Homes.

Fortunately for her descendants, Annie was one of the luckier Home Children. Albert and Mary Patterson of Uxbridge who contracted for her services seem to have been very kind to her, not only ensuring that she was well cared for, but also that she effectively became part of their family. Moreover, she was given a good education. In 1900, she received her High School and Collegiate Senior Leaving Certificate from Uxbridge High School. She then enrolled in the Ontario Normal College in Hamilton for training as a teacher, graduating in 1901. Following this training, she taught for several years in schools in Bracebridge and Exeter, Ontario.



The Dorrington siblings: Amy, William, David and Annie

Annie was also more fortunate than many Home Children because she was able to keep a connection to her Dorrington relations.

In 1903, she was able to reunite with her siblings in England. Any correspondence that might have been exchanged among the siblings does not seem to have survived, but apart from this family group taken in London (left), Amy, William, and David later sent their sister portrait photos, and David might have visited Annie in Canada when he travelled to the United States.

On January 3, 1907, Annie married James Henry Dempsey the first son and second child of Solomon Dempsey (1841 – 1921) and Elizabeth Hughes Dempsey (1842 – 1921) from Russell, Ontario. James worked as a dry goods merchant, a profession he pursued in Alberta, BC and Orillia, Ontario where he became the managing partner of Northway and

Dempsey, a store that sold women's fashions. The couple's first child, James Arthur, died in his early years, but two children, Harold and Corinne, survived. Having lost her birth family, Annie must have been delighted with the marriages of her son and daughter, and the consequent arrival of seven grandchildren. She died of an aneurysm on November 1, 1951 and was buried in St. Andrews and St. James Cemetery, Orillia.

Her obituary indicates that she took a keen interest in public affairs and was a member of the Women's Canadian Club. One of Annie's defining beliefs was the importance of education, not surprising from someone who had risen from humble position of indentured servant through her own learning. She must have been gratified that her son became a gifted musician and music teacher, and her daughter graduated in Honours English Literature from Victoria College at the University of Toronto.

There are not many photographs of Annie extant, and in the few that have been rescued,



she is usually shown with a serious, almost grim face. Considering the losses she suffered in her life, this is not surprising. Apart from the death of her parents, her early exile, and the loss of her first child, her husband died when still relatively young. When her daughter Corinne came down with the 'flu during the 1918 – 1920 world-wide epidemic, Annie must have been terrified that yet another loved one would be taken from her. She lived through the First World War, the Depression when hungry migrants came frequently to the door seeking help, and the Second World War during which her son Harold served. She must never have felt confident that the good life and second family that she had secured might not be snatched from her.

In the photo (left) of her with her first granddaughter Elizabeth Musgrove Wilson, Annie finally seems relaxed enough to register her pleasure at the arrival of another generation of her family. For her grandchildren and their descendants Annie provides an example of resilience, strength, adaptability and courage in overcoming loss. We owe her a lot.



James Dempsey wedding portrait

A Journey of Discovery: Reuniting a Family Across Continents

Summarized from the article "Tracing Her Roots Connie Ebbett Visited Father's Homeland : By RUTH SCOTT

Daily Gleaner Wed, Aug 14, 1996 · Page 6

BHC Registry ID #: 85235

John Duffy's journey to Canada in 1927 was one of adventure, hardship, and an unexpected separation from his family. As a young boy growing up in Scotland, he had little understanding of what awaited him on the other side of the Atlantic. Decades later, his daughter, Connie Ebbett, embarked on her own voyage—one that would reconnect her family after more than 50 years apart.

John and his brother, Tom, were the eldest of seven siblings. Their parents, struggling with financial difficulties, made the difficult decision to send them to Canada, believing they would learn a trade and build better lives. While John's immigration records confirm his arrival in 1927, no documentation has been found to support that Tom was also part of the Cossar program. Letters from Tom briefly reached their mother in Scotland, with one of the last known addresses being in Seattle, but eventually, the correspondence stopped and the family never heard from him again.

John's first encounter with Canada was a harsh one. Arriving in the middle of winter, he stepped off the train in New Brunswick into deep snow, the biting cold stinging his legs. The brothers had believed they were heading to an agricultural training school, but upon arrival, John quickly realized that Cossar Farm was more of a labor placement than an educational opportunity. His disappointment lingered for years, as he had not been given the schooling he had hoped for and had never been told the true reason he was sent to Canada. Later in life he remarked "The only education I got," he said wryly, "was how to milk a cow and pick apples."

Despite his initial challenges, John found some solace in Canada. After six months at the Cossar Farm, he was placed with Alfred Scribner, a kind-hearted lumberman. The Scribner family took John in as one of their own, providing him with a sense of belonging he had lost since leaving Scotland. Though he never received the education he had hoped for, he found stability and kindness in his new life.

For years, John stayed connected to his family back home, sending barrels of Macintosh apples he had picked himself as a gift from Canada. Letters were exchanged for some time, but over the years, contact faded. By the 1950s, all communication had ceased, and his Canadian-born children had no knowledge of their Scottish relatives.

John passed away in 1986, believing his ties to Scotland had been lost forever. However, his youngest sister, Ina, never forgot her brothers. Wondering why John had stopped writing, she began searching for him. Her efforts led her to Canadian newspapers and embassy inquiries, but for years, she found nothing. It was only through persistence that she finally stumbled upon a clue—her daughter, a journalist, brought back Canadian phone directories, allowing Ina to search through names in the hope of finding a connection.

In 1994, Ina came across a listing for "Ashley Duffy" in Toronto. When she called, she discovered that Ashley was John's son. It was a miraculous reunion after more than five decades of silence. The news quickly spread through the family, and soon, John's daughter, Connie, was preparing to visit Scotland to meet the relatives she had never known.

In April 1996, Connie arrived in Scotland and was warmly welcomed by her aunt Ina in North Berwick. Over the next several days, she explored the land her father once called home, recording her impressions in a travel diary. Scotland's green landscapes and historical sites captivated her, but the most meaningful part of her visit was yet to come.

At a family gathering in Glasgow, Connie finally met her father's siblings and their descendants. The moment was filled with emotion, as she immediately recognized familiar features and mannerisms in her uncle Dan, who strongly resembled John. She also saw herself mirrored in her cousin Betty Junior. The joy of reconnecting was overwhelming, and as stories were shared and laughter filled the room, it was clear that the lost family bonds had been restored.

For over 50 years, John Duffy had believed his family ties had faded away, but his children had now rediscovered them. The separation that had once seemed permanent was no longer a barrier, and the connection between Scotland and Canada was rekindled, ensuring that John's legacy would live on in both lands.



Building New Lives: The Dr. Barnardo's Colonization Scheme

By Lori Oschefski from "Lost But Not Forgotten"

The Dr. Barnardo Colonization Scheme was a program developed by Dr. Thomas Barnardo's organization, in 1890, to send older boys to Western Canada to become independent farmers. The program focused on boys who had lived in Barnardo's Homes and had gained experience working on farms in Ontario.

The Colonization Scheme was one of the most positive and helpful programs created by any organization sending children to Canada. It focused on giving the older boys who were leaving the care of the Homes real opportunities to succeed. It didn't just place them with families to work; it provided them with land, training, and the tools they needed to become independent farmers.

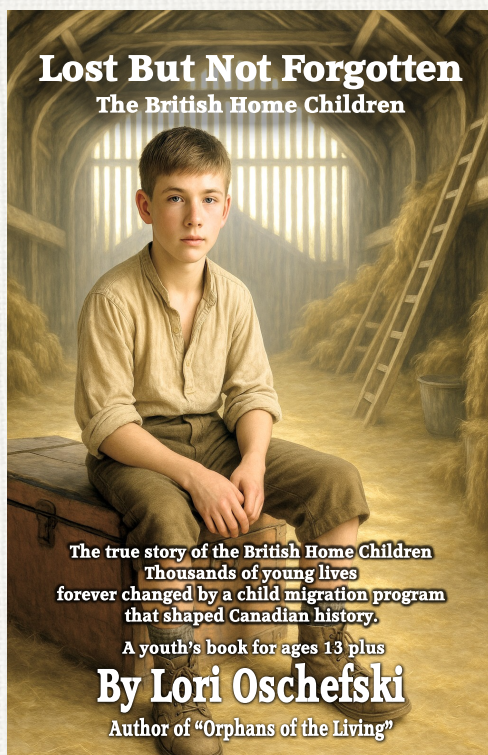
These boys were offered help in obtaining land in Western Canada, primarily in Manitoba, under the provisions of the Dominion Lands Act.

The Dominion Lands Act was a Canadian law from 1872 that gave free land to people who wanted to start farms in the western parts of Canada, like Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. It was part of a plan to encourage people to move to these areas and help Canada grow.

Under the law, anyone over 18 (usually men) could get 160 acres of land for a small fee of \$10. To keep the land, they had to live on it, build a house, and farm a portion of it within three years. This helped turn empty land into farms and communities.

Dr. Barnardo, to help his lads obtain land through this provision, aimed to provide financial and practical support, including money for travel, housing, and farming equipment, which the boys would eventually repay. Upon arrival, the boys received training at a central farm to prepare them for life as independent farmers. They were expected to work hard, maintain their farms, and repay the costs of their supplies. The goal of the scheme was to help the boys become self-sufficient settlers, contributing to the development of Canada's agricultural regions while also improving their own prospects.

While the scheme offered opportunities, it also came with challenges. The boys had to adjust to a harsh climate, isolation, and the demanding work of farming. However, for many, it provided a fresh start and the chance to build stable, independent lives in a new country.



New Book Release – Coming Early Summer 2025

From acclaimed author and historian Ms. Lori Oschefski comes a powerful new title for young readers: *Lost But Not Forgotten*. This is the first historical non-fiction book written specifically for students that covers the child migration programs from 1869 to 1939. Aimed at readers aged 13 and up, the book brings the emotional and often heartbreaking story of the British Home Children to a younger generation in an age-appropriate and compelling way.

Lost But Not Forgotten is an adaptation, student-friendly version of Oschefski's popular book *Orphans of the Living – British Home Children in Canada*, which has been widely praised for its deep research and unflinching look at this dark chapter in Canadian history. With real-life stories, accessible historical context, and thought-provoking insight, this new book offers a comprehensive introduction to the migration schemes that sent over 100,000 children to Canada.

This important and engaging book ensures that the voices of these children are heard—and remembered—by future generations.

"Orphans of the Living" is available on Amazon in Canada, the United States and throughout the United Kingdom. "Lost But Not Forgotten" will likewise be available.