

Not Here by Choice: Canada's Importation of Child Labourers

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Abstract

Between the 1830s and the 1940s, more than 100,000 poor British children were imported to Canada as indentured apprentices. While support for the so-called “juvenile immigration movement” was initially strong, it did not take long for the public and media to turn against the children. This episode in Canadian history, wherein children became the target of hostility, is one that until recently has been largely ignored in Canadian historiography. Although the juvenile immigration movement is mentioned in passing in most scholarly works about the history of British immigration to Canada, academic attention to the practice of importing child labourers began only in the late 1970s. To understand Canada's practice of importing young child labourers requires examining Britain's attempts to deal with its poor, the inter-relationship between Canada's labour needs and its immigration policies, and changing public perceptions of child labour that ultimately led to the demise of child importation.



Introduction

“Outcasts,” “street waifs,” “children of vicious and criminal tendencies,” and

“the offal of the most depraved characters. . . of the Old Country.”¹ Such was the language used in newspapers, trade union reports, and even the Canadian Parliament toward the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries to describe British pauper children who had been brought to Canada as apprentices and indentured as domestic servants and agricultural labourers.² This episode in Canadian history, wherein children—and British children at that, not any of the ethnic groups typically hailed as inassimilable—became the target of hostility, is one that was largely disregarded in Canadian historiography until Joy Parr’s 1977 Yale University dissertation highlighted what she called “the dark side of evangelicalism, of turn of the century childhood, and of Canadian rural life.”³ Parr’s work brought attention to the fact that many Canadians are descended from young children removed from their surroundings in Britain and sent to work in Canada. Since the publication of Parr’s dissertation, several historians have published works that explore the juvenile immigration movement in further detail and illuminate the conditions under which these children lived and worked.⁴

1. Editorial, *Toronto News*, 6 May 1884; *The Globe*, 10 September 1884; D. J. O’Donoghue, Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, 1895, quoted in P. T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, “The King’s Children in English Canada: A psychohistorical study of abandonment, rejection, and colonial response (1869–1930),” *Journal of Psychohistory* 8, no. 4 (Spring 1981): 387; Canada, House of Commons, “Report of the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonisation of the House of Commons,” *Journals*, (1888), 10.

2. Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869–1924*, (London: Croom Helm, 1994), 11.

3. Joy Parr, “The Home Children: British Juvenile Immigration to Canada, 1868–1924” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1977), iv.

4. The major works on the topic include Parr, *Labouring Children*; Phyllis Harrison, *The Home Children: Their Personal Stories* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1979); Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980); Gail H. Corbett, *Barnardo Children in Canada* (Peterborough, ON: Woodland, 1981); Rooke and Schnell, “The King’s Children”; Gillian Wagner, *Children of the Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982); Patricia T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, “Imperial Philanthropy and Colonial Response: British Juvenile Emigration to Canada, 1896–1930,” *The Historian* 46, no. 1 (November 1983): 56–77; Philip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Marjorie Kohli, *The Golden Bridge: Young Immigrants to Canada, 1833–1939* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2003); Charlotte Neff, “The Children’s Friend Society in Upper Canada, 1833–1837,” *Journal of Family History* 32, no. 3 (July 2007): 234–255; and Roy Parker, *Uprooted: The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada, 1867–1917* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

To more clearly understand what motivated Canadians to import more than 100,000 pauper children as indentured labourers—most only ten and eleven years old—requires going beyond an isolated examination of the juvenile immigration movement and exploring the history of British poor relief as well as the relationship between Canadian labour needs and immigration policies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Understanding the cessation of the practice likewise requires looking beyond the reported public hostility to, and poor treatment of, the children and investigating the evolution and acceptance of the concept of “childhood” and its impact on the development of British and Canadian child labour laws. While relying on the major scholarly works that have explored Canada’s importation of child labourers in detail, this paper also draws from a variety of sources that address British and Canadian social and immigration histories in an effort to situate the juvenile immigration movement within its broader historical context. Numerous primary sources available through Library and Archives Canada, particularly personal and government letters, orders-in-council, police reports, government reports, and lists related to the juvenile immigration movement, were gleaned from RG17 Agriculture, RG18 Royal Canadian Mounted Police, RG25 External Affairs, and RG76 Immigration and used in the writing of this paper. Historical newspaper articles, House of Commons reports, and a publication by Thomas Barnardo, one of the leading philanthropists involved in the movement, were also consulted to cast light on contemporary public and political opinion of the children and their presence in Canada. Phyllis Harrison and Gail H. Corbett have, in their respective works,⁵ provided significant collections of memories from former child immigrants. Recognising the inherent challenges involved in basing historical works on long-term memories without sufficient corroboration, however, this paper does not use those sources to any great extent. It does, however, include a single case study that is drawn primarily from the unpublished records of

5. Harrison, *The Home Children* and Corbett, *Barnardo Children in Canada*.

one philanthropic organisation, with minor details added from the unpublished memoirs of the former child immigrant herself.

I. Solving the “Problem” of Pauper Children

Charitable efforts to provide relief to Britain’s poor have had a long history. The growth of religious-based philanthropy in the mid-nineteenth century was little more than a product of, and reaction to, the evolution of poor laws over the previous centuries. In another sense, though, the juvenile emigration movement was unique in that it represented the organised separation of children from their families and their emigration from Britain.⁶

Early English Charity

The nature and foundation of medieval English charity—based upon the almshouse—were largely destroyed by the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536–40 and of religious guilds, fraternities, almshouses, and hospitals during the following decade. The evolution of the country’s poor laws was primarily a parliamentary attempt to fill the gap. The 1597 and 1601 *Acts for the Relief of the Poor* created a national poor law system that was largely parish-based, locally enforced, and voluntary. The system permitted almshouses to care for those too disabled to work and established workhouses for the able-bodied. Child pauper apprenticeship was also introduced through the Act as a means to arrest and forcibly apprentice vagrant children between the ages of five and fourteen.⁷ Seventeenth century records show that pauper apprenticeship was used extensively to reduce poor rate expenditures. As such, the “parish did not focus on doing good for the child but on relieving itself of a burden and

6. Parker, *Uprooted*, xiii.

7. Charlotte Neff, “Pauper Apprenticeship in Early Nineteenth Century Ontario,” *Journal of Family History* 21, No. 2 (April 1996): 146. Pauper apprenticeship differed significantly from trade apprenticeship, as the “children were [simply] to be kept busy, off the streets, fed, clothed, and housed” (144).

blight.”⁸

In 1662, *An Act for the Better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom* allowed city officials to return newcomers to their previous place of settlement if they were deemed likely to become a public charge.⁹ By 1834, the *Poor Law Amendment Act* created a more rigorously implemented, centrally enforced, and mandatory system centred on the workhouse and managed by administrative units called Poor Law Unions.¹⁰ It also included a financial provision for the emigration of the poor. Two subsequent amendments led to a significant increase in the emigration of the poor: the 1848 *Poor Law Amendment Act* created a common fund to finance emigration, while the 1850 *Poor Law Amendment Act* provided that a Poor Law Union could assist the emigration of poor orphan or deserted children under the age of sixteen.¹¹

Assisted Emigration of Pauper Children

As soon as they began settling the Virginia colony in the early 1600s, the British sought to ensure that there was a sufficient labour supply to keep the colony functioning. It achieved this through the use of indentured servitude, whereby in exchange for their transportation to the colony labourers agreed to work for a pre-determined number of years for little or no wages. In the early American colonial period, the size of the indentured population was almost triple that of the non-indentured. Indentured labourers included men and women as well as children, and by the later seventeenth century, forty-five percent of the indentured servants arriving in Lancaster County, Virginia were under the age of 16.¹² At the same time, assisted emigration—the partial or total absorption of emigrants’ transportation and settlement expenses without

8. Ibid, 147.

9. Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 138.

10. Ibid., 60.

11. John Eekelaar, “‘The Chief Glory’: The Export of Children from the United Kingdom,” *Journal of Law and Society* 21, No. 4 (December 1994): 489.

12. Richards, *Britannia’s Children*, 55.

a work-as-payment requirement—was also promoted in Britain as a viable way to both ease the social problem of poverty and purge the criminal class.¹³ From the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, displaced agricultural workers and unemployed wage workers from throughout the British Isles and Ireland were assisted to emigrate in large numbers.¹⁴ Although they later became the most likely to be emigrated, workhouse inmates or those receiving parish relief were at first explicitly excluded.

In its earliest days, the emigration of pauper children was undertaken primarily to remove those who had committed crimes or “become public nuisances through destitution.”¹⁵ Sending such children initially to the American colonies and after 1783 to Australia, South Africa, and Canada was seen as an appropriate and expedient response to the problem of child pauperism that also helped to meet the colonies’ labour needs. The first recorded emigration of poor children dates to 1619, when the London Common Council sent one hundred vagrant children to Jamestown, Virginia.¹⁶ From the seventeenth through early nineteenth century, thousands of children may have been sent overseas.¹⁷

By the mid-nineteenth century, child pauperism had increased significantly as a result of a mass migration of the rural poor to cities. Many poor families, unable to find work, were forced to survive with insufficient food, water, and clothing in dirty and crowded hovels. Young children were often compelled to work in very low paying and tedious jobs to supplement

13. Harper and Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, 247.

14. *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, ed. Paul R. Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 1119. While the majority of Scottish agricultural immigrants paid their own way, a significant minority were assisted to emigrate. Helen Cowan, *British Emigration to British North America: The First Hundred Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 43; Harper and Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, 16–17, 52; Kirby A. Miller, Review of *Sending Out Ireland's Poor: Assisted Emigration to North America in the Nineteenth Century*, by Gerard Moran, *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 784. Cowan, *British Emigration*, 68–70.

15. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, xiii.

16. *Ibid.*, 251; Eric Richards, *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 54.

17. Bean and Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire*, 37–38.

their families' incomes. Child pauper apprenticeships also shifted from their original focus on agricultural and domestic work to factory work. Many poor children died before reaching adulthood; those who survived faced a life of grinding poverty, crime, and disease.¹⁸

Recognition of the at-times deplorable conditions under which poor children worked contributed—in part—to the growth of philanthropy and social reform in early nineteenth century Britain. The seventh Earl of Shaftesbury was particularly noteworthy in bringing attention to the working conditions of child colliers, factory workers, and chimneysweeps and was instrumental in the development and passage of acts abolishing child apprenticeship and setting restrictions on child labour. He also helped to establish some of the earliest “ragged schools,” which acted as industry training centres for youth. During the same period, the concept of childhood began to evolve and children began to be seen as more than just little adults. By the latter decades of the century, reformers were successfully arguing that children should not work until the age of fourteen, that government-funded schooling should be mandatory, and that child abuse should be criminalised.¹⁹

However, while the concept of childhood was recognised among the middle and upper classes, it was seen quite differently between rural and urban areas and between classes. Evangelical philanthropists, who were heralded among the wealthy for their family-modelled institutions, used emigration to separate children from parents deemed unworthy.²⁰ By the mid- to late nineteenth century, social reformers targeting poor children used the bleak economic and social prospects facing pauper children to justify their emigration.²¹ The reformers argued that the colonies' labour needs could be

18. Parr, *Labouring Children*, 15-18.

19. Rooke and Schnell. “Imperial Philanthropy,” 69; Parr, *Labouring Children*, 12.

20. Parr, *Labouring Children*, 12.

21. “Child saving frequently entailed the separation of children from family, friends, and community by means of institutionalization and placing out in order to ensure effective guardianship,” R. L. Schnell, “The Right Class of Boy: Youth Training Schemes and Assisted Emigration to Canada Under the Empire Settlement Act, 1922–39,” *History of Education* 24, no. 1 (March 1995): 73. See also Elaine Hadley, “Natives in a Strange Land: The Philanthropic

best met by the “surplus of destitute, homeless and unemployable children in Victorian Britain’s urban centres.”²²

As the century progressed, economic justification was supplemented by an evangelical conviction that removing pauper children from cities and sending them to colonial farms would benefit them not only economically, but also morally and spiritually. By the end of the century, a further “imperialist” argument was used: the need to settle uninhabited lands throughout the Empire with British emigrants. By this reasoning, pauper children were not just being rescued but were acting as the building blocks of the Empire.²³

Advocacy for formally organizing the emigration of destitute children from Britain began before 1830. In 1826, Robert Chambers, a London police magistrate, appeared before a British Parliament Select Committee convened to address the broader issue of emigration. As a key witness, Chambers declared that London had become overrun with beggar children and that the best solution was to send them to Canada. He stated that “children who [are] down and out, those twelve years of age and upward, should be sent to Canada, where they [are] badly needed, to be apprenticed to persons who. . . would be glad to receive them as workers on the land.”²⁴ Chambers’ testimony was supported by others who also believed in the great public benefit of emigrating homeless boys.²⁵

By the 1830s, several private agencies, notably the Society for the Suppression of Juvenile Vagrancy (renamed the Children’s Friend Society in 1834), were already providing training to children and sending them as apprentices to Canadian farms.²⁶ The mission of the Society was to rescue

Discourse of Juvenile Emigration in Mid-Nineteenth Century England,” *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 418-419.

22. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, xiii.

23. As Schnell notes, “the movement of children. . . was conducted in the context of imperial relations and of Canadian national aspirations,” “Right Class of Boy,” 73. See also Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, xv.

24. Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants*, 23.

25. *Ibid.*, 24.

26. Corbett, *Barnardo Children in Canada*, 23.

poor children from their negative urban environments and provide them with “useful, healthy, and profitable employment.”²⁷ Although the British Colonial Office opposed efforts to organise child emigration on an official basis, the Society sent 141 child apprentices to Upper and Lower Canada between 1833 and 1836. As debates about child emigration persisted in the British Parliament over the next decade, private agencies continued to train and equip poor children for the colonies.²⁸

Despite the advocacy, the early child emigration initiatives started by Lord Shaftesbury, the Children’s Friend Society, and the Reformatory and Industrial Schools did not receive sufficient public support and were short-lived.²⁹ However, their underlying philosophy motivated the large scale juvenile emigration movement of the 1860s. By this time, a growing number of organizations and private individuals managing children’s homes began to more seriously organise the emigration of children to the colonies, particularly to Canada. Eventually, more than fifty organisations were engaged in this work.³⁰ The most prominent included Maria Rye, Annie Macpherson, Dr. Thomas Barnardo, the Quarriers, the Methodist Children’s Home, Dr. Thomas Bowman Stephenson, James William Condell Fegan, and Ellen Smyly. Most of the organisations ran on a strong evangelical Protestant base and worked in the belief that removing pauper children from their environments would provide them with socio-economic and spiritual opportunities. Several Catholic organisations, working on the same general premise, also emigrated pauper children.³¹ Barnardo started small and initially worked through Macpherson and Stephenson. However, his organisation grew quickly and by the turn of the twentieth century he was sending more than 1,000 children to Canada each year, making his the largest of the

27. Neff, “The Children’s Friend Society,” 235.

28. Ibid, 234; Neff, “Pauper Apprenticeships,” 153.

29. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, xiii.

30. Harper and Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, 253.

31. Several works provide detailed accounts of the various organisations, their missions, and their work. See in particular Kohli, *The Golden Bridge* and Parker, *Uprooted*.

organisations.

Less than one-third of the children sent to Canada were actually orphans or completely destitute. Many arrived without their families' knowledge. Some children had sought philanthropic help themselves, while others were referred by third parties such as city missionaries, church ministers, or other charities.³² The majority were surrendered by parents who could not afford to look after them and, seeking to avoid the workhouse, hoped that philanthropic organisations might provide a temporary refuge. However, most of the organisations believed that child poverty was related to poor parenting and used this as a justification to permanently separate the children from their families.³³

In almost all cases, the child and his or her parent had little choice about emigration. Parents were pressured to sign the Canada Clause which allowed philanthropic organisations to send children to Canada. Barnardo, however, was not concerned about such a policy and openly used emigration to separate children from parents whom he deemed unfit.³⁴ Barnardo's records show that six percent of surrendered boys and eight percent of surrendered girls were emigrated without parental consent or knowledge.³⁵ Believing it immoral to leave children in pauperised conditions, in 1885 Barnardo wrote an article in which he not only questioned whether judicial law should override moral law, but declared that he had abducted forty-seven children and sent them to Canada. "I have myself frequent *bought* little children. . . I have also smuggled children quietly away, or I have abducted them almost by force in the face of angry opposition."³⁶ Another

32. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 137

33. Rooke and Schnell, "The King's Children," 391.

34. Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (Piscataway NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 23.

35. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 138–140.

36. Thomas Barnardo, "Is Philanthropic Abduction Ever Justifiable?" *Night and Day*, (London: November 1885), 149–50. Parr estimates from Barnardo's records that nine percent of boys and fifteen percent of girls emigrated to Canada were abducted by Barnardo (*Labouring Children*, 67).

philanthropist, Arthur Thomas, justified child emigration thus: “We are merely transferring them from one part of the Empire to another – from our own England where they have no prospects, to our own Canada, where their prospects are as bright as the flame that glows on the maple leaf in the fall.”³⁷

II. Canada’s Need for Cheap Labour

The push to remove pauper children from Britain could only have succeeded if there was a reciprocal desire for such children at the receiving end. Canadian support for the juvenile emigration movement was multi-faceted and multi-layered, based on a combination of labour needs, population needs, endorsement of evangelical philanthropy, and a belief that importing child labourers mirrored existing child apprenticeship practices.

Population Gaps and Labour Shortages

While Britain faced crowded cities full of destitute families, British North America—and later the Dominion of Canada—had a small population. Even as the population grew, however, outside of a few towns and cities it remained primarily scattered and rural. There was also a shortage of agricultural labour, particularly in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.³⁸

Canadian policy and practice encouraged the immigration of agriculturalists. However, the land grants system by which immigrants acquired farmland resulted in a proliferation of relatively small farms. Families were typically granted less than 200 acres.³⁹ Work on small farms was undertaken primarily by unpaid family members. In many cases, though, farming families could neither do all of the work themselves nor afford to hire

37. Rooke and Schnell, “The King’s Children,” 393.

38. Although the Province of Ontario came into existence only in 1867, the term Ontario is used here for clarity. The same reasoning is used for Quebec.

39. Parker, *Uprooted*, 129. Until 1911 the majority of Canadian farms outside the prairies were smaller than 100 acres.

permanent labour. This created a growing demand for a supply of cheap casual labour that could be hired only as needed.⁴⁰ Although the 1871 Census showed that eighty percent of the Canadian population lived in rural areas, this percentage decreased by 6 percent per census year as young adults moved away to seek education and non-farm employment or to acquire cheap land in the west.⁴¹ This in turn reduced the availability of family labour and further increased the demand for cheap wage labour. It was this labour gap that imported boy labourers would fill. As Parker notes, “They were replacement labourers, but replacement labourers who were more akin to unpaid family workers than to hired workers, even though many had indentures of apprenticeship.”⁴² Imported girls filled similar gaps as domestic workers, particularly in farm and rural homes.⁴³

Child Apprenticeship

The concept of apprenticing young pauper children was not new. By the late eighteenth century the primary formal and legal mechanism to support orphaned and abandoned children in Ontario was apprenticeship. This mechanism was recognized in the 1799 *Act to Provide for the Education and Support of Orphan Children* and in an 1846 Toronto municipal statute (*An Act to Authorize the Apprenticeship of Minors in Certain Cases and to Regulate the Duties of Masters and Apprentices*).⁴⁴ Pauper apprenticeship provided boys and girls with homes and training that they would otherwise have received from their parents or other relatives. Apprenticeships were governed by written

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid, 131–133.

42. Ibid, 134. Parker notes that between 1901 and 1911, imported children replaced farmers’ sons at a rate of about twenty-seven percent; if regarded as wage labourers, the 1911 Census shows that they “constituted 80 per cent of the growth in male wage labourers on Ontario farms during the same time.”

43. Parker also notes that rural areas were “considered to present less temptation and threaten less moral danger” than would cities (*Uprooted*, 137).

44. Neff, “Pauper Apprenticeship,” 144.

indenture documents signed by town wardens or the child's mother, and countersigned by two justices of the peace. The apprenticeship was to last until the child was an adult.⁴⁵ In 1827, a further provincial act extended apprenticing rights to guardians, including children's homes, while subsequent acts redefined various aspects of the apprenticeship mechanism. In 1893, the foster care system was established through the *Children's Protection Act*, and the *Adoption Act* of 1921 legalised adoption.⁴⁶

Ontario's rapidly expanding labour-intensive agrarian economy meant that pauper apprentices were a source of cheap and readily available labour. As a result, the organisations involved in apprenticing children found that they regularly had more applications than available children. These organisations worked alongside the homes that were later established as distribution centres for immigrant children.

Support for the Importation of Child Labourers

A number of high level government and industrial officials advocated for and provided both direct and indirect support to the philanthropic organisations engaged in supplying pauper children. In 1825, Peter Robinson, a member of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada who oversaw adult emigration schemes, advocated that destitute British children be sent to Canada as labourers.⁴⁷ With Robinson's support and involvement, the Children's Friend Society established branch societies in Canada. Through a letter printed in newspapers and sent directly to private individuals, the Society encouraged the establishment of committees to manage the Canadian end of the immigration and placement process.⁴⁸ By March 1835, such a committee was formed in Toronto and included a number of prominent citizens and politicians, including Robinson. The Lieutenant Governor and the mayor and council of

45. Ibid, 148.

46. Ibid, 144–45.

47. Corbett, *Barnardo Children in Canada*, 23.

48. Neff, "Children's Friend Society," 236.

the City of Toronto were committee patrons.⁴⁹ Similar organisations were subsequently formed in Huntington, Cobourg, and Kingston, as were auxiliary “Ladies Committees” which oversaw girl emigrants. Children sent by the Society between 1833 and 1836 were placed in Upper and Lower Canada and New Brunswick as domestic and farm workers with a range of hosts, including friends of the board members.⁵⁰ Boys were apprenticed until the age of twenty-one and girls to the age of eighteen.⁵¹

Small numbers of child labourers were sent through various organisations until the late 1860s, most often at the request of Canadian emigration agents or provincial governments in Upper and Lower Canada and the Maritimes. By the late 1860s, the juvenile immigration movement had increased significantly. The level of support in Canada for the movement also increased. Prominent officials and citizens from many towns assisted and encouraged the philanthropic organisations by providing homes for distribution centres. For example, the mayor and a justice of the peace in Niagara-on-the-Lake supported Rye’s purchase of an old court house and jail.⁵² Belleville’s Mayor and city council donated a home to Macpherson,⁵³ while the citizens of Galt gave her a farm and land and the family of Mr Justice Dunkin (Minister of Agriculture, 1869–1871) raised half the funds to purchase a home in Knowlton, Quebec.⁵⁴ Similarly, Sir George Cox, president of Midland Railway Company and later a Liberal Senator, donated the home “Hazel Brae” rent-free to Barnardo in Peterborough, Dr. Morley Punshon, a Methodist minister, bought a home in Hamilton for Stephenson, and William

49. Ibid.

50. Parr, “Home Children,” 2.

51. By the indenture terms, the master fed and clothed the child and paid three dollars per year to the Society and seven dollars per year to the local committee to hold for the child until he/she became of age. Neff, “The Children’s Friend Society,” 241.

52. Kohli, *Golden Bridge*, 72.

53. When the home burned down in 1872, City Council offered another house rent and tax free for 3 years; local citizens furnished the home and took in the children. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 66–67.

54. Ibid, 68–69. The Province of Quebec granted the remaining funds for the Knowlton purchase.

Gooderham, a wealthy Toronto citizen, gave Fegan a distributing home.⁵⁵ Sir Charles Tupper, then the Canadian High Commissioner in London, worked with the Minister of Agriculture and the Canadian Pacific Railway to help Barnardo acquire a 2,800 hectare industrial farm in Manitoba in 1887.⁵⁶

Canadian Immigration Policy

Despite the active involvement of government officials as individuals in the juvenile immigration movement, there were no official government policies related specifically to the importation of child labourers. Prior to Confederation, immigration to Canada was largely unrestricted, unregulated, and fragmented between both the public and private sectors and federal and provincial levels of government.⁵⁷ The *Constitution Act, 1867* specifically recognised agriculture and immigration as the responsibility of both the Dominion and provincial governments, while the first *Immigration Act* of 1869 deemed immigration to be a federal responsibility and placed it under the Department of Agriculture, where it remained until 1892. While the Act said nothing about the admissible classes of immigrants, a subsequent amendment in 1872 prohibited the entry of “criminals and other ‘vicious classes.’”⁵⁸ An 1879 order-in-council further excluded paupers and the destitute. However, since immigration was largely associated with agriculture, the importation of pauper child agricultural labourers was not discouraged. In fact, in 1875, Lord

55. Ibid, 104.

56. Dr. Barnardo wrote to Tupper asking the Canadian government to grant him good land near Winnipeg for a farm training school as well as railway transportation from all ports of entry to Winnipeg. LAC, RG17, Agriculture, Volume 411, Docket 44833, 26 June 1884. Tupper replied with a letter of introduction to the Minister of Agriculture and suggested that Barnardo contact the president of the CPR. Ibid, 11 July 1884. The land granted by the government was supplemented by a land grant from the Manitoba and Northwest Railway. Ibid, RG17, Agriculture, Volume 487, Docket 53503, 3 June 1886.

57. Reg Whitaker, *Canadian Immigration Policy since Confederation* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 3.

58. Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy 1540–2006* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2007), 49.

Dufferin, the Governor General, agreed on behalf of the Canadian government to Dr. Stephenson's request to financially support the children's pre-departure training. Thereafter the government provided a grant of \$2 per child brought into Canada.⁵⁹ This decision to financially support the juvenile immigration movement clearly expressed the government's approval, even if implicit, of the importation of child labourers.

The linking of immigration to agriculture continued, and was strengthened after Clifford Sifton was appointed Minister of the Interior in 1896.⁶⁰ To Sifton, significant agricultural immigration was the key to Canada's success.⁶¹ In 1901, he sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister stating "[our] desire is to promote the immigration of farmers and farm labourers. We have not been disposed to exclude foreigners of any nationality who seemed likely to become successful agriculturists. . . ."⁶² While Sifton is perhaps best remembered for his desire to attract "stalwart peasants in sheepskin coats,"⁶³ his focus on agriculturalists also implicitly included child agricultural labourers.

In spite of such implicit support, however, the government had no intention of being responsible for the children and left this duty to those who brought them to Canada, none of whom were bound by any rules or regulations. This lack of an explicit policy meant that the juvenile immigration movement developed and grew in an uncoordinated and haphazard way. The initiative for finding children, selecting new homes, and supervising them (or not) remained entirely in the hands of philanthropic organisations, each of

59. Stephenson's request for financial support was addressed to the Minister of Agriculture, and passed through the Prime Minister to the Governor General for response, (Kohli, *Golden Bridge*, 139–140). In addition to the \$2 per head support, the government also subsidised the transportation costs of many children. See for example, LAC, RG17, Agriculture, vol. 50, file 4708; *ibid.*, vol. 110, file 10751; *ibid.*, vol. 346, file 36829; *ibid.*, vol. 347, file 36927; *ibid.*, vol. 729, file 83960; *ibid.*, RG25, Immigration, ser. B-1-b, vol. 198, file I 6/90.

60. The Ministry of the Interior assumed responsibility for immigration in 1892.

61. Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 61.

62. Mabel F. Timlin, "Canada's Immigration Policy, 1896–1910," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue canadienne d'Economie et de Science politique* 26, No. 4 (November 1960): 518.

63. Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 91.

which set its own practices and guidelines.⁶⁴

In 1874, Andrew Doyle, Britain's Senior Local Government Board Inspector, prepared a report in which he strongly condemned the juvenile emigration movement, saying of it "to send them as emigrants can be regarded not as a way of improving their position, but simply of getting rid of them at a cheap rate."⁶⁵ He also criticised Canada's lax management of the children once they arrived. His report was rejected by the Canadian government, which subsequently set up a Commons Select Committee on Immigration and produced its own report to demonstrate that child labour importation was both successful and beneficial.⁶⁶ In 1884, the government issued an order-in-council giving provincial governments responsibility for supervising immigrant children.⁶⁷ The Ontario government followed this in 1897 with the *Act to Regulate the Immigration into Ontario of Certain Classes of Children*, by which the work of each agency was to be inspected quarterly and the children supervised until the age of 18. The Act also stipulated that all child emigration agencies were to maintain proper homes for the children and made it an offense to bring any child who was intellectually or physically defective or had been convicted of a crime. Similar acts followed in Manitoba, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. The Ontario government also appointed J.J. Kelso as Secretary of Neglected and Dependent Children. Kelso later produced a *Special Report on the Immigration of British Children* which was largely meant to calm fears about the supervisory system.⁶⁸ In 1899, the federal government created a new position to deal specifically with British immigrant children. George Bogue Smart was appointed the Inspector of British Immigrant Children and Receiving Homes

64. Ibid, 79.

65. Quoted in Parr, *Labouring Children*, 32.

66. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 87-88. Even so, the Local Government Boards (LGB) still urged the Canadian government to undertake annual inspections of the children. LAC, RG17, vol. 346, file 36882. In 1875, the LGB suspended the emigration of children based and after "a great deal of lobbying" by the Canadian government and assurances of annual government inspections, did it reinstate emigration in 1883. Rooke and Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy," 62.

67. LAC, RG17, vol. 421, file 45958.

68. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 154-155.

in 1900 and remained in this position until 1933. He standardized the inspection process and published annual reports on his findings, which largely focused on improvements in the way child labourers were being treated.⁶⁹

In spite of these actions, the Canadian government continued to see child emigration as the cheapest way to increase the number of new immigrants and subsequent reports made by immigration officials did nothing to disturb the notion that child labourers were an asset to the country. They also did relatively little to improve the children's living and working conditions. In the mid 1920s, more than sixty British Boards of Guardians sent identical resolutions to the Canadian High Commissioner demanding that the Canadian Government make it compulsory that government officials examine and pre-approve all homes receiving children and frequently monitor the homes. In 1924, the government passed an order-in-council that effectively made it illegal for unaccompanied children under the age of fourteen to enter the country. In 1925, it placed a three-year moratorium on the immigration of school-age children. The moratorium was made permanent in 1928. Although small numbers of underage immigrants continued in the 1930s, these policies largely brought an end to the importation of young child labourers.⁷⁰ The practice continued in various guises, though, until almost mid-century for those over the age of fourteen.⁷¹

69. See for example LAC, RG76, Immigration, ser. I-A-1, vol. 200, reel C-7354, file 83981 parts 1 and 2 for Bogue Smart's inspection reports for the years 1900–1933.

70. Rooke and Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy," 59.

71. Children were sent by the National Children's Home and Orphanage until at least 1934, while inspections of the children continued until at least 1937. LAC, RG76, ser. I-A-1 vol. 45, reel C-4708 and vol. 46, reel C-4709; *ibid.*, ser. I-A-1, vol. 66, reel C-4734; *ibid.*, volume 67, Reel C-4735; vol. 68, reel C-4736; vol. 69, reel C-4736, file 3115. Schnell provides a detailed look at the policy and practice of juvenile emigration under the Empire Settlement Act between 1922 and 1939. "Right Class of Boy." Harper provides a detailed look at juvenile emigrants in 1920s New Brunswick. Marjory Harper, "Cossar's Colonists: Juvenile Migration to New Brunswick in the 1920s," *Acadiensis* 28, No. 1 (Autumn 1998): 47–65.

III. Changing Public Perceptions

The reception given to the juvenile emigrants was mixed and changed dramatically over time. Canadians' need for cheap labour was such that they initially gave no thought to the origin or background of the children. Economic recessions, an increase in (adult) pauper immigration, and the creation of child protection acts caused the later Canadian response to range from "callous indifference to contempt and virulence to ambivalence."⁷²

A Positive Welcome. . .

Initial Canadian perceptions about the importation of child labourers were generally positive, as seen by the provision of distribution homes mentioned above and the ease with which the children were placed into homes that required their labour. The evangelical approaches used by the philanthropic organisations resonated with Canadians, and local newspapers bought into the rhetoric that saving destitute British children and giving them a new working life in Canada was a positive thing to do. For example, reporting on one of Maria Rye's first shipment of girls to Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1869, the local *Niagara Mail* reported that "[the] scheme of relieving destitute children is a most judicious movement. It enables children to be trained here and begin life under better auspices."⁷³ Likewise, in October 1875, *The Globe* reported that "There can be no just motive, then, for retaining [the children] in their pauper condition, or [not] letting them have the chance which pauper apprenticeship affords. Almost any change would be for the better. . ."⁷⁴ *The Peterborough Examiner* quoted the local MP stating that although there were some objections to the pauper children, "[the] feeling was not general, for there was room in the broad Dominion for every soul likely to become a good and

72 Rooke and Schnell, "The King's Children," 388.

73 *Niagara Mail*, 17 November 1869.

74. "Juvenile Immigration," *Daily Globe*, 2 October 1875, 4.

industrious citizen.”⁷⁵ Similar stories appeared in other newspapers and almost all generally reflected the attitude that such children ought to be grateful to be in Canada.

. . . Followed by Criticism

In the 1830s, initial criticism focused on the fact that almost all of the children sent by the Society had “been parcelled like so many serfs among our upstart *nobility*, to learn to wait at table, to clean boots and shoes, knives and forks, and perform all the menial offices of scullions.”⁷⁶ There was also consternation that the children had been placed almost exclusively in the service of the members of the Toronto Committee.⁷⁷

By the late nineteenth century, there was an increasingly negative tone to news stories written about the child labourers. In spite of a general rejection of Doyle’s 1874 report, the report nevertheless fostered a major negative shift in perceptions about the juvenile emigration movement. At the same time, an increase in poor immigrants led Canadians to resent the idea that their country was used as a dumping ground for what they considered to be Britain’s underclass.⁷⁸ However, it was only after a series of scandals and tragedies involving the children—including criminal charges, suicides, and the apparent murder of one boy—that opposition to the movement became widespread.⁷⁹ There was a growing belief—largely instigated and fostered by the media—that the unregulated importation of children of suspect upbringing was not in

75. “An Hour with Dr. Barnardo,” *The Peterborough Examiner*, 21 August 1884.

76. *Correspondent and Advocate*, 25 June 1835.

77. Letter to the Editor, *Correspondent and Advocate*, 2 July 1835. Neff notes that some of this consternation may have been due to a misinterpretation of the Society’s objectives and to objections about the people with whom the children were placed. Neff, “Children’s Friend Society,” 243.

78. *Ibid.*, 75; Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 118.

79. Thompson notes that at least one child was sold at an auction. Allan Thompson, “Time to Accept Canada’s Role with Home Children,” *Toronto Star*, 28 August 2010, L7. See also LAC, RG18, RCMP, ser. B-1, vols. 1284, 1400, and 1427, which address various criminal activities attributed to “Barnardo Boys.”

Canada's best interests. There was also suspicion that philanthropists profited from the movement. The *Toronto News* commented

We have enough orphan and abandoned children in our own streets to look after. The impudence of a large class of pseudo-philanthropists who make a trade of shipping outcast children from England to Canada. . . was well exemplified in the remarks of one. . . who had the cheek to contend that more immigration was desirable.⁸⁰

Six months later, *The Globe* echoed the sentiments, stating that "waifs and inmates of reformatories, refuges, and lodging houses. . . are not the classes with which to build up a strong nationality."⁸¹

As the movement grew, so too did the number of reports commenting on crimes committed by some of the children. In August 1890, *The Globe* reported on a special session convened by the Prison Commission to investigate the work of Dr. Barnardo.⁸² While the paper provided a detailed summary of Barnardo's explanation of the purpose and benefits of his work, it ended the article by echoing the comments of a commissioner, who suggested that the unskilled labour undertaken by the child workers "put skilled labor out of work, and condemned the whole system, on the ground that there were boys enough in Ontario without importing them from England."⁸³ *The Star* reported that "the children sent to Canada from England are street waifs and workhouse paupers, and. . . the professional philanthropists engaged in the work are largely prompted by mercenary and not charitable motives."⁸⁴ In his popular analysis of Canadian society, *Strangers within our Gates*, James S Woodsworth commented that although British immigrants were desirable, the

80. *Toronto News*, 6 May 1884.

81. *The Globe*, 10 September 1884.

82. "The Prison Commission," *The Globe*, 5 August 1890, 5.

83. *Ibid.*

84. "Child Emigration to Canada," *The Star*, 18 April 1891.

imported children “from such surroundings with inherited tendencies to evil are a very doubtful acquisition to Canada. . . . we would not refuse to help the needy. But we must express the fear that any large immigration of this class must lead to the degeneration of our Canadian people.”⁸⁵

The prejudices promulgated by the media were further vocalised by trade unions. *The Globe* reported on the 1885 annual meeting of the Trades and Labour Council, which declared its

most earnest protest against the allowance of the movement. The very large numbers of strong, healthy children. . . in [Canada’s] orphan asylums, children’s homes, etc., are living evidence. . . that if ‘good homes’ are to be found for orphan children in this country, there are unfortunately many more of them. . . than can be provided for by the demand. . . [we predict] the Reformatory as the most likely ‘home’ for a large number of these [imported] children.⁸⁶

The Council then denounced the government’s encouragement of poor immigrants, both adults and children, who would compete against Canadians for jobs.⁸⁷ The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada later stated that Canada had become “a dumping ground for the refuse of the highways, byways and vice haunts of the great cities – waifs, strays, and the children of vicious and criminal tendencies, antecedents, and environments.”⁸⁸ The

85. James S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates: Or, Coming Canadians* (Toronto: F. C. Stephenson, 1909), 61.

86. “Vigorous Protest against Importation of Pauper Children,” *The Globe*, 19 January, 1885, 3.

87. “Trades and Labour Council: Report of the Legislative Committee,” *The Globe*, 23 June, 1885, 2.

88. D. J. O’Donoghue, Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, 1895, quoted in Rooke and Schnell, “The King’s Children,” 387. Similar reports were published by other labour papers and the Ontario Department of Agriculture. Even the Social Service Council of Canada questioned “the eugenic effects of bringing in thousands of boys and girls, a considerable portion of which have sprung from stock, which, whatever else may be said of it, was no able to hold its own in the stern competition of the motherland.” Rooke and Schnell provide a detailed account of these articles in “The King’s Children.”

groups' objections were based largely on a mistaken belief that child labour would drive down wages and that after their farm indentures, the children would move to cities and compete for urban jobs. However, farm families taking in child labourers generally could not afford adult labour and the unskilled children posed little threat to skilled labourers.⁸⁹

Although some newspapers attempted to provide a balanced view of the juvenile immigration movement, the children faced ongoing ostracism and criticism.⁹⁰ Government ministers received letters complaining about them.⁹¹ By the 1920s, the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, under the leadership of Charlotte Whitton, was collecting and publicising sensationalistic statistics from asylums, jails, health clinics, and reformatories to demonstrate that the child emigrants

failed the test of desirable immigrants on every score. As the dregs of British society, their fares underwritten by charity and government subsidy, their placement in rural Canada a payment for their poverty and dependence, and without a commitment to the land, these children and youths had no redeeming qualities.⁹²

That the Canadian Council on Child Welfare played such a leading role in criticizing the juvenile immigration movement seems at first glance to be based on an increasing acceptance of the concept and importance of childhood. The decades prior to the 1920s had seen the emergence of child protection laws and child welfare practices in Canada, and certainly these laws and practices were instrumental in finally bringing an end to the movement.

89. Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 135

90. See, for example, "The Barnardo Boys: Interesting Conversation with the Canadian Agent," *The Globe*, 27 October 1894, 4.

91. For example, see LAC, RG76, Immigration, ser. I-A-1, vol. 311, reel C-7861.

92. Harper, "Cossar's Colonists," 49.

However, this is insufficient to explain the derogatory attacks, as they were targeted not at the juvenile immigration movement itself, but at the poor immigrant children directly.⁹³ Instead of embracing the emigrated children within the broader confines of childhood, the campaign instead embraced eugenics to claim that the children were morally, socially, and physically defective. Criticism of the juvenile immigration movement in fact “united. . . disparate groups as trade unions, women’s organizations, sheriffs, country doctors, and exponents of Canadian child-saving.”⁹⁴ In the end, the criticism was so ubiquitous that many imported children chose not to mention their history as adults.

IV. Life Experiences

It is estimated that approximately one-third of the children brought into Canada as labourers were well-received and humanely treated and some were adopted. The majority, however, “were exploited, neglected, defrauded, or mistreated.”⁹⁵ For example, the suicides of three juvenile emigrants in the 1920s were highly publicised in the newspapers, not only as examples of the inadequate placement and supervisory policies but as examples of child immigrants being unprepared for life in Canada.⁹⁶ The death of one child in 1895—and his mistress subsequent acquittal on manslaughter charges—was used by the press to highlight the deficiencies of the children being imported.⁹⁷

In *The Home Children*, Phyllis Harrison published stories from more than one hundred children imported between 1871 and 1930.⁹⁸ To those

93. Rooke and Schnell, “Imperial Philanthropy,” 69.

94. *Ibid.*, 58.

95. Rooke and Schnell, “The King’s Children,” 388-89.

96. *Ibid.*, 407.

97. For example, *The Globe* reported “It is expected that the defence will take the ground that young Green was diseased and unhealthy, and evidence will also be offered showing the previous good character of Miss Findlay.” “The Barnardo Boy Green,” *The Globe*, 18 November 1895, 3.

98. Harrison, *The Home Children* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1979).

memoires can be added many more, including the following that has been extracted from the official and personal papers of one imported child labourer:

Winifred was not yet 6 years old when she was admitted to the Barnardo home in Essex in 1903 with her 3 year old brother Frank. Her two half-brothers had been admitted seven months earlier. Her father had died from pneumonia the previous year. Her mother, who worked as a charwoman, was unable to support her five children. She had tried to get outdoor relief, but because her youngest children were illegitimate, had been refused. The children arrived at Barnardo's by horse-drawn wagon, carrying all of their belongings in a single small bag. Winifred's intake report noted that "*the children have been much neglected and practically lived in the streets. During the past six months, the mother has had the greatest difficulty procuring food. . . and the mother and her children appeared insufficiently clothed and fed. . . Their furniture has been sold by degrees. . .*" Although the Barnardo home offered to take Winifred and her brother in temporarily, she was immediately placed in a Girls Village Home, and then transferred to foster parents where she remained for three years. In July 1907 she was sent to Canada. Within a week of her arrival, she was placed on a farm in Port Perry, Ontario. Over the next eight years she was moved to seven different homes, most often at the request of the homeowners because she was considered to be rude, naughty, too young, too old, not tidy enough, or not smart enough. In one home she was sexually assaulted, in another she was worked like a slave, in yet another she was

deemed not worthy of the amount that the homeowners paid to keep her, so they sent her away. She was allowed to go to school only until the third grade. Regular monitoring reports commented on her clothing, cleanliness, appearance, and attitude, but little about the conditions under which she lived or worked. The homeowners' thoughts about her suitability and habits are noted, but nothing is said about Winifred's feelings or how she was being treated. Although she was able to reconnect with her three brothers – one in Canada, one in South Africa, and a third in Australia – she never again saw her mother or the baby who had stayed behind in England. By the time she turned nineteen, Winifred had been working for wages in low-paying jobs for two years, was attending business college, and was planning to be married – sight unseen – to another former Barnardo child. Doing so was something that she rued for the rest of her life.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Between the 1830s and 1940s, more than 100,000 children were imported into Canada through the juvenile immigration movement and apprenticed or indentured shortly after their arrival. They were valued more for their labour than for their existence as children.¹⁰⁰ Had they stayed in Britain, most were too young to leave school under that country's compulsory schooling laws.¹⁰¹

Even for those children who were placed in good and loving homes, the general prejudice that prevailed against the “Home Children”—an epithet that had pejorative connotations—did little to make them feel welcome or part of Canadian society. As adults, the majority of these children remained and became settled in Canada. However, the work that philanthropic

99. David W. Anderson, “Winifred Frost’s Story,” (Painted Post, NY: unpublished manuscript); Barnardo, file ACS/KF/RECNO (London: unpublished records).

100. Rooke and Schnell, “The King’s Children,” 397.

101. Parr, *Labouring Children*, 11.

organisations and individuals did, removing British slum children and sending them to rural Canada for their own good, was controversial at the time and remained so until it ended.¹⁰²

It is estimated that twelve percent of people living in Canada today are descendants of these imported child labourers. On November 16, 2009, Canadian Immigration Minister Jason Kenney issued a statement that Canada would not apologize to child migrants, stating

[there's] no need for Canada to apologize for abuse and exploitation suffered by thousands of poor children shipped here from Britain starting in the 19th century . . . the issue has not been on the radar screen here. . . we are taking measures to recognize that sad period, but there is, I think, limited public interest in official government apologies for everything that's ever been unfortunate or [a] tragic event in our history.¹⁰³

Less than one month after Kenney's statement, Member of Parliament Phil McColeman (Brant, Ontario) introduced a private member's bill in the House of Commons encouraging the proclamation of 2010 as year of the British Home Child. The bill was passed and in September 2010, Canada Post issued a stamp to commemorate the significance of the declaration. That this previously ignored chapter in Canada's immigration history has now been recognised is perhaps little consolation to those who have not survived to see it. For their descendants, however, understanding the contributions made by these children, in mind, body, and spirit to the growth of Canada—both willingly and unwillingly—is important for defining who we are as individuals and as a country.

102. Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 72.

103. "Canadians Not Interested in 'Home Children' Apology: Minister," *The Star*, 16 November 2009, 3.

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