



Remembering our British Home Children who served

British Home Children Advocacy & Research Association

November 2015 Newsletter *By Lori Oschefski & Andrew Simpson*

William Francis Conabree

By his Great Grandson Gerry Lauzon

William was born in Liverpool to a Catholic family in 1890. He was sent over in 1904 through the auspices of the Catholic Emigration Society. He was a horn player and stretcher bearer for the 49th Loyal Edmonton Regiment. He lived through gas attacks and was made a prisoner of war near the end. One of the people with whom he was a POW, was Con Smythe, the famed owner of the Toronto Maple Leafs. William lived his life in the region of Shawinigan after the war.

After the death of his wife, also a BHC, this hand written letter was found by his family. It is a fascinating look at the horrifying treatment he received from his Canadian host family. He ran away from this situation, and later enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and fought in WWI. The letter is transcribed as written, without corrections.

I came out to this country from England in July 1904. I was 14 years old at the time, being of the poor class, I came with the Catholic Emigration Society; their headquarters at the time on St. Thomas street in Montreal. I was sent to work on a farm as a hired man at a rate of \$1.00 per month, this being sent to the society. I was tagged for a place in Ontario, Bulger by name. If I ever struck it bad in my life, it was there. One could not imagine how people could ill treat another person to such extent.

Well, the boy who I replaced was sent back immediately after my arrival, a walking skeleton. Knowing as I do now, I wonder if he made the trip alive, poor fellow. I knew him very well; he was in the same school as myself in England. If he did make it alive, he must have died a short while afterward, as he was too far gone to last very long.

How is it that they did not immediately call me back once they saw this boy's condition? I remained there about a year unwillingly of course and if decent people only knew what I went through they would be shocked, but there I was without a soul

to turn to for help, no writing paper, no money even to buy a stamp. I was forbidden to go outside the front gate by this farmer, for if I did he said he would horse whip me to death, and meant it. For I often had the home strap lashings, my body was marked and my arms and wrists had blisters marked by this home strap. And that was done by the woman herself, he himself used the whip. This home strap the woman had it hung up in the summer kitchen, as it was handy for her to use it on me, for no reason at all. I can swear to this. Her only invented reason at all: I was a dirty Englishman.

I worked from sunset and most of the time in the fields and at night after a hard days work outdoor she would make me wash the dishes having piled them up so there would be plenty. They would go to bed and she would often tell me to wash the floors, bake the bread in the oven, and she would say "pity help you if you let it burn". I had no bed; I slept on an old sofa in the kitchen with the dog. I had no clothes except the old working clothes that the poor sick boy left. The good clothes I came out with were taken away from me, in fact everything I owned was not much but it was taken away. All letters I was keeping were destroyed, my clothes were distributed amongst their own boys, they had three, two about my age.

**"Believe me
my friends, it's
the truth"**

After I was there three or four months, a visitor called to see me. He called me outside and asked me how I was getting on. I explained to him that I would like to be taken away from there. He could see for himself the condition I was in. I could hardly talk as the people were in hearsay of what I said.

Well after he went I had hope of being taken away, but no. It happened that this visitor's father was a neighbour of this farmer's brother about five miles away. That I did not know at the time, in fact I was not allowed to know anybody. The neighbours were very far away.

The only time I saw the neighbours was when they had a "bee". I was the one sent to work at the bee, and I got instructions before going to work at the bee that I was not to say a word to anyone, for they would hear of it and pity help me if I spoke. They seldom cut my hair. It use to lay on my shoulders like a girl, and I was swarmed in lice. I did not know what clean clothes was, always the

Now 2 years
old, our
Newsletter
reaches over
1,750
subscribed
readers each
month!

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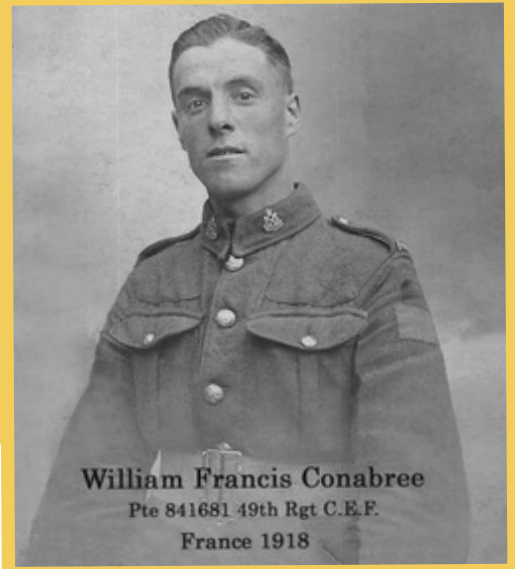




Prisoners of War

Findmypast.com

Findmypast.com has released a unique collection covering the service records of millions of men and women taken captive in times of war. Published in three phases in association with the National Archives, their latest set includes one million people who were prisoners during World War II.



same old clothes. I got my both feet froze right in their yard, there was no weather cold enough but that they would make me work outside. The socks I was wearing were full of holes; they were discarded by the farmer too far gone for repairs. They were given to me to wear is reason my both feet froze. They froze "white" all over. Here's the treatment they made me take for them.

They made me put my feet in ice cold "well" water until my feet got all coated with ice and after that they swole up so big I had to go to work with rags wrapped around my feet. No question of trying to put the buckskin moccasins on, my feet split open in several places and did not heal for months afterward, all of my toenails came off. When my feet got a little better I began to wear the moccasins again. I was sent to a wood sawing "bee" for some neighbour away down the road. As usual the warning that I should not say a word. It happened as we were finishing up that night, it was a way back in the woods, a sleigh drove up and asked for me. It was another visitor to see me, not the same as previous. He bide me to jump in the sleigh with him, and immediately on the way back he told me who he was, and starting questioning me about the treatment I was getting. I told him how I was treated, my feet were still very sore. He had me take off the old buckskin moccasins after my arrival at the farmer, and what he didn't tell them. He even said he was ashamed of his own nationality after they told him of their own nationality.

I expected to be taken away immediately, but no, he said. He had to make his report first. The next day the farmer and his wife had me write a letter to contradict anything this fellow would say. So there I was again still no hopes. The next Spring, a boy working for his brother came over to give us a hand with the stoning and it was through him that I got an address to go to if I decided to run away. I bide my time to do so, seeing it was my ownly salvation and only chance of getting free from this ill treatment. So one day in the spring or early summer, the sewing of crop was through. He was going to Egansville to the races. Before going he had a couple of sandwich of bread and butter only made up for me, and took me back in the woods to cut wood alone. I carried the axe, saw, etc., and small lunch with me. He showed me what he wanted me to do, and then left me alone. I started cutting up the wood and I was getting thirsty, nothing to drink. I was told to come home only when the sun was going down and to bring home the cows for milking. The flies were eating me alive and nothing to quench my thirst. I decided now's your chance, so I walked through the bush to the road and started away. Every time

I saw a horse and rig coming, I hid laying down flat inside the fence. That is the way I got away.

I walked five miles to Mr. B.'s place and I stayed there for a week until the association ordered my return. I went to another farmer after that, of the same nationality. It was a little better, the farmer's wife hated the English. So you see it was pretty hard going when your nationality is hated where you have to stay. The treatment was much better than the previous place. The farmer had a bad temper. After being there about a year, he was in bad humour one day and knocked me down. I got up and told him it was too bad that I was not a bit older. I would try hard to defend myself. He then gave me an awful punch in the face and knocked me down. And the the brave fellow put the boots to me. I was black and blue from the armpits to the knee on the right side. I had a hard time to walk about, so I kept away from the house, slept in the stable that night and walked 15 miles to Ottawa the next day. What a sight I was in my old farm clothes on the streetcar. A lady gave me 5 cents to pay my car fair in Ottawa.

I then went to work for a French Canadian farmer and stayed there three years. He was an elderly man. I got on fairly well there, a little close on the table, but seeing what I went through, I easily overlooked that.

I then got a job in Montreal with the firm of Frothingham and Workman wholesale hardware. I stayed with them for seven years working my way up from labourer in the yard to express and letter order department, of which I was in charge. I left there to enlist in the Canadian Army for overseas C.E.F. [Canadian Expeditionary Force] March 1916. When I was in the trenches in 1917, my wife in Montreal had the misfortune of having my home taken away from her by a landlord for a months rent of \$18.00 which my wife said was promised her for the cleaning of the flat. It was her first month in that flat and it was the understanding, but she did not have it in writing. So she was put out on the street with her two children, one 4 years old and the other 18 months. When I came back, we started up again, got things together, got myself a job.

I started travelling for a firm and moved to Shawinigan Falls. I was doing fairly well by now, but I got roped in on an accident deal in 1920. This was certainly a rotten deal. The party who did this was not right, his wife was against this deal. I was mislead all along and didn't think it possible such a rotten deal could be let through. I found out so and believe me it has shaken my

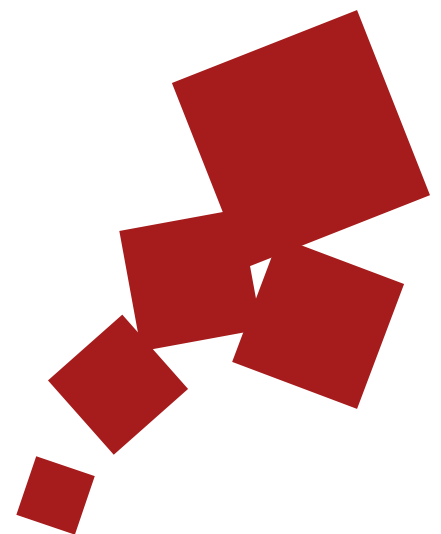
faith in certain people, for which I can never forget until the day I die. I had so much faith in righteousness that I did not think such a thing possible. Why even the clergy remarked about it as being not just. It is really too bad such things are allowed. It does not do them any good. They all lose out in the end. But it hurts the poor harding working law abiding citizen who works honestly to earn a living and keep his family going. I feel so peeved when I think about that nasty deal, and the ones who were responsible for it. It is understandable that the atomic bomb is now here.

Yours Truthfully,

W.F. Conabree Ex. Pte 841681 C.E.F.

P.S. When I went back to England with the C.E.F., I met some of my relatives. I did not tell them of my ill treatment on the farm, as I did not want them to feel bad about it. I just kept it to myself. My wife was a slave too, came to this country with the same organization at 8 years of age [1893]. She was put on a farm as a working hand. They never sent her to school. She did not know to read and write. She tells me she always worked in the field.

The End



How we remember their Service

A new home for our BHC First World War Casualty List

When the First World War broke out the British Home Children answered our country's call. By April 2nd 1917, over seven thousand Home Boys had enlisted. Based on our rigorous research, the BHCARA estimates approximately ten thousand British Home Children in total enlisted. Comparing how many children were sent to Canada to how many of those Home Children were eligible to enlist, this number suggests that almost all Home Boys who could enlist did!

In 2013, the British Home Children Advocacy & Research Association began the project of identifying all the British Home Children who died in World War One. Prior to BHCARA's involvement, a list was compiled by the outstanding efforts of Perry Snow. Recognizing the importance of this work, Marjorie P. Kohli and John Sayers quickly stepped up and contributed their information to the list. John Sayers, located in Ottawa, visited Library and Archives Canada on our behalf. He was able to obtain the listings from many of the Home Child organization sent to the Government during the war. These listings detailed the boys from each organization who were serving and those who had perished.

BHCARA's Head Researcher Jennifer Layne, along with Marjorie Kohli, Dona Crawford, Carol Black, Dawn Heuston and Lori Oschefski researched each boy carefully and their information was catalogued. Thousands of records were combed through in efforts to extract our British Home Children casualties.

Library and Archives Canada are thrilled to be publishing our First World War Casualty list. This index will be

appearing on the LAC web site in the upcoming months.

Student Remembrance Event

This year the BHCARA will once again be taking part in the Student Remembrance event taking place at the Orillia Public Library, Orillia, Ontario. Hundreds of local students are invited to visit the library on November 9 and 10th to learn about our country's participation in the wars. We are thrilled to once again be participating in this two day event. Our children will taking this story forward for us.

National Remembrance Day Ceremony, Ottawa November 11, 2015.

The Wreath Bearer this year will be British Home Child descendant Ian MacLeod, Ian's grandmother was Sarah Taylor. Sarah came to Canada with her sister Jenny (sharing the same little trunk) from Dundee, Scotland.

Ian is a retired OPP officer, retiring in 1998. As an OPP Officer he was assigned to various positions starting with Traffic Patrol, Community Service Corporal & Spokesman for the OPP with regard to radio and television in B Division, Marine Patrol on the St. Lawrence River, Criminal Investigator and Motorcycle Rider. He participated in several other special events such as two Royal Visits as greeter & escort, security for the Olympics in Kingston, security & escort for the Canada Youth Games in Thunder Bay and security for Pope John Paul II in 1984 to name a few.

The participation in this event is an incentive of the Ontario East British Home Child Family on behalf of all British Home Children, their descendants and all BHC groups.

On November 11, 2015, BHCARA Member Sandy Stewart will lay a memorial wreath on behalf of the Quebec chapter of our organization. The wreath will be placed during the service at Ile du Grand Calumet, Pontiac, Quebec Royal Canadian Legion Branch 132 in Campbell's Bay, Quebec.

Wreaths are also expected to be laid in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia this year.



WWII Veteran, Trooper Len Brown holds a miniature of the plaque he sponsored in memory of his BHC Mother Miriam Ann Morris. Unveiled in Toronto last July, the full size plaque bears the names, to that date, of the BHC known to have perished in the First World War.



"What all of these boys did was something so outrageously courageous that I stand in awe of them all the time, every day."

"They strapped on Canadian uniforms and they went back to the country that had sent them away. They went home to defend the land and the freedom of the very people that used them as slaves. They gave everything when they were given nothing. They had no reason to fight, and yet they stood for us. They died for us."

Jennifer Layne, Head Researcher of the First World War Project



Pictures:
2014 First World War Commemoration Service at the Black Creek Pioneer Village, Left is Lori Oschefski and Jennifer Layne laying the first BHC memorial wreath to be laid at Queen's Park in Toronto Nov 2014.

Andrew Simpson

Remembering one man's death from the Great War
and reflecting on the sacrifice made by families on both sides of the Atlantic

I am looking at an iron grave marker.
It is just over 25 cm long and 14 cm wide and has worn well, considering it is almost a century old and for a while at least, stood on a battlefield on the Western Front.
Of all the objects from the Great War that have come my way, this stands out as one of the most poignant.

It would have been placed over the grave of a soldier to mark where he was buried, until a more permanent memorial could be erected.
And as you would expect it comes with a history.

We know that it dates from 1916 and that it was used during the Battle of the Somme. In time, if we can identify the exact location it was placed in the ground, then the plot number of 907 might be able to lead us to the identity of the dead soldier.

According to the provenance that came with its sale, it was bought by a French farmer as scrap and may well have been destined for use on the farm or melted down. Now for whatever reason, he did not melt it down, nor was it left to rust in a field and eventually was sold on to a British dealer who in turn sold it to my friend David Harrop.

David has a unique collection of memorabilia from both world wars which focus on the everyday objects which were the backdrop to how people experienced those conflicts including medals, letters and photographs as well as souvenirs and official war time literature.

But the marker is a bit different, partly because of its direct link to the Battle of the Somme and the death of a serviceman but also because it may be German.

One source has suggested that British war markers were made of wood and those used by the German army were made of metal. And that makes a little bit personal because my maternal grandmother was German and some of her family served in the armed forces of Imperial Germany while six of my immediate family were in the British army making that war and the subsequent world war a real family affair.

From the German side all we have is a metal note case with an embossed military cross on the front and a name on the back.

So holding the marker in a very odd sort of way brings me a bit close to that side of my family.

It may sound a tad sentimental but it works and will have worked for all those who after the conflict could go and stand beside the gravestones of a loved one.

That in part was due to Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware who was the founder of the Imperial War Graves Commission which is now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

In the absence of an official system to mark or record the graves of those killed in action he set up a Red Cross unit which aimed to register all those who died.

In 1915 it was transferred from the Red Cross to the Army and two years later became the Imperial War Graves Commission charged with recording and maintaining the graves and the places of commemoration of all those who died.

And today although the name has changed the organisation continues the work, overseeing the maintenance of Commonwealth war graves across the world and offering a free online service for those wanting to search for family members.

Amongst those 1,700,000 graves is that of my uncle who died in a Japanese POW camp in 1943 and who rests in the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand Thailand.

Nana saved all of his letters and the official correspondence and now with the online service I can view his headstone which brings me back to that iron marker and the as yet, unanswered question of who number 907 was registered to.

Pictures; iron war marker 1916, courtesy of David Harrop and the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand, from the collection of Andrew Simpson



Read Andrew's blogs at: www.chorltonhistory.blogspot.ca



History Award Nominee

The BHCARA is thrilled to announce CEO Lori Oschefski has been nominated for the Orillia Museum of Art and History 2015 History Award. Nominated in their General History category, this nomination recognizes someone whose scholarly research results in a publication that will expand the permanent public record of history knowledge and/or someone whose communication or teaching skills inspire greater public awareness of, and interest in history, over the last five years. The OMAH History Awards will be presented at a gala event on November 5. We extend the very best wishes to Ms. Oschefski, who is thrilled with this nomination. MS. Oschefski grew up in Orillia as did her BHC Mother, Muriel Oschefski.

Time still to order for Christmas!

Visit our online store to purchase our BHC jewellery, calendars or our fund raising book "Bleating of the Lambs"

http://canadianbritishhomechildren.weebly.com/store/c1/Featured_Products.html

New Book Release

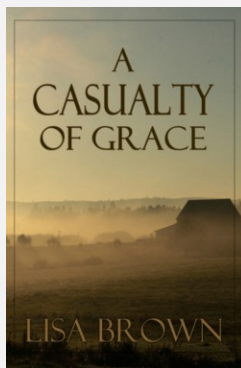
A Casualty of Grace

by Lisa Brown - Published October 2015

Oliver and Simon are young brothers who are unexpectedly orphaned and left alone in the world with nobody to care for them. Now, all they have is each other, and the threat of being torn apart becomes painfully real. The promise of a good home together in distant Canada eases their fears, but it is a promise that is destined to be broken.

After being separated from Simon, fate delivers Oliver to the Pritchard farm, where Liza Pritchard, a woman struggling with her own fractured and afflicted life, sees in Oliver the family she so desperately wants. But Oliver has to contend with her husband, an angry and violent man, and he can't see past the terrible life he has been thrust into. Both Oliver and Liza have much to learn about faith and forgiveness, and together they embark on an emotional journey that will change each of them forever.

The BHCARA recommends this book as an excellent read about the BHC. The historical content is very accurate, down to the inspections of the children in their workplaces and how they felt unable to tell the truth about their treatment. The emotions of pain, loss, grieving, fear and loneliness of Simon and Oliver are described in a completely engaging and strongly expressed manner. Her portrayal of the characters Mr. Pritchard, a cruel and uncaring Master, and his abused wife and her conflicted feelings of fear of her husband and sympathy for the boys is masterly done. A must read!



A Casualty of Grace is available as an e-book on Amazon.ca.

Paperback copies are available by contacting the author at: lisabrownbooks@gmail.com

Our Black Creek Pioneer Village Exhibit, Toronto, Ontario

In July of 2014, the Black Creek Pioneer Village; in Toronto in partnership with the BHCARA, opened a spectacular four-hundred and fifty square foot exhibit on the British Home Children. This exhibit is Canada's largest, most comprehensive long term exhibit for the BHC. Scheduled to close at the end of December 2015, we are thrilled to announce the exhibit will run through to the end of 2016 and possibly 2017. Please keep in mind that BCPV is closed for the winter months. If you wish to visit the exhibit during these months please contact BCPV at www.BlackCreek.ca.

Over the winter months, CEO Lori Oschefski will be working with the curator at Black Creek on updating the exhibit. We are very grateful to those who have loaned their items thus far. Your generous loans made this exhibit possible.

BARNARDO MAGAZINE INTERVIEW!

We are thrilled to announce that this winter's edition of the Barnardo's Guild Messenger Magazine, will be featuring a story on the work of the BHCARA, Bleating of the Lambs, our facebook group and CEO Lori Oschefski's BHC Mother. Visit our [FACEBOOK group](#) for more details!

BHC Documentary "Forgotten" - European Premiere

Following resounding successful showings in Toronto, Los Angeles and Hamilton, the Award winning documentary by Toronto Film Producer Eleanor McGrath is headed to London, England. "Forgotten" will be shown at the Crystal Palace International Film Festival on November 15th. "Forgotten" is about the yearning to know one's history. What began with a fire at 295 George Street in Toronto became the catalyst to sharing the story of our British Home Children in this film. For ticket information visit: <http://cpiff.co.uk/does1/>

John Jefkins

John Jefkin's amazing family reunion story continues to generate interest! The Toronto Star featured a [three page article](#) on John's story, published on Father's Day 2015. Since then, John has been asked to speak at a flurry of engagements, one of these events picked up by the [Etobicoke Guardian](#). After speaking at the Montgomery's Inn in Etobicoke, John spoke to the Kiwanis Club of Kingsway Humber. The club made a very generous donation to the organization. We have a very special project on the cards for 2016 and this donation will be put towards this. Details on this project are being finalized and should be announced in the New Year.



Once in a lifetime trips

British Home Child George Beardshaw in Hamilton

The BHCARA was delighted to treat British Home Child George Beardshaw and his wife Emma, to a delightful dinner at the Sheraton in Hamilton. Following the dinner, the charming couple was treated to a viewing of the film “Forgotten” in which both George and Emma appear. Many group members were on hand at the dinner to greet George, making him feel honoured and special. The film not only featured George, but also two of his closest friends, BHC Cyril Hewitt (who came on the same ship) and BHC Walter Goulding (who passed away August of 2014). The BHCARA was able to take George to visit Walter several weeks before Walter passed away. George and Cyril have not seen each other in several years now. We are in the midst of making reunion plans for the two friends. George is also a Second World War Veteran, serving with the Queen’s Own Rifles.



Lori with BHC Walter and George, April of 2014.



Film Producer Eleanor McGrath, George, Emma and Lori

Special thank you's to Beverley Schulz for the dinner arrangements and Larry Stevens for sharing Lori's eight hour drive that day! The day gave George “great happiness” according to his caregiver Judi, he has talked non stop about it ever since.



Ferris, his lovely wife Irene and Lori

Ferris Quick in Peterborough

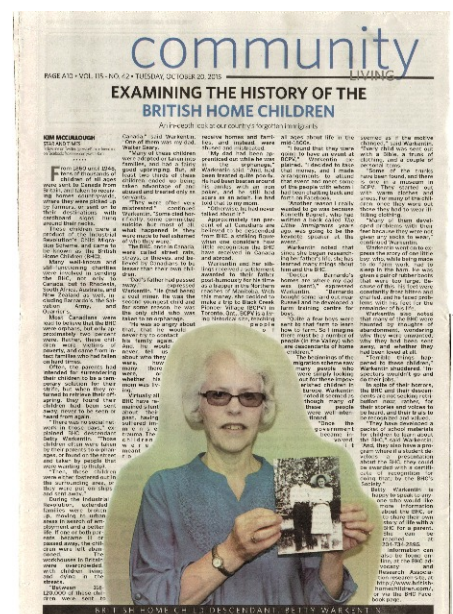
This past October, Lori Oschefski was able to take British Home Child descendant Ferris Quick, on a trip to Peterborough, Ontario to see his mother's name on the Hazel Brae Barnardo Home Memorial. Engraved on this memorial are the names of approximately nine thousand children who were processed through this receiving home prior to their work placements. After 1887 only the Barnardo Girls were brought to Peterborough. Ferris was thrilled to find his mother Kate Newman's name on the 1905 immigration panel. Ferris called our trip a “*once in a life time trip*”. As the last surviving child of Kate's he only wished his siblings were here to see it too. More information on this memorial can be found on our web site “[British Home Children & Child Migrants in Canada](#)”.

Betty Warkentin - “The money for this trip fell down from heaven”

BHCARA group member Betty Warkentin flew from Swan River, Manitoba this past September and attended the World Premiere of “Forgotten” and the Black Creek Pioneer Village BHC Day Celebration. Of this trip, Betty said “*I truly feel it was an undeserved gift from God and I feel so blessed.*” In Betty's words, this is her story:

“Dad (BHC Walter Geary) was hired, along with other men in our village by the government to trap for furs in an area now flooded by the Grand Rapids Dam in Northern Manitoba. (I nor my siblings ever knew this). Many people lost their livelihood and some their homes because of the flooding. The first group of people to work in 'The Summerberry Project' as it was known, received a settlement earlier. The second group, which included my Dad, received their settlement this year. Since my Dad and Mum are gone, the settlement was divided equally among us five siblings. That gave me enough for our trip and some books. We must have been very young or not even born when he trapped up North.”

When Betty arrived back home, the local paper became interested in her story. Kim McCullough, who wrote the article for the local “Star and Times” had never heard of the British Home Children. Walter's gift to his daughter not only enabled her to take this trip, it also has served to educated many more about the British Home Children migration programs! You can read the full article in our [Facebook Group](#).



Betty is holding a photo of her Mother and Father