

Children's Emigration Homes, J. T. Middlemore's Agency

John Throgmorton Middlemore, a well-educated son of wealthy philanthropic parents, opened his Children's Emigration Homes in 1872 in Birmingham, England. Rapid industrialization and minimal social support mechanisms had created the overcrowded, ill-lit and filthy slums from which most of his children came. Middlemore saw his agency as part of Birmingham's social services—an essential support for starving, ill-fed ill-clothed and often neglected or ill-treated slum children with no chance in life. He did this not as a saver of souls but as a saver of children: giving them a new life in Canada where, by growing up in loving supportive families, they could achieve far more in life than was possible in England. The Children's Emigration Homes were supported by the Middlemore family and by voluntary donations from the Birmingham population, recognized for their philanthropy.

The first party of twenty-nine Middlemore children arrived in Canada on May 12, 1873, most being settled in or near Toronto, the others around London, Ontario. He did this by taking advantage of the Canadian government's support for immigrants of all ages, in its attempt to increase the country's population, and altruistically by finding Canadian couples, who, having no children of their own or their children having left the family home, wanted to have children around them. Middlemore not only settled and visited his own children in Canada until they reached their 18th birthday (though they were under his control until they were 21), but also, at the request and expense of managers and sponsors, he settled and treated children from workhouses, industrial schools, reformatories, orphanages and interested individuals in the same way as he did his own.

The City Council of London, Ontario, invited Middlemore to settle children with qualified people in rural areas and gave him the free use of a city-owned farmhouse and surrounding land as his distributing home. He named it the Guthrie Home and bought it in 1880. Parties of children arrived there for settlement every year until it was closed in 1890.

In 1885, Middlemore began settling a few children in and around in Fredericton, New Brunswick, again by the invitation of the city and other leaders. So successful was this, that in 1893 with the Guthrie Home closed, he decided to bring all Middlemore children for settlement in the Maritimes. The Middlemore Home at Fairview Station near Halifax was opened in 1897 and, except for the years 1917, 1918, 1919 and 1931, received children for settlement until 1932, the year assisted juvenile emigration was halted by the Canadian government. The Fairview Home continued operation until it was closed in 1941, the year when all Middlemore children settled in the Maritimes had passed beyond the age of care.

Middlemore recognized that some of his children would fail and agreed that he would return any such children to England. The records show the number of failures returned averaged about two per year. On the other hand, he was pleased to learn that most of his children did well, becoming ordinary middle-class Canadians: farmers or farmers' wives, as well as organists, teachers, pastors, mechanics, telegraphers, secretaries, nurses, city, county or provincial officials, mayors, and provincial legislators. One even earned a D.Ed. from Harvard University. Careers such as these would have been unthinkable for Middlemore children had they stayed in Britain.

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