



# British Home Children Advocacy & Research Association

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## Press Release

### Regarding: Beacons of Light British Home Children & Child Migrants Sesquicentennial International Tribute

From 1869 right up to 1948, over 100,000 children of all ages were emigrated right across Canada, from the United Kingdom, to be used as indentured farm workers and domestics. Believed by Canadians to be orphans, only two percent truly were. These children, known as the British Home Children (“BHC”) and Child Migrants, were sent to Canada by over 50 organizations including the well-known and still working charities: Barnardo’s, The Salvation Army, Quarrier’s and Fairbridge, to name a few. BHC are an integral part of the fabric of our nation - often, rightfully, called Canada’s Nation Builders. Their vast contributions to our country should never be forgotten. Descendants of BHC, number in the millions in Canada alone!

The British Home Children Advocacy and Research Association (“BHCARA”) is a Canadian based not for profit organization dedicated to the story of Canada’s British Home Children (BHC). Founded in 2012 by Barrie, Ontario’s Lori Oschefski, the BHCARA now reaches thousands of people through their Facebook group of over 6,700 members and their mailing list of over 4,000 subscribers. Our website now has over 1 million hits and we have a high media presence. The mandate of the organization is to promote the story of the British Home Children, to advocate for those who no longer have a voice and to provide free research help to those seeking their family histories; often providing closure from painful pasts.

On November 8, 1869 the very first party of BHC arrived in Canada, making 2019 the 150th anniversary of this arrival. The date of September 28th has been chosen for a special international tribute as this date is commemorated nationally as British Home Child Day in Canada; a unanimous passage of MP Guy Lauzon’s private member’s motion M-133 in the House of Commons, Feb. 7, 2018. This initiative for this tribute started when BHCARA member Kim Crowder approached MS. Oschefski for support in the illumination of the High Level Bridge in her city of Edmonton, Alberta. Since then, many members have become involved reaching out in their communities for support. BHCARA member Tracy Smithers contacted Her Majesty the Queen and received a prompt letter of support back from her!

The BHCARA is asking communities to participate in the “**Beacons of Light for British Home Children and Child Migrants Tribute**” by illuminating memorials, monuments, buildings, City Halls or other areas with the colours of the BHCARA; red, white and blue. Cities and towns are also participating by proclaiming this day as “British Home Child Day” in their community. Some cities are sharing this message on their digital billboards.

The tribute is a symbolic gesture showing these children, in their sesquicentennial year, are not forgotten. Many Canadian and UK cities have agreed to participate with over sixty-five supporters to date, including the iconic Niagara Falls, Toronto’s CN Tower, The Northern Lights Display in Vancouver and St. Andrews House - Head Quarters of the Scottish Government in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Town of Midland and Orillia are participating by proclaiming September 28th as BHC Day in their cities. A full listing of our supporters can be viewed at [www.britishhomechildren.com](http://www.britishhomechildren.com).

The BHC are a critical part of our nation’s fabric, this country was built on the backs of these children. We would appreciate your support in sharing the news of this important and extraordinary tribute to Canada’s Nation Builders. A history of the British Home Children follows.

Very best regards  
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## **The History of The British Home Children** **By Roberta Horrox**

The British Child Migration Scheme officially started in Canada, in 1869, when Maria Rye arrived with sixty-eight children from England. In Canada, the children from this scheme became known as British Home Children. Maria Rye's idea grew to over fifty organizations sending over 100,000 to Canada between 1869 and 1948. These children ranged from a few months to 18 years of age; being sent to Canada to work as indentured labourers and servants. The child migration scheme was supported by both British and Canadian governments which paid organizations for each child sent, additional bonus fees were paid for sending more children; however, no bonus was paid for children from workhouses. This scheme was viewed as a win-win situation, as Britain reduced the cost of caring for many poor destitute children; while Canada gained cheap labour for a country that was just starting to expand. While many believe the children were orphans this was not the case, as only 2% were true orphans; the majority were from single parent families, most often due to a parent dying or from families that were poor and destitute. Many factors led to Britain having so many poor, destitute people. These children through no fault of their own were caught up in this tragedy. As child migration to Canada came to a halt, it increased to Australia with approximately 7,000 children being sent there. Child migration to Australia ended in 1970s. The major difference was that children sent to Australia were most often institutionalized. New Zealand took in 549 child migrants, with fewer children being sent to Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Cape of Good Hope Colony in South Africa.

In Canada, while some of the children were treated well, most were seen as nothing more than cheap labour, some suffered abuse; some cases of horrific abuse resulted in death. Whether these children were treated well or abused one thing in common is the feeling of loss; loss of family, friends, country and culture. Some were sent to homes that didn't speak English. Often told by sending agencies that they were unwanted, uncared for, or that their parents had died, while their parent(s) were told they were adopted by good British families. If siblings arrived in Canada together they were more often than not separated once they got here. Although checks were suppose to take place on a regular basis, things fell short due to vast number of children, lack of enforcement, shortage of inspectors, the immense distance, and difficulty traveling to remote places in order to perform the checks on the children. When inspectors did visit, the children didn't necessary get to speak to, or even see, the inspector; and if they did it often occurred with the master present. Therefore the children would hide the truth for fear of being reprimanded or further abuse.

Many British Home Children were stigmatized by members of the communities they came to live in, often being told they were street rats, guttersnipes and a multitude of other derogatory terms. If a British Home Child lived in a community and something bad happened, usually a British Home Child was blamed. They had no one to turn too, no one to stick up for them, they suffered in silence. As a survival mechanism they shut down, blocking memories; they became silent of their trauma, silent of any abuse; silent and ashamed of their past, and their lives as British Home Children. Most carried this stigmatism throughout their lives, refusing to tell even their immediate family where they had come from. Some children had their names changed or spelling of names became corrupted, while some where too young to know their correct names, birthday dates, or the names of their parents. These children were not given the necessary documents to prove who they were; this became an issue when they became older wanted to travel, or needed proof of identity such as applying for pension. The children were promised an education, the vast majority did not receive the education promised. Silently and unwittingly aspects of their traumatic experiences were often passed down to their children. For instance, as a corruption of their BHC experience, when they became older with families of their own they were unable to show love or affection for their own children. During WWI nearly every eligible British Home Boy voluntarily signed up for the Canadian Expedition Force; 1,000 Home Boys paid the ultimate sacrifice. The most common date of death was April 9, 1917, the first day of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

In Nov 2009, then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, issued an apology for their role in the Child Migration Scheme; then in Feb 2010, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown issued an apology for Britain's role. In Canada, Canadian Parliament declared 2010 Year of the British Home Child. On Feb 16, 2017 the Canadian House of Commons issued an apology and on Feb 7, 2018 MP Guy Lauzon's private member's motion M-133 was unanimous passed making Sept 28th, National British Home Child Day in Canada. To date our prime minister has not issued an official apology on behalf of the government.



On January 31, 2019, the Government of the United Kingdom issued a press release entitled "Ex-Gratia Payment Scheme for former British Child Migrants" to compensate former child migrants that were still alive on March 1, 2018, "in recognition of the fundamentally flawed nature of the historic child migration policy". In a background Statement, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse Interim (UK) report stated, "The Government has long acknowledged and accepted, assessment at the time of the national apology in 2010 and went further, calling it a 'shameful episode of history' and this failure in the first duty of a nation, which is to protect its children". For the Child Migrants sent to Canada this payment is much too late, as so few are still living.

BHC organizations in Canada, and Child Migrant organizations in Australia and the UK that have been formed to give voices to all British Child Migrants. These organizations were formed to help educate the public on The British Child Migration Scheme, as well as help descendants search and reconnect with lost family members. Of note, "The Guest Children" who were children sent to Canada by their parents for protection during the war are not part of the British Child Migration Scheme. The two are entirely different, but often misconstrued.

With this year being the 150th anniversary of British Home Children in Canada; work continues to give these children their voices.

The following website is an excellent resource: British Home Child Advocacy and Research (BHCARA) - CEO Lori Oschefski website <https://www.britishhomechildren.com> BHCARA also has a facebook group