

British Home Children Advocacy & Research Association

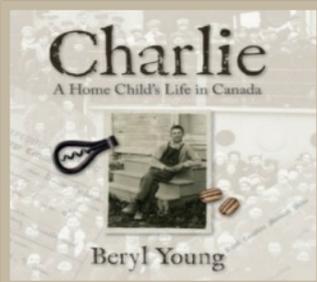
January 2015 Newsletter

Written by Lori Oschefski with a special
book review by Andrew Simpson

The BHCARA would like to wish everyone the very best this New Year. We are excited to announce the release of our new BHCARA web site! Found on a new easy to remember URL, www.britishhomechildren.com, this site was designed for us by Megan Nicole at www.nicheculture.biz, and is easier to use and to view. Also a new, easy to remember contact email is now in use. Info@britishhomechildren.com. This new web site does not replace the British Home Children in Canada research site but the former BHCARA web site.

Pick up the new edition of 'Your Town Magazine: Bowmanville' in Ontario. Available online the second week of 2015, this edition features a BHC article, co-written by Lori Oschefski & Sandra Joyce. Visit www.yourtownmagazines.ca.

We would like to remind everyone that the exhibit at Black Creek Pioneer Village in Toronto is now closed for the winter months and will reopen in May. Please check the dates at www.blackcreek.ca. This exhibit will run until December 2015.



This year the BHCARA will have teachers packages available for schools. These packages will include suggested lesson plans, suggested learning activities, relevant links, suggested reading lists, information on our Black Creek Pioneer Village exhibit and one award winning book "Charlie: a Home Child's Life in Canada", written by author

Beryl Young.

Beryl's Grandmother was forced to send her children to an orphanage after the death of her husband. Charlie, their son, and Beryl's father was placed in a Dr. Barnardo's Home in London. At the age of 13 he was called into the office and told he was being sent across the ocean to Canada. He experienced homesickness and hardship, but fortunately, also great kindness in Canada. Charlie enlisted in the First World War, after which he returned to Canada and joined the RCMP. Charlie rose from poverty to become a valuable member of Canadian society.

As an adult, Beryl wrote the compelling and inspiring story of her father after she discovered more about his past, which he rarely spoke about. This book is perfect not only for our young readers from grades five through eight but can also be enjoyed by readers of all ages!

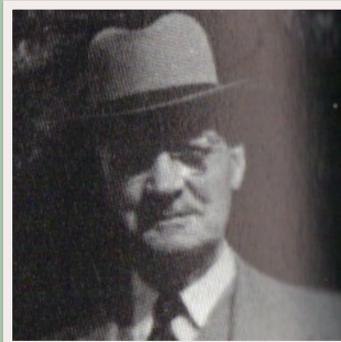
We are grateful to Ronsdale Press for their generous donation of twenty copies of Beryl book. The books are to be distributed to classrooms so students can learn an account of a British Home Child who came to Canada at the age of thirteen.

For more information on the school packages please contact:
info@britishhomechildren.com

For more information on Charlie and Beryl's children's books visit:
www.berlyyoung.com

Spencer Smith

Shaftesbury Homes is one of the lesser known organizations who brought children to Canada. Originating in St. Giles, London, England as the "The National Refuges for Homeless and Destitute Children", it would later be based at 164 Shaftesbury Street, London. In 1884 a home was opened in Hamilton, Ontario to receive the Shaftesbury children.



In later years, Shaftesbury was renamed "The Children's Aid Society of London England - Canadian Branch Shaftesbury Home" and the boys were taken to Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Spencer George Smith was one of the thirty three children who arrived in Hamilton, Ontario in 1885. Born in 1872 in Bethnal Green, London, England he was the son of George Smith and Mary Mears. It is still not yet known why Spencer was taken into care and sent to Canada. As a lonely child in Canada he would remember the kindness shown to him by Mrs. Fred Martindale, the wife of the first farmer he was placed with, for the rest of his life.

At the age of forty one he wrote a poem in fond remembrance of her kindness to him. He stayed with the Martindale's for a year and then was moved to the farm of William and Edith Bell in the Burlington area of Ontario. On May 9th 1900, Spencer married the Bell's daughter, Edith. For a few years, they ran a store in Toronto and then returned to Burlington where they ran a grocery store. Their produce was well known for its quality and attracted boating customers who docked in Burlington specifically to shop at their store. They always ensured that children were given free treats from the store.

In 1924, his wife Edith passed away and in 1926 he remarried. Spencer was a well respected member of the Burlington community and an honoured long term member of the Horticultural Society. During the depression he hired workers to clean up the shoreline at the foot of Brant Street. Spencer himself spent considerable time working alongside these men cleaning up the area, planting many of the trees that still flourish there today. When he retired in 1950 he worked to develop a small park in the same location. The park was bestowed with the name of its creator "Spencer Smith Park".

In the years following Spencer's death the park was greatly expanded, covering over thirteen acres by 1967. At this time there was a push to change the park's name but the Horticultural Society refused to comply and today the park still bears his name.

Today this park is a community treasure. It is home to many events and activities such as the Sound of Music Festival, as well as Canada's Largest Ribfest. It has a small beach and plenty of walking paths. A monument stands by one of the paths and is dedicated to the park's primary creator, British Home Child, Spencer Smith.

Mark Gillies of the Burlington Gazette will begin publishing a weekly historical column, starting on January 5th with Spencer's mother in laws interesting story. This will be followed by an article on January 12th focusing on Spencer himself.

These articles can be viewed online at: www.burlingtongazette.ca

To Australia and the story of those other British Home Children

by Andrew Simpson

The story of the children sent to Canada from the late 19th century into the early 20th has almost passed out of living memory, but those who went to Australia were still leaving our shores in the 1970s.

These Australian stories are no less harrowing than those young people who travelled across the Atlantic.

They bring to the surface all the same feelings of anger and incredulity that someone could think it was a good idea to solve the problems of our homeless, neglected and poverty stricken children by dumping them in other parts of the Empire.

Now before any one accuses me of a lack of historical impartiality I do have to say that like many of the descendants of children sent from Britain to Canada I have been very careful in examining the case for their migration. Some in Canada might even feel that I have been over cautious about coming to a judgement.

Here it is enough to say that despite some well meaning thinking on the part of some good people and a belief that wide open spaces were a better environment than the streets and dismal courts of the poorer parts of our cities the policy was wrong.

And it was seen to be wrong at the time. Almost from the onset of the programme people were worried about the lack of supervision and inspection in Canada and had been challenging the very premise upon which the migration was undertaken.

So, that I hope has negated that oft used argument by the apologists of the scheme that we are in some way judging past actions by present day sensibilities. It always was a tired and barren argument but one totally exposed when you consider that the policy was still in full swing in the 1960s and really only came to an end 40 or so years ago.

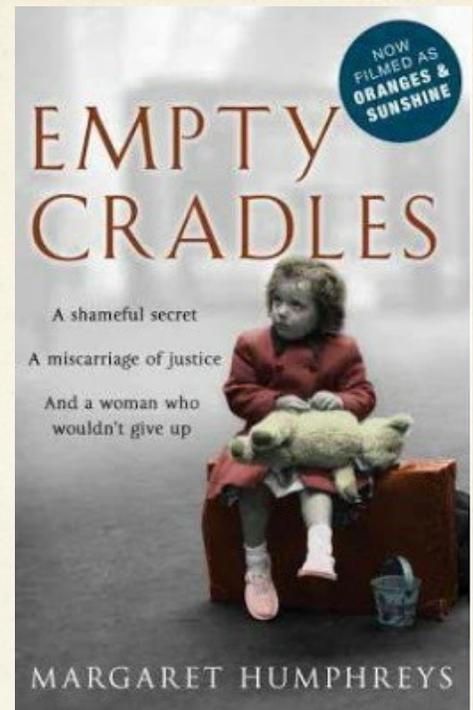
This was no case of another time and another place, but at a moment when Britain had embraced the welfare state, believed we were advancing to a new bright future which offered new life choices to its entire people and set against full employment and growing prosperity.

And yet the children were still being sent. In some cases having been told their parents were dead and in almost all cases denied any real knowledge of who they had been or why they were sent.

This shabby little episode, this last flickering of a discredited policy in child care was exposed by Margaret Humphreys, a Nottingham social worker in the 1980s. Her work in providing a history for all those Australians who grew up with no knowledge of a family in Britain or the circumstances which led to them being sent to Australia is documented in her book *Empty Cradles* which in turn became the film *Oranges and Sunshine*.

It is a powerful account of the confusion, hurt and anger felt by many of these young people combined with an insight into the reluctance shown on the part of the charities and government agencies to either help or even admit the extent of the programme.

And this is why I think it is essential reading for all of us engaged in telling the story of British Home Children.



For most of us our own BHC relatives are dead and many of their records are scattered, lost or unobtainable. Even just identifying the names of the young people is a huge task and some I fear will never emerge from the shadows.

So for most of us looking for family it is a matter of pouring over newspaper accounts, census returns and just possibly if we are very lucky the records of the local work house or children's charity.

Going the next step and trying to understand the justification for the migrations is wrapped up in dense committee minutes of long forgotten charities or the often vain self congratulatory biographies and autobiographies of the worthies involved.

All of which means our own feelings of anger and disbelief are one step removed. Mrs Humphrey's book has the value that here are the voices and experiences of people still alive, still able to recount their stories and give a context to what happened.

In its way the book has done more to make me angry about what went on than the plight of my own great uncle or the stories uncovered by Lori and Norah and the many others committed to telling the story of our Canadian BHC.

But it is also a very revealing insight into how the charities and authorities tried to minimise what went on and in some cases to perpetuate the myth that it was all oranges and sunshine and that they were only doing what was best for the children.

More than once Mrs Humphrey's was told that her work had caused hurt to those who ran the charities to which her reply was always that she knew of countless other Australians who had been at the receiving end and were also still hurting.

I know there are those who feel that the publicity around the book takes the limelight away from the experiences of our Canadian relatives but I rather think it is the reverse. Empty Cradles exposed an awful episode in child care, opened up the debate and contributed to national apologies made by the Australian and British Governments.

All of that was a good thing, and will lead I have no doubt to an apology from the Government of Canada. The work of those promoting the petition along with the growing number of books, exhibitions and research will continue to shine a light on all those young people sent north across the Atlantic.

*Empty Cradles, was published in 1994. Its sales of 75,000 copies helped to fund the work of the Child Migrants Trust at a critical time when British government grants had been stopped. Empty Cradles has been dramatised as the 2011 feature film Oranges and Sunshine.

The Child Migrants Trust was established in 1987 by Margaret Humphreys CBE, OAM. It addresses the issues surrounding the deportation of children from Britain. In the post-war period, child migrants as young as three were shipped to Canada, New Zealand, the former Rhodesia and Australia, a practice that continued as late as 1970.

<http://www.childmigrantstrust.com/>

Andrew Simpson is a author, historian and researcher from Chorlton-cum-Hardy, a suburban area of the city of Manchester, England. His book, "The Story of Chorlton-cum-Hardy" was published in 2012, "Didsbury Through Time" was published in 2013. His third book "Manchester and the Great War" is expected out in the summer of 2015. Andrew's Great Uncle Roger James Hall was a British Home Child brought to Canada in 1914 by the Middlemore Homes. Andrew has a strong interest in the British Home Children and has written many fascinating and informative blogs on this subject.

To read Andrew's blogs and find information on his books please visit:

<http://chorltonhistory.blogspot.co.uk/>

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