

RESEARCH ON MISS RYE'S BRITISH HOME CHILDREN (BHC)

v.2

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Re: <http://www.nhsm.ca/media/MSRBHC-Jun2020-v.2.pdf>

Compiler's Notes (2020):

In 1867 Maria S. Rye started communicating with Canadian Government about the immigration of young poor women and girls to Canada from the gutters of urban centres and workhouses in Britain. For a decade she had been a leading advocate for improved employment opportunities for young women in Britain, and she was an early suffragette. In 1868, after testing the distant waters of Australia and New Zealand, she settled on the colony of Canada because it was much closer. So, in 1868 she brought young women in their 20s to be domestics in Canada. Although this was partially successful, she realized that greater pressure on society and the British Government was the huge unresolved issue of young and teenage destitute, deserted and orphaned girls who were unending generations of life givers by unscrupulous means. In 1869, Rye acquired the former courthouse & gaol in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) for a modest sum and converted it into 'Our Western Home'; and the first girls arrived there during that year. This was the first large mass transport of children to Canada and Rye was always considered by the Canadian Government as the leader in the Children Immigration field. With advertising and unsolicited requests for young domestics and farm workers, Rye's program was hugely successful, and the demand accelerated at an extraordinary rate. So much so that Annie Macpherson and many others quickly followed her example as the years of the 19th century passed by. Rye also acquired Avenue House in Peckham, Southwark, South London to channel her British homed children through to the administration at Our Western Home.

In 1874 the Doyle Report slammed Rye and Macpherson for their practices of child immigration without proper Government oversight and inadequate follow-up of those children placed in North America. Doyle, a Catholic, was especially damning of Rye, who was an evangelical Anglican. When one reviews the paperwork currently available for the children in the charge of Rye and Macpherson, the latter did a somewhat better job of her accounting reports while Rye felt that the children were in respectable hands. As we all know, teenagers will be rebellious teenagers, and some children, even in those days of more respect, religious instruction and controls, were bound to be dissatisfied with their new environment. The effect of the Doyle Report was that, in 1877 when child immigration to Canada restarted, Rye made sure that all her reports offered only children's initials and ages, and not their full names. This also applied to the person(s) who acted as the placement for each child. So, in the 21st century, a useful listing of Rye children is only possible by combining the ship's manifest information with Rye's reports.

A little over twenty years ago Gail Collins in St. Catharines in Ontario and Chris Sanham in Henfield, West Sussex, England decided to try and find all of the records available that applied to Maria Rye and her children to make up a database, with Gail doing the period 1869 to 1879 and Chris doing 1880 to 1896. All went well until Chris became extremely frustrated with his dealings with Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and eventually withheld his portion of the database and refused to correspond with Gail, or anyone else as far as I know, for the last 8 years or so. Gail submitted her contribution to a Rye database to LAC several years ago and it has been included in the main Home Children database at LAC.

In parallel with the work of Gail Collins and Chris Sandham, Richard and Monica Taylor of the Niagara Historical Society collected most of the papers they could find on Maria S. Rye's children by extensive research in Canada and abroad. Starting more than a decade ago, they became exhausted from this considerable effort and their health failed. However, they left a treasure trove of uncompiled papers in the Museum's archives. It was these papers that were the starting point to this project.

Recognizing that all sources of Rye's children information were incomplete and lacking the compilation required for simple access to a research tool for descendants of Rye BHCs – including the LAC (RG17 file, etc.), Ontario Archives, BIFHSGO, University of Liverpool, Collins, Sandham and Taylor – the author took a totally systematic approach to the compilation of the Rye BHCs. The outcome of this compilation is a .pdf file on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum website, <http://www.nhsm.ca/>, under Collection & Research, Links and Our Western Home – Rye Home.

The Scope of the project was to create a SINGLE Excel spreadsheet with ALL known BHCs in chronological order in the charge of Maria S. Rye from 1868 to 1896, and in the charge of the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society from 1896 to 1914 that were administered by the Our Western Home staff in NOTL. This was a statistical, or genealogical, project - and not a history project. At the conclusion of this, in understanding Rye and CofE NOTL BHCs better, we now know specifically and in one document what BHC information is still missing.

In some cases, these BHCs did not set foot in NOTL but were sent directly to their placements in Eastern Canada. As far as is known, all those Rye BHCs that were placed in the United States actually came through Our Western Home in NOTL. At the outbreak of World War One the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society vacated Our Western Home in 1915 and the building was turned over to Niagara Camp for the housing of Polish Army officers until 1919. The building was demolished in 1923.

With few unknown exceptions, the following complete documents are in the author's electronic backup document files, having been extracted and included in the new Rye BHC database:

- (i) **Ship Manifests** for all Rye BHCs from 1868 to 1914. Prior to 1880 several shiploads of Rye BHCs to Halifax, NS and St. John, NB are largely unaccounted for. Unlike Quebec City, the Maritime ports did not retain their ships' records until 1881. It is

believed that we have yet to account for about 200 Rye BHCs. It should be noted that all early BHC shiploads to Canada were accompanied by Rye herself. Later Mrs. Hannah Soffi was the matron in charge for ship transportation for more than 25 Atlantic crossings. There were usually 2 voyages per year with about 100 BHCs.

- (ii) Miss **Rye's Annual Reports**.
- (iii) **Department of Agriculture** correspondence and reports with regard to BHCs (some now missing).
- (iv) **Department of Agriculture** correspondence with regard to Miss Rye.
- (v) Available **Rye BHC Letters**.
- (vi) **Government oversight records** (e.g., field reports) with regard to Rye BHCs.
- (vii) Appropriate **Census records in NOTL and England**.
- (viii) **Boards of Guardian** and **Charity Commission reports**.
- (ix) **LAC's RG17 file**.
- (x) The **Collins Collection** at LAC, the **Kohli Collection** at University of Waterloo, and the **Taylor Collection** at the NOTL Museum.
- (xi) The **BIFHSGO file**, administered by Lynda Gibson.
- (xii) Special Collections & Archives, **University of Liverpool Library**, England.
- (xiii) **Heritage Canadiana** Collection of BHC documents.
- (xiv) Various secondary website documents, including Ancestry, myHeritage, etc.

See: <http://www.nhsm.ca/media/MSRBHC-Jun2020-v.2.pdf>

So, until the Niagara Historical Society published this new comprehensive Rye database on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum website in late 2018, none of the material on any other website was close to complete and certainly not useful as a single comprehensive research tool for descendant family members. There have been many contributors to this project; the author has simply been the compiler of all their available data for the benefit of future researchers. Our NOTL Museum holds a collection of Rye BHC artifacts and materials.

As a postscript to the database project, the author is now slowly building a database of MARRIED Rye BHCs and their families and collecting their photographs and images. This includes communication with current descendants and relations. To this end, the author continues to seek family involvement in discovering more about (i) the descendants of Rye and CofE BHCs who were administered through Our Western Home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and (ii) any other sources not described above.

Your Own Research:

Many people, when contacted these days, are unaware of their relationship to a British Home Child (BHC). Many BHCs are therefore being rediscovered in this age of the Internet, genealogical services and DNA testing. Photographs of BHCs are often hard to find, if they exist at all. Correspondence is even harder to find, because the literacy of these people – especially

in their early years - was generally modest. It is hard for us to recognize that all these BHCs were from very poor homes, and very few BHCs had more than 3 years of formal education.

If you are interested in conducting research on any BHC who passed through NOTL – or any other BHC through another agency such as Dr. Barnardo's, Fegan Homes, Quarrier's, Marchmont Homes, Middlemore, Catholic Charities, Church of England Waifs & Strays in Quebec, etc. – the two most comprehensive sites are Library & Archives Canada (mostly microfilm) and Ancestry (subscription service). There are numerous other Internet sites which describe more or less information on BHCs in Canada. Almost all the detailed information about BHCs is in the reports prepared by the Home they passed through. Note that Our Western Home in NOTL placed, with few exceptions, only girls.

Of course, your best resource for information on a relative who was a BHC is often your own family – maybe not you, but perhaps one of your siblings or cousins. If you are really starting from scratch and have no possibility of assistance from your family, then you may have to seek assistance from a knowledgeable and experienced researcher.

Outsourcing Your Research

The compiler of the database cited above, and on the Niagara-on-the-Lake website is:

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If you make contact with this person, please confirm that you found his information through the NOTL Museum. The Museum makes a research request charge of \$25/hour. Prices for longer studies can be negotiated.

Records are only as good as their original and continuing existence and their availability online. This researcher does not take on projects that require travel. However, he may make recommendations for further study by the family, if such opportunities exist to his knowledge. He has been researching family histories for over 50 years and conducts a once-monthly Workshop for the general public in NOTL. A typical project might be as follows:

Scope of Possible Work:

- (i) Family tree – as much as is readily available from Ancestry database.
This will not include those people living after 1921, unless their births were before 1911.
Est. up to 8 hours.
- (ii) Supporting documents, such as census, birth, baptism, marriage, death and burial records; British and Canadian military and civil records; as many as are readily available to confirm dates/places in the family tree.
Est. up to 2 hours.
- (iii) Transatlantic travel document(s) confirming vessel, dates, places.

- (iv) Photographs, if readily available. The images may be of person(s) or grave markers.

Not included in this scope:

- (i) Any data not included in the Rye BHC database on Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum website.
- (ii) Correspondence, unless it appears in Miss Rye's records.
- (iii) General Internet references to Rye BHC children.

Notes:

- (i) The scope is estimated for a single Rye BHC. For sisters, the additional estimated time will be up to 3 hours per sister.
- (ii) Information will be delivered electronically only as a set of .pdf and/or .gif files.
- (iii) All work will be done on a best-efforts basis only. If the material sought is not readily available, the estimated time used will be commensurate with the material available. It is reasonable to expect errors and omissions from the work delivered.