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GIRLS' FRIENDLY SOCIETY

MG 28, I 349

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MG 28  
I 349

GIRLS' FRIENDLY SOCIETY, London, England (est. 1875). Girls' benevolent and social organization.

Microfilm, 1880-1955. 30 reels, A-1188 to A-1217.

Established in 1875 by five English women, the Girls' Friendly Society organized constructive activities for girls and women employed in domestic service, business and factories. The Society encouraged its members to emigrate to the British colonies. The Society also attempted to organize branches in Canada, Newfoundland and other parts of the British Empire/Commonwealth.

Acquired in 1978.

Minute books (1884-1955): microfilm reels A-1188 to A-1190; correspondence (1881-1954): microfilm reels A-1191 to A-1193; emigration registers (1907-1927): microfilm reels A-1194 to A-1198; and printed material (1883-1950): microfilm reels A-1199 to A-1217; relating to the activities of the Girls' Friendly Society in England and in Canada as well as material on the immigration of young women to Canada.

## GIRLS' FRIENDLY SOCIETY

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Established in 1875 by five English women, the Girls' Friendly Society organized constructive activities for girls and women employed in domestic service, business and factories. The Society encouraged their members to emigrate to the British Colonies. The Society also attempted to organize branches in Canada, Newfoundland and other parts of the British Empire/Commonwealth.

Records date from 1880 when Society began recording the minutes of its different committees. The Public Archives of Canada has microfilmed extracts of manuscript and printed materials relating to immigration and the Society's activities in England and Canada. Minute books, registers, correspondence, reports and miscellaneous papers constitute the manuscript sources. Printed papers include pamphlets, books and periodicals published by the G.F.S. as well as a few by the British Women's Emigration Association (B.W.E.A.) and the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (B.O.S.B.W.).

### I

- ✓ A group of five English women with the support of the Church of England clergy founded the Girls' Friendly Society (G.F.S.) in 1875 to benefit young women in domestic service, in the factories and in business. For the first few years the Society concentrated on establishing new branches and attracting members. Lowell, Massachusetts, started a chapter of the G.F.S. in 1877. Several European cities also had G.F.S. representation. Canadian participation in the Society dated from 1883 when Church of England women formed a branch in Toronto.

A Constitution established the Central Rules, membership and the federated structure. The Central Rules drawn up by the Society were that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York be patrons, that all Associates belonged to the Church of England or a church in communion with it (eg. Church of Scotland) and that all members be of "virtuous character." Loss of such meant forfeiture of one's membership. These rules remained intact until the mid-1930s when officials reworded the last rule.

The Girls' Friendly Society created three types of membership. Associates (usually older women) advised younger members and served on the governing councils. Members who were girls over fourteen participated in a wide range of self-improvement or recreational activities. Candidates who were girls considered too young for active membership undertook "good works" for handicapped children or for the Anglican missions.

The structure of the G.F.S. in England reflected that of a three-tier federation. The Central Council, composed of representatives from such bodies as the Executive, Finance and Emigration Committees, directed the organization's work from its headquarters in London. The Committees began to record their proceedings in 1880. Under this Council were a number of departments such as industrial training, workhouses and orphanages, registries, sick members and emigration. Branch Councils looked after G.F.S. business in a particular district, especially the maintenance of an employment registry, while diocesan councils conducted the Society's work in the parishes.

Unlike other social agencies which "rescued" members of the working class from immoral or impoverished backgrounds, the Girls' Friendly Society concentrated on preventing young women from falling into vice. It operated an employment registry office which screened prospective employers to ensure their respectability and good intentions. The Society administered a number of supervised lodges or resthomes which women could visit during their free time to recuperate from the stresses of working. The Associates also organized their members' leisure time by providing wholesome activities such as reading lessons, literary appreciation classes, amateur dramatics and missions work. When the girl guide movement commenced

in the early twentieth century, the G.F.S. enthusiastically supported guide companies and brownie packs. It endeavoured to upgrade the standards of domestic service by sponsoring the League for Skilled Housecraft in the 1920s. The Society sponsored lectures on the British Empire to encourage emigration and to foster feelings of imperial unity.

Members of the Girls' Friendly Society shared similar views with such emigration societies as the British Women's Emigration Association (B.W.E.A.) and the Colonial Intelligence League. Indeed one of the leading G.F.S. Associates, Ellen Joyce, helped to found the B.W.E.A. in 1884. Society officials believed that emigration to the British colonies offered one solution to the lack of employment for women in Britain. Mrs. Joyce directed the Society's promotion of migration to Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The organization idealistically perceived Canada as a growing country with high moral standards and limitless opportunities for domestics, governesses, home helpers, dressmakers, etc. The first contingent of the Society's members sailed in 1883 with a party of Waifs and Strays' Society children under the supervision of the Rev. John Bridger. Mrs. Body, President of the Girls' Friendly Society in Canada, subsequently complained that some girls were "troublesome." A tour of Canada convinced Mrs. Joyce of the need for better organization, more protection on the inland journey and a more selective means of choosing candidates. In 1885 a party of eleven girls carefully picked for their good character joined the protected party conducted by the matrons of the B.W.E.A. Thereafter most G.F.S. members joined the Association's emigration parties until the 1920s when the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (B.O.S.B.W.) assumed this function along with making travel arrangements for G.F.S. members. In several instances they went to Canada under the care of the Waifs and Strays Society, Dr. Barnardo, Mrs. Birt or the Salvation Army.

Groups of G.F.S. members ranging from very young girls to women in their thirties began new lives in Canada. Many already secured employment before leaving England. Some went out to be married; others to join relatives already settled. The women came from the workhouses and the homes for orphaned children. They previously worked as domestic servants, shop assistants, dressmakers, governesses, stenographers, factory workers, teachers and nurses.

Each emigrant obtained from her Associate in England a letter of introduction or "commendation" which entrusted her to the care of the nearest Canadian Associate or to an Anglican clergyman in the district where she was settling. The Canadian Associates frequently encountered difficulty in keeping track of the girls who came to this country. The Society was not as well organized as it appears to have been in Great Britain. Emigrating members sometimes lost interest in the Society after settling in Canada.

The efforts of the Girls' Friendly Society to spread its movement across Canada met with varying degrees of success. At one time or another there were branches of the Society in Vancouver, Kelowna, Qu'Appelle, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, St. John's and the Newfoundland outports. Efforts to build hostels for girls at Regina and Lloydminster failed, but the Society maintained the Joyce Hostel in Kelowna, B.C., two hostels in Toronto, a rest place in Montreal as well as summer lodges in Aylmer, P.Q. and Hamilton Beach. The Depression of the 1930s ended migration work. The G.F.S. in Canada was already recording declining membership. Competition from other women's groups such as the Women's Auxiliary of the Anglican Church and inadequate clergy support made it difficult for the Society to attract members. It also possessed an image of being just for English immigrants or servants. By the end of the Second World War G.F.S. activity had practically ceased in Canada. Newfoundland appears to be the only place where the Society proved popular through its sponsorship of many brownie packs and girl guide companies up to the 1950s when it affiliated with the Women's Auxiliary of the Church of England in Newfoundland. The Society wound up its affairs in the rest of Canada during the mid-fifties.

## II

The collection of the Girls' Friendly Society contains both manuscript and printed materials. This organization did not keep records of its proceedings until the adoption of its Constitution in 1880. The Public Archives of Canada has microfilmed extracts primarily relating to British emigration to Canada from the Archives of the Girls' Friendly Society in London, England. The first reel (A-1762) contains a general index but several dates are incorrect.

The papers are arranged into five categories: Minutes and Papers; Correspondence and Papers; Miscellaneous Books and Registers; Publicity and Leaflets; Publications. The first category, Minutes and Papers, pertains to the work of the sub-committee on emigration known as the Colonial Committee until 1911, the Imperial Committee until 1921 and the Overseas Committee after that date. These minutes date from 1884 since emigration became a separate department of the Girls' Friendly Society only towards the end of 1883. Each minute book includes an index at the beginning. The Colonial/Imperial Committee had a Canadian sub-section whose minutes appear at the back of Minute Book No. 1 (#87) and as a separate book for 1905-1920 (#92). The Minutes of Central Council, 1880-1895, (#31), contain information on the adoption of the organization's Constitution in 1880 as well as the early entries for the Colonial Emigration Committee. In the margin there are cross references to the main minutes of the Council (not microfilmed by the P.A.C.) or another committee. The Employment Office and Migration Book (#47) outlines both the progress and difficulties experienced in attracting girls to domestic service and in promoting overseas migration. Some statistics on migration appear here. It should be noted that Minute Book No. 3 of the Overseas Committee (#89) for the period 1925-1955 is closed to researchers until 1986.

The correspondence category includes letters, pamphlets, reports and miscellaneous papers on the G.F.S. in Canada and Newfoundland. Information on the Society's beginnings in Canada can be gleaned from Mrs. Townsend's notes (#289) and from an article in The Bulletin of the Council for Social Service of the Church of England in Canada which outlines the activity of the Society to 1918 (#223). Another paper sketches the work of the Montreal Branch up to 1935 (#224). Some minutes of the annual meetings of the Girls' Friendly Society in Canada from 1935 to 1941 appear in file number 224. The minutes for 1931-33 may be found in the Publicity and Leaflets category (#65). Statistical Reports from the Dioceses (#269 and #270) provide some idea of the Society's extent in Canada and Newfoundland for the period 1925-32. These papers suggest the diminishing activity of the organization at this time.

The Society in England supported several Church of England projects aimed at

the Canadian "missions" on the prairies. The Society raised considerable sums of money for the Archbishops' Western Canada Fund by which the Church (without consulting the Canadian bishops) purchased town lots for the future erection of churches. Papers giving financial details, lists of sites purchased and actual churches built may be found in files # 222 and 224. There is also material on the proposed (but never executed) construction in Regina of the Princess Patricia Hostel to provide inexpensive, supervised lodging for young women training as teachers (#223). The G.F.S. also held sales of work for the overseas missions during the interval from 1924 to 1931 (#243).

To encourage interest in the British Empire and Commonwealth and to promote emigration the Society in London engaged lecturers to present talks and slide shows on the different colonies. The Empire Education Committee (#227) contains several pamphlets of imperialist groups such as the Victoria League, British Empire Union and the Women's Unionist Organization. The Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women made sailing arrangements for any G.F.S. member wishing to emigrate to Canada after 1920. Some statistics on British migration can be found in their file (#263) which contains a copy of their Annual Report for 1936.

Papers on the relationship of the G.F.S. with the Y.W.C.A. (#306), the change of the rule regarding the admittance of only "virtuous" girls (#304, #310, and #317) and a paper criticizing the G.F.S. for concentrating solely on preventive work round out the correspondence category. It should be noted that the file on Newfoundland, 1930-40; 1950-54 (#249) contains many reports on the local branches of the Society as well as papers on the winding down of the Society in Canada during the 1950s but is closed until 1985.

The Miscellaneous Books and Registers category contains Commendation Registers for 1907 to 1927 (#62-71) and a history of the Society called Friendship's Highway by Mary Heath-Stubbs (#91). The Commendation Registers provide some valuable information on the background of the girls and women who emigrated to Canada. The register notes such things as member's name; address in England;



birth date; where baptized and confirmed; the Associate's name and address; date of sailing; ship's name; port of entry; temporary address of the member in Canada; future Canadian address; and a remarks column. There is a nominal index at the back of each register. It must be noted that not all such information was filled in. In some cases it is difficult to determine precisely where the women went since their future address was usually in care of the Bishop. The destinations ranged from cities and towns in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia to prairie settlements and several maritime cities.

These Commendation Registers thus indicate that a letter was given to a particular member who was sailing for Canada. If the individual changed her mind, it was so noted on the Register. G.F.S. Associates in Canada endeavoured to keep track of these female emigrants and report on their adjustment to Canadian life. Judging from the lack of follow-up comments, the task proved difficult. The remarks column occasionally shows that a particular individual successfully made the transition to a new life while a few notations record that tragedy struck several women.

The fourth category of Publicity and Leaflets contains a bound volume of pamphlets (#13) written or collected by Ellen Joyce, Emigration Department Head, as well as overseas diocesan reports from Canada and Newfoundland. The brochures discuss the economic position of English women: their surplus number; their destitute circumstances and insufficient job opportunities. Two leaflets outline the work of the British Women's Emigration Association of which Mrs. Joyce was President. Emigration organizations perceived Canada as a British and Christian country and desired to preserve this character from the "threat" posed by immigrants from central and southern Europe who clung to their own culture and language. The overseas diocesan reports (#65) contain the minutes of the Girls' Friendly Society annual meetings for 1931 to 1933, two reports dated 1932 and 1935 on the work of the G.F.S. in Canada, and a copy of the 1936 Annual Report of the Council for Social Service of the Church of England in Canada.

The Publications category contains periodicals published by the Girls' Friendly Society in England: Friendly Work, 1883-94 (#78-84); The Girls' Quarterly, 1894-99 (#85); \_\_\_\_\_, 1900-1916 (#86-101); G.F.S. Advertiser, 1880-1919 (#102-131); and G.F.S. Workers' Journal, 1920-1950 (#132-162). These magazines reflect the Society's promotion of purity, temperance, thrift and mutual help. Further insight into female emigration to Canada and employment of women in the British Empire/Commonwealth can also be culled from these documents.

Other manuscript sources which treat the subject of female emigration are: MG 40 ? Fawcett Library Collection; MG 40 ? Church of England Children's Society; MG 40 ? Dr. Barnardo. Record groups for the Departments of Agriculture and Immigration in the Public Records Division (7th floor) will also facilitate research on this topic.

Finding Aid 90, British Records on Microfilm, lists the appropriate microfilm reel numbers.

For information on juvenile and women's migration consult:

Carrothers, W. A. Emigration from the British Isles (London: P.S. King & Son, Ltd., 1929).

Canada. Department of the Interior. Report of G. Bogue Smart, Inspector of British Immigrant Children and Receiving Homes, 1904, 1912-16 (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1905; 1913-17).

Harrison, Phyllis, ed. The Home Children, Their Personal Stories (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1979).

Johnson, Stanley C. A History of Emigration, From the United Kingdom to North America 1763-1912 (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966).

Heath-Stubbs, Mary. Friendship's Highway, Being the History of the Girls' Friendly Society, 1875-1935 (London: G.F.S. Central Office, 1935).

Macdonald, Norman. Canada, Immigration and Colonization, 1841-1903 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966).

Plant, G.F. Oversea Settlement, Migration from the United Kingdom to the Dominions (London: Oxford University Press, 1951).

Scholes, Alex G. Education for Empire Settlement, A Study of Juvenile Migration (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1932).

Shepperson, W. S. British Emigration to North America, Projects and Opinions in the Early Victorian Period (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

Sutherland Neil. Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

Turner, Wesley B. "Miss Rye's Children and the Ontario Press, 1875," Ontario History 68 (September 1976): 169-203.

Women's Migration and Overseas Appointments Society. New Horizons, A Hundred Years of Women's Migration (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963).

MICROFILM SHELF LIST

<u>Vol.</u>	<u>File Title/Description</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Reel No.</u>
	1. <u>Minutes and Papers, File</u>		
31	Central Council	1880-1895	A-1188
45	Emigration Dept. Agenda Book	1915-1920	A-1188
47	Employment Office and Migration Book	1924-1935	A-1188
87	Colonial Committee Minute Book No. 1	1896-1904	A-1188
88	Colonial/Imperial/Overseas Committee Minute Book No. 2	1905-1925	A-1189
89	Overseas Committee Minute Book No. 3 (CLOSED UNTIL 1986)	1925-1955	A-1190
90	Colonial Organisation Fund	1905-1910	A-1189
92	Minute Book: Canada	1906-1922	A-1189
96	Various Sub-Committees	1910-1921	A-1189
113	Standing Committee Minute Book	1911-1920	A-1189
	2. <u>Correspondence and Papers, File</u>		
222	Canada	1912-1918	A-1191
223	Canada	1918-1934	A-1191
224	Canada	1931-1941	A-1191
227	Empire Education Committee - Request For Lectures	1924-1928	A-1192
243	Missions: Sales of Work; Programmes	1924-1931	A-1192
249	Newfoundland (CLOSED UNTIL 1985)	1925-1940 1950-1954	A-1193
263	Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women	1920-1941	A-1192
269	Statistical Reports from Dioceses	1925-1929	A-1192
270	Statistical Reports from Dioceses	1930-1936	A-1192
289	G.F.S. in the Colonies; notes by Mrs. Townsend together with letters from the Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury	1881-1882 1904-1910	A-1192
292	The Church of England's Women's Help Society contrasted with the G.F.S. - Rev. Cyril Bickersteth	1898	A-1192
304	Letter from Mrs. Glassco of the Canadian G.F.S. Commenting on the New Ruling of the American G.F.S. in regard to Probation and Suspension	1926	A-1192

<u>Vol.</u>	<u>File Title/Description</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Reel No.</u>
306	Note on the Work of the G.F.S. and its Relation to the Y.W.C.A. Definition of Church of England Membership: Letter from Mrs. Benson	1928-1929	A-1192
310	Central Rule I: Letters from Archbishops, Bishops and other Clergy, together with some from Overseas	1932-1936	A-1192
317	Treaties with the G.F.S. in other Countries. General Correspondence	1936-1938	A-1192
	3. Not copied		
	4. <u>Miscellaneous Books and Registers</u>		
62	Commendation Register Canada No. 1	1907-1922	A-1194
63	Commendation Register Canada No. 8	1910	A-1194
64	Commendation Register Canada No. 9	1910-1912	A-1195
65	Commendation Register Canada No. 10	1911-1912	A-1195
66	Commendation Register Canada No. 11	1912-1913	A-1196
67	Commendation Register Canada No. 12	1912-1913	A-1196
68	Commendation Register Canada No. 13	1913-1919	A-1197
69	Commendation Register Canada No. 14	1913-1914	A-1197
70	Commendation Register Canada No. 15	1919-1923	A-1198
71	Commendation Register Canada No. 16	1923-1927	A-1198
91	Mary Heath-Stubbs. <u>Friendship's Highway, Being the History of the Girls' Friendly Society, 1875-1935.</u>	1935	A-1199
	5. <u>Publicity, Leaflets, Etc.</u>		
13	Leaflets by the Hon. Mrs. Joyce presented for the Use of the President of the Central Council	1885-1914	A-1199
65	Diocesan Reports - Overseas	1911-1945	A-1199
	10. <u>Publications</u>		
78-84	<u>Friendly Work</u>	1883-1894	A-1200-A-1217
85	<u>The Girls, Quarterly</u>	1894-1899	A-1200-A-1217
86-101	?	-1916	A-1200-A-1217

<u>Vol.</u>	<u>File Title/Description</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Reel No.</u>
102-131	<u>G.F.S. Advertiser</u>	1880-1919	A-1200-A-1217
132-162	<u>G.F.S. Workers' Journal</u>	1920-1950	A-1200-A-1217