

OPEONGO LINES

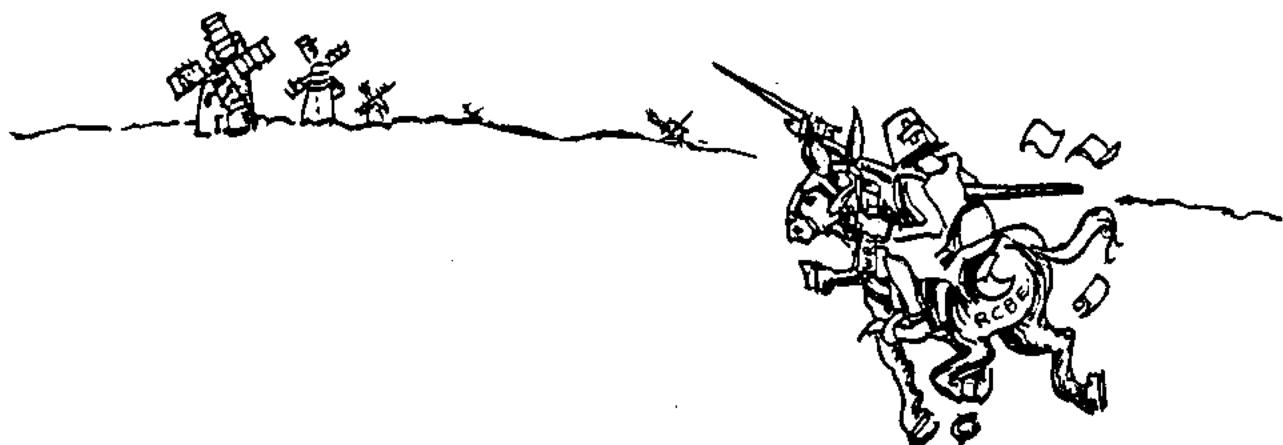
From the Editor's Desk:

For some time now Heritage Renfrew Directors and members have been busy at work on two major fronts.

On the local scene we have been researching - at the request of Town Council - archival and historic sources, including pre-Confederation material pertaining to the ownership of Block "J", which most Renfrewites know as Victoria Park. You will remember that the Renfrew County Board of Education had threatened to sue the Town if they were not given a deed of ownership to the property which a former Prime Minister bequeathed as a Public Square to the Town almost 150 years ago. Heritage Renfrew's team of researchers normally submits our substantial findings and suggestions to Town Officials who pass them on unopened to the Municipality's legal counsel. That is why you have never seen them on the Council agenda or heard them discussed at Council Meetings. Matters before the court are not discussed by Public Officials.

But the Director of Education for the RCBE is on record in an published interview with in a recent newspaper as saying that the Board is not suing after all. That is why we feel the time is propitious to inform members of Heritage Renfrew and the citizens of Renfrew that, though we are not lawyers, nothing that we have discovered alters in any way our conviction that in claiming Renfrew's Public Square as its own, the Renfrew County Board of Education has its legal feet planted firmly in mid-air.

We hope you enjoy the overview a trio of researchers has prepared. We thank all members, directors, and citizens at large who have contributed in any way to the process.



This has been a month of achievement for our efforts on behalf of Home Children. As we go to press our Home Children Committee is corresponding with almost 700 people regarding their Home Child histories. In the last month the Committee has organized our 4th Annual Reunion of Home Children. It was unique for many reasons: 1) it was held at a former Distribution Home in Ottawa; 2) Prime Minister Chretien sent letters (gold embossed and with the PM's seal) to each family represented (and even sent extras to present to any who wanted to attend but were unable to do so.); 3) Collette Bradford flew over from England to be guest speaker; she is Head of After Care at the famous Barnardos; 4) Though reservations were limited to just over 200, almost 300 were in attendance. 5) At the Reunion Archbishop Marcel Gervais of Ottawa read a short but moving prayer to and for Home Children.

Your Committee has also discovered the whereabouts of tens of thousands of Home Children records, has attended a Barnardo Reunion in Belleville and entertained the Bradfords in 'Home Child Country' for a week. The getting-to-know-you process has already facilitated retrieval of information for all Canadian Home Children and their descendants.

The Committee will also be making a presentation on Home Children to Carleton University students just about the time you receive this.

Finally, thanks to a generous grant from the Ontario Heritage Foundation and donations from Home Children and their families and friends, Heritage Renfrew was able to host the unveiling of the first Historical Plaque in Ontario - and perhaps in Canada - to commemorate Home Children. Home Children officiated: CHARLES MARTIN unveiled the plaque, ARTHUR MONK spoke on behalf of the Home Children, and ADA ALLEN and BILL LUCY lent their support.

Dave

Your comments and suggestions about this newsletter and Heritage Renfrew activities in general are most welcome. They can be sent to the Editor, Opeongo Lines, 107 Erindale Ave, Renfrew, Ontario, K7V 4G3. Tel (613) 432-2486.

HAS THE BOARD BLINKED?

(THE VICTORIA PARK SITUATION IN A NUTSHELL...or two..or even three or more)

FLASH: Renfrew County Board of Education staff removed playground equipment from Victoria Park last week.

Some - and we certainly hope they are right - might construe this move to mean that the Board is having second thoughts about its claim to the Public Park Land (Block "J") that was bequeathed to Renfrew nearly a century and a half ago by Sir Francis Hincks, a pre-Confederation Prime Minister.

BACKGROUND:

(In the following article the Public Park land donated by Hincks is referred to as "Victoria Park", "The Public Square", "The Public Park" and Block "J".)

It seemed the neighbourly and friendly thing to do over the years to allow the students in the Old Victoria (Ward) School, and in the building that replaced it, to use the public parkland for recreational purposes. Yet this simple gesture of good faith seems to be the basis for the County Board's claim that it owns the property.

At no time since a school was built on the lot next door (the west half of Block M) nearly a century ago, has a Board of Education made an offer to purchase Block "J". No money has ever changed hands in a sale. Neither the old Renfrew Public Board of Education nor the new Renfrew County Board has ever had a deed to Block "J". Yet the Renfrew County Board of Education now claims it owns the land.

This is but one reason why Heritage Renfrew directors bristled months ago when they learned that the Renfrew County Board of Education in closing Victoria School claimed the adjacent public park as its own. Two separate historical studies were made by former past-presidents of Heritage Renfrew two decades ago. The integrity and thoroughness of their work can be assumed; both researchers were later made Official Town Historians by Town Council. Harry R Hinchley and Marjorie Lindsay both concluded that the land was, and is, public property. Heritage Renfrew directors also felt that the Ontario Heritage Foundation would not have put a provincial plaque up on the site in the mid 1970's if the property had somehow ceased to be public land.

We really got our dander up, however, when we were presented with written proof that the Board intended to sue the Town of Renfrew if the Town did not give the Board legal deed to the land. (We have to confess, though, that we were initially amused that the Board, presumably on the advice of its legal counsel, would claim it was the legitimate owner when it did not have a deed and would threaten to sue the legitimate owner for

that very proof of ownership and expect it would be handed over meekly. We thought of the character in Dickens who said "If the law says that, then the law is a ass!")

HERITAGE RENFREW GETS INVOLVED:

Fearing that Town Council might cave in to the threat of litigation we presented our case for retaining Block "J" - the Public Park, and also advised Town Council to give deeds only to the property comprising what used to be the old Tasse Street allowance and a west portion of Block "M" which was originally designated as the site of the County seat. These sections are straddled by the recently closed Victoria Public School. We felt the County Board had a legitimate claim to that parcel of the land...but NOT to Block "J" which is known as Victoria Park or the Public Square.

At this same time Heritage Renfrew was in touch with the Renfrew Board of Education and offered to address the Board at large to explain why we thought their claims to Block "J" were not valid. That offer was declined.

Town Council did act on our suggestion, however, and the Board of Education accepted the smaller parcel of land. The matter did not rest there. Renfrewites will remember reading in a local paper a few weeks ago a statement by the Renfrew County Director of Education to the effect that the Board was not suing. The article said the Board was "just giving its lawyers a crack at deciding who owns the school yard at Victoria School." (Were Shakespeare to hear that, he might have referred us to his own line about a "rose by any other name".)

Meanwhile, Heritage Renfrew was asked by Renfrew Town Council to assist the Town's solicitor by doing research in archival areas that are presumably outside the ken of the legal profession. To date we have made over five dozen observations which we have followed up today with a 'short' 19 page presentation which is supported by many more dozens of pages of documentation.

ABOUT OUR LATEST PRESENTATION:

In drafting our latest presentation we have consulted the actual minutes of Town Council since its first meetings in the 1850's. We have fleshed out details and verified facts by cross reference to local histories and to the Renfrew Mercury reports from the newspaper's inception in 1871 to the present. Through Inter-Library Loan we also obtained the published autobiography of Sir Francis Hincks. We have copied and studied the pertinent Land Records at the Registry Office in Pembroke. We have talked to individuals who have been associated with the Victoria School as students, teachers, principals, members of the former school boards, or as citizens of adjacent areas. We have solicited legal comment. We have met with or have sought the assistance and advice of our MPP's, the Head Archivist for Ontario, and the Ontario Heritage Foundation. We have made use of provincial and dominion archival sources and original maps or copies of same. We await further material from the National Archives, the

Ontario Archives, Osgoode Hall in Toronto, and one other nationally known source.

CONCLUSIONS:

We feel the Board would be tilting at windmills should it continue to claim to ownership of Block "J". These facts are clear:

1. There is a **CLEAR INDICATION** that the Land is and always was **PUBLIC LAND**.
2. Legal authorities are on record stating that, while there is no deed to the land, **NO DEED IS NECESSARY BECAUSE THE LAND WAS DEDICATED AS PUBLIC LAND**.
3. In the century and a half history of Block "J" no deed has ever been sought by any School Board until the RCBE recently threatened to sue the Town of Renfrew.
4. **No School Board has ever owned a deed to the land.**
5. In the early disputed history of the property after Hincks died, one D.H. McAndrew claimed he had bought ALL of Hincks property in the area. But three successive separate decisions by a Judge in the cases said he did NOT own Block "J", i.e. the Public Square.
6. If the Board claims the property under provisions of the Education Act of the late 1960's (when County Boards replaced local Boards) they should be aware that there are precedents which show that even the land on which a school was situated sometimes reverted to the donor when the new system came in.
7. The Board may consider making a claim of adverse possession to all or part of Block "J". To do so they would have to establish that they had personally or through their tenants been in actual, peaceable, continuous, exclusive, open, undisturbed and undisputed possession and occupation of the lands so claimed without the permission of the owner and without having given any acknowledgement of title of the owner. We do not think that their arguments would stand up in a court of law.

We feel that the efforts of Heritage Renfrew and the Town of Renfrew to ensure that Block "J" remains Public Land are strongly supported by law, tradition, and historical data. We also feel that the Board of Education should make a public announcement of its intent in the matter and quit its posturing.

Earl Lindsay, member at large

Marge Lindsay, Past Presidents' Advisory Committee & Town Historian
J.A. David Lorente, Past President's Advisory Committee

HOME CHILD PRIDE

For too long Home Children did not talk of their past, yet they were truly unique Canadian pioneers. Like all pioneers they came to this country and faced great hardships, but they were without family or friends, and they were children!

They were once reluctant to talk of their past, because a stigma was unjustly attached to the name 'Home Child', but they are talking now and with pride. And asking for clues to their past history. In the last 5 months Heritage Renfrew Home Children Committee has answered 237 requests for our ten-page Researcher's Kit and advice on how to search their past. We are corresponding with 687 people in all.

The Home Children's pride in accomplishment comes chiefly from within. Home Children alone know what odds they faced and the survivors are proud they came out on top. This pride was reinforced by the Governor General last year and by the Prime Minister and Roman Catholic Archbishop of Ottawa this year. Mr Hnatyshyn wrote an Open Letter to all attending the third Reunion of Home Children in 1993. Mr Chretien sent individual gold embossed letters with the PM's seal this year. The text read:

I am delighted to convey my warmest greetings to everyone attending the 4th Annual Home Child Reunion. This event provides you with a special opportunity to reflect upon your life in Canada and share your experiences. It also allows us to salute you for your many contributions to the development of this nation. Your pioneering and brave spirit enabled you to overcome adversity and meet challenges with perseverance and vigour. I am pleased to join with those who gratefully acknowledge the important role you have played in the growth and prosperity of our country.

Please accept my best wishes for a memorable reunion.

Jean Chretien

Archbishop Marcel Gervais uttered these words at the 4th Reunion:

Our Father, whose Son told us to "suffer the little children to come unto me", bless all the Home Children who came to our shores, who were so often so alone and so helpless. We pray for their children and their children's children. As we dedicate this memorial to them today we ask forgiveness of them and of you Father for any pain they suffered. We pray for any who may have been the cause of their pain, and that altogether, we may praise you and one day be one with you. We ask this though Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.

The Reunion was deemed important enough for Barnardos of England to send the Head of their After Care Unit to Canada to be our guest speaker. Barnardos sent 1 of every 3 Home Children to Canada; 30,000 of the 100,000. Collette Bradford had entertained

our Home Child Committee members who were researching at the Barnardos Unit in England two years ago. The Canadians returned the favour by showing Collette and her husband Steve our Upper Ottawa Valley 'Home Child Country' and making Canadian source material Finding Aids available to them. The Bradfords hope to return to Canada next year and have invited the Lorente's to the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Barnardos' birth in England next summer.

Mrs bradford met individually with dozens of Home Children everywhere she went and personally followed up with individual letters to each on her return. It is her personal aim to greatly facilitate the retrieval of information in Home Child cases and to help even those 70,000 Home Children who were sent over by other agencies.

Though reservations were cut off at just over 200 last May, almost 300 attended the September Reunion. They came from Edmonton, all parts of Ontario and Quebec, Virginia and Florida. You don't do things like that if you are not proud. The Quebec delegation's Lizzie Smith presented our Committee with a specially designed Home Child crest featuring the Lion of England, the Birmingham skyline as typical of the industrial cities of the time, a ship with a star of hope to guide it and the plains, rivers and mountains of our vast country. The motto is Latin reads SPES IN CANADA - (Our) HOPE (IS/WAS) IN CANADA.

Coincidentally, about this time, we made two other discoveries that will help researchers. First, a gentleman in Southern Ontario wrote to say that he had the Canadian records of 4,500 Home Children sent over by Fegan Homes. He had offered these files to the Ontario Government years ago and received no response. The files are most important because Fegans often took in children from Ireland and sent them over to Canada. This discovery will greatly facilitate our research; as any genealogist knows Irish records are sometimes hard to come by.

We have also ascertained the whereabouts of the files for all the Roman Catholic Home Children sent over by the old Southwark Diocese which comprised London south of the Thames to the coast.

The first historical plaque in Ontario to commemorate Home Children, their 'Homes' or the philanthropists that sent them over was unveiled in Renfrew on October 19. Home Former Child CHARLES MARTIN of Dacre unveiled the plaque which honours all Home Children of every denomination who came to the Ottawa Valley. ART MONK who now lives in Beachburg spoke on behalf of the Home Children and commented on his reluctance for years to talk of the past he now speaks of with great pride. BILL LUCY who has lived in the Douglas and Renfrew area for all of his years in Canada was in attendance, as was ADA ALLEN of Napanee who was featured recently in THIS COUNTRY CANADA magazine.

How many Home Children came to the Valley? Probably thousands. We know of 19 who came to Douglas on one day from one agency alone. We also know that over 30 family names in Renfrew derive from Home Children.

Some people have expressed skepticism about the published statistic that says that 11% of the population of Canada is descended from Home Children. "It's too high", they say. And your Home Child Committee started to believe them....until today when we videotaped the memoirs of GEORGE BARTER of Ottawa. (His son Doug lives in Renfrew.)

Like most Home GEORGE has worked at a variety of occupations. He was born in 1899 but he still square dances and calls whenever he can. The home which he built is full of his paintings and craft product made from scraps. He makes wine, but does not drink, and he played the organ until his hearing started to fade after an operation two or three years ago. He marvels at the changes he has seen in his almost 96 years. That is why he wanted to leave a video record for his seventeen children, sixty-five grandchildren and fifty-five great-grandchildren.

About that statistic about 11% of the population being descendants of Home Children..... We're believers again!

Text of the Renfrew Historical Plaque - the first in Ontario to commemorate Home Children:

OTTAWA VALLEY HOME CHILDREN

From 1869 until the Great Depression England exported about 100,000 children to Canada as cheap farm labourers. Hundreds, perhaps, thousands, came to the Ottawa Valley. Not all were orphans; some were sent over without the knowledge or permission of their parents; others were sponsored by benefactors who saw greater hope for them in this land of plenty. Virtually all were poor. Most were between 7 and 14 years of age, but some were mere toddlers. Each child was supposed to get room, board, token pay and some education. Many received no wages, no schooling, and much abuse. To their credit most "Home Children" overcame privation, loneliness and prejudice to become productive and proud Canadians. Their descendants and the citizens of Renfrew honoured them and celebrated their contribution to this country at the first Reunion for Home Children, in Renfrew in 1991.

The plaque was paid for entirely by donations from Home Children, their families and friends with the assistance of a generous grant from the Ontario Heritage Foundation. It was sponsored by Heritage Renfrew and erected with the assistance and cooperation of the Renfrew Public Library Staff and Board and the Town of Renfrew.

In the ceremony following the unveiling Mayor Haramis of Renfrew, in expressing his pride in the accomplishments of local Home Children, presented each one with a Town of Renfrew pin.

FLASH! We welcome Jesse Billyard to our Heritage Renfrew Archives. Jesse is on duty every afternoon from Monday through Friday. He has already started to index the census microfilms and has also transcribed some of the old Town of Renfrew Council Minutes. Drop in and see him. He is anxious to help you.