

The Middlemore Boys: Immigration, Settlement, and Great War Volunteerism in New Brunswick

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Article abstract

Between 1885 and 1916, Sir John Middlemore's Children's Emigration Homes resettled more than 3,000 indigent British youth from the streets of Birmingham to Maritime farms. While their transition was anything but easy, these emigrants were more than mere reactionaries to circumstance. Fifty-four per cent of New Brunswick's Middlemore boys volunteered for military service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force with the onset of the Great War (almost one in six were underage). While motivations for enlistment varied, many Middlemore boys had an overwhelming need to return to the familiarity of home and to reconnect with family members once left behind.

The Middlemore Boys: Immigration, Settlement, and Great War Volunteerism in New Brunswick

CURT MAINVILLE

Entre 1885 et 1916, les Children's Emigration Homes de sir John Middlemore, des foyers d'accueil pour enfants émigrants, permirent à plus de 3 000 jeunes Britanniques démunis des rues de Birmingham d'être placés dans des fermes des Maritimes. Bien que la transition soit loin d'avoir été facile pour eux, ces émigrants firent plus que simplement réagir aux circonstances. Cinquante-quatre pour cent des garçons que Middlemore envoya au Nouveau-Brunswick se portèrent volontaires pour servir dans le Corps expéditionnaire canadien au début de la Grande Guerre (près d'un sur six n'avait pas l'âge légal). Si les motifs de leur enrôlement variaient, beaucoup d'entre eux éprouvaient un grand besoin de retrouver la familiarité de leur pays et de reprendre contact avec des membres de leur famille qu'ils avaient quittés autrefois.

Between 1885 and 1916, Sir John Middlemore's Children's Emigration Homes resettled more than 3,000 indigent British youth from the streets of Birmingham to Maritime farms. While their transition was anything but easy, these emigrants were more than mere reactionaries to circumstance. Fifty-four per cent of New Brunswick's Middlemore boys volunteered for military service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force with the onset of the Great War (almost one in six were underage). While motivations for enlistment varied, many Middlemore boys had an overwhelming need to return to the familiarity of home and to reconnect with family members once left behind.

The promptitude with which 8,049 youths and young men, many of whom in their early childhood and others as older lads came to Canada through British emigrating agencies, answered the call to the colours with their Canadian-born companions cannot be too largely commended. Their conduct has already created an entirely and wholly unexpected emphasis on the importance of the migration of juveniles to the dominions overseas.¹

CANADA'S INSPECTOR OF BRITISH IMMIGRATION AND RECEIVING HOMES, G. Bogue Smart, who had held this position since 1903, took great satisfaction in the efforts of juvenile immigrants. It was, after all, governmental officials such as Smart who drew upwards of 100,000 English youth to the dominion between 1869 and

1 G. Bogue Smart, Canada, Sessional Papers 25 (1918), Vol. 53 Department of the Interior, Pt. II Immigration, 34.

1925, and it was he who had encouraged many to return in aid of the empire when war was declared in 1914. Yet Smart was hardly alone in his desire to rectify so many “misfortunes of birth.”² The Sir John Middlemore Charitable Trust, formed in 1872, was one of a number of philanthropic organizations established in response to the needs of British youth trapped in poverty. Named for its chief benefactor, the first Baronet of Selly Oak and future parliamentarian for Birmingham North, his Children’s Emigration Homes for boys and girls was more than just a feeder for Canadian immigration to 1935: it reduced the burden of public welfare in Britain while simultaneously satisfying the need for inexpensive agricultural labour in Canada.³ Resettlement of indigent youth, however, was not without its challenges. While complaints about their suitability ranged from poor health and a lack of mental or emotional stability to a general apprehension regarding their separation from both family and home, there is some merit to Middlemore’s suggestion that life in the colonies was fundamentally better than life in the poorhouses of Birmingham and its environs.⁴

Canadian families were more than eager to accept these children into their homes, although their motives were sometimes less than altruistic. The demand for inexpensive labour was as intense in the Maritimes as it was in Ontario and the West. Between 1885 and 1916, Middlemore authorities distributed in excess of 3,000 children throughout the Maritime Provinces, most of them through its Fairview Receiving and Distribution Home in Halifax. Ranging in age from 2 to 17 years, more than half were sent to New Brunswick to serve as domestic servants and farm hands, tasks for which all but the hardest were ill-prepared and woefully unsuited. Many adapted to life in Canada. Others rejected their adoptive homes, opting to improve their fortunes in the United States or to return to Britain.⁵

Not surprisingly, Middlemore boys were highly enthusiastic in their support for military service when war was declared in 1914. Young, homesick, and sometimes desperate for something better than the back-breaking toil of farm labour, 54.1 per cent of eligible boys who had been placed in the province joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). By comparison, New Brunswickers as a whole produced 21,904 volunteers, representing a more modest 28.1 per cent of all eligible males.⁶

2 G. Bogue Smart, Canada, Sessional Papers 25 (1910), Vol. 44 Department of the Interior, Pt. II Immigration, 98.

3 G. Bogue Smart, Speech to the International Conference of Managers of the Reformatory and Refuge Union, Manchester, 16 June 1908, p. 7, RG 76, vol. 200, file 8391, pt. I, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

4 Some insight into Middlemore’s motivation is provided by his granddaughter, Dr. Joanna Middlemore-Malins, in her introduction to Paul Cadbury’s *One Hundred Years of Child Care* (Birmingham: The Middlemore Homes Committee, 1972), 6.

5 Quantitative data was extracted from the records of the Children’s Emigration Homes, a copy of which is held by Library and Archives Canada as MG 28 I 492, to determine the frequency and location of placements, trends in observed behaviour as reported by Middlemore authorities in their annual inspection reports, and the varying reasons for a child’s departure when it could be determined. Biological data was further cross-referenced against ship’s manifests, border crossing registers, census returns, and military records to discern patterns of movement and the extent to which Middlemore boys volunteered for military service.

6 Colonel A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1938), 50. Duguid does not provide the number of provincial volunteers, although underlying statistics suggest that they comprised a total of 27,061 men, less 5,157 called

While this stands as a remarkable achievement for a class of citizenry that few expected would ever find success, in many ways their efforts mirror the British-Canadian experience as a whole. The latter joined in large numbers, more so than their Canadian-born equivalents, and account for an overwhelming majority of both the first and second contingents that were sent to Europe in late 1914 and early 1915 respectively. For most British-born Canadians, economic imperative, imperial sentiment, and moral persuasion were strong motives for enlistment.⁷ Nearly forgotten in the surge to enlist, however, is a reason that differentiates juvenile emigrants from other British expatriates: for those who lived through the experience, the CEF was a means of returning to the familiarity of their former homes and reconnecting with lost family members. This theme runs through the core of the Middlemore experience.

Juvenile emigration has emerged as a topic of expanding interest among Canadian social historians eager to unlock the political characteristics of “child-saving” – the late-19th-century movement that effected the removal of tens of thousands of impoverished children from predominately urban environments to counter the effects of industrialization – and the psychological impact of familial separation on long-term social development. Joy Parr, a pioneer in the field of juvenile emigration, has noted several inconsistencies in public policy and organizational practice with regards to the emigration of children; despite the efforts of evangelical groups such as Britain’s Dr. Barnardo’s Homes to “save” children, boys and girls often suffered in Canada for want of personal identity and status. While acknowledging the evangelical foundation of juvenile emigration as laid out by Parr, Gillian Wagner stresses the evolutionary character of the movement towards the turn of the century. She concludes that the determination of emigrationists to infuse their work with imperialist sentiment – juvenile emigration and imperial expansion being essentially bound together – was no less damaging in its effects on the child but represented an altogether different attitude from the simple link between “child-saving” and religious duty. While Parr and Wagner share what is largely a negative outlook towards the movement, Roy Parker, as the most recent entry in the field, argues that the more harmful aspects of juvenile emigration have been largely overplayed. In spite of many criticisms, both contemporaneously and within the emerging historiography, emigration societies for Parker were merely a reflection of the social and political forces of their time.⁸

Sometimes lost in these interpretations, however, is the impact of juvenile emigrants upon, and their motivation towards, military service during the Great War.

up under the Military Service Act. For a wider range of statistics generated by the Department of National Defence, see RG 24, vol. 1842, GAQ 10-44, LAC.

7 Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 9.

8 Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Gillian Wagner, *Children of the Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982); Roy Parker, *Uprooted: The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada, 1867-1917* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008). The roots of modern criticism of the “child-saving” movement run well back into the 19th century and are well documented by all three scholars. Few contemporary sources, however, concentrate on the perceived effects of separation on the child, focusing instead on legal issues, the moral obligation of British authorities to care for its own people, and the economic impact that the loss of British youth to the colonies represented.

The late Victorian era may have marked the height of imperial emigration, but no parallels have yet been drawn to the reverse effect: that the call to arms in 1914 resulted in the voluntary return of thousands of British youth in Canadian uniforms. This was no mere fluke, and suggests a degree of agency that few historians have hitherto credited or explained. Even less has been written about juvenile emigration to Canada's Maritime Provinces prior to 1917, when wartime necessity closed trans-Atlantic shipping to immigration. The influence of Emma Stirling's Home and the Bristol Emigration Society, both of which operated within this region, remains relatively unknown, although New Brunswick's Cossar's Farm has recently started attracting some attention. One of the smallest of the Maritime organizations, George Cossar's training farm along the lower St. John River drew less than 300 young Scottish immigrants to the province between 1909 and 1916. As Marjory Harper explains, however, Cossar boys were culturally distinct from other juvenile emigrants: not only were they older and better trained than their contemporaries prior to settlement, but Cossar boys were all volunteers for emigration. Many even paid their own fare to Canada.⁹ Conspicuously absent from Harper's discussion, though, is the exceptional contribution of Cossar's Farm to the CEF or the influence that juvenile emigration might have had on New Brunswick's oft-maligned recruiting record between 1914 and 1918.¹⁰ The roots of that influence, however, extend well before war, to the very formation of the "child-saving" movement.

Like many large manufacturing centres of its time, Birmingham symbolized both the power of industrial and economic expansion and the social ills that accompanied it. From the time of its founding in 1872, Sir John Middlemore's Children's Emigration Homes for boys and girls was an organization intended to serve as an enhancement to existing municipal and private resources within that city. Determined to admit into his custody only the worst cases of poverty and neglect, Middlemore believed that emigration to Canada represented one of the few alternatives to a life of misery and crime on the streets of Birmingham. He also understood that this was hardly the ideal solution. While children could not legally be removed from Britain without their parents' consent, Middlemore was well aware of the effects of prolonged separation on family members. An air of permanency hung over every final good-bye: "When mothers and children were meeting for the last time on earth, [it] was as pathetic as life could present. After tea had been served, and a few speeches had been made, the parents and the children were left for a short time together . . . farewell kisses were exchanged, and the life-long separation was at length effected."¹¹ Few, Middlemore included, ever expected to see these children in Birmingham again.

New arrivals were directed exclusively to the Guthrie Receiving Home in London, Ontario, until 1885 when, commencing with a group of 16 boys and girls,

9 Marjory Harper, "Cossar's Colonists: Juvenile Migration to New Brunswick in the 1920s," *Acadiensis* XXVIII, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 47-65. See also Marjory Harper, *Emigration from Scotland between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

10 While detailed placement files have not survived, approximately half of the 276 Cossar boys settled in New Brunswick prior to 1917 are known to have joined the CEF, a rate that is commensurate with that of the Children's Emigration Homes.

11 Children's Emigration Homes, *Annual Report* (1882), 6.

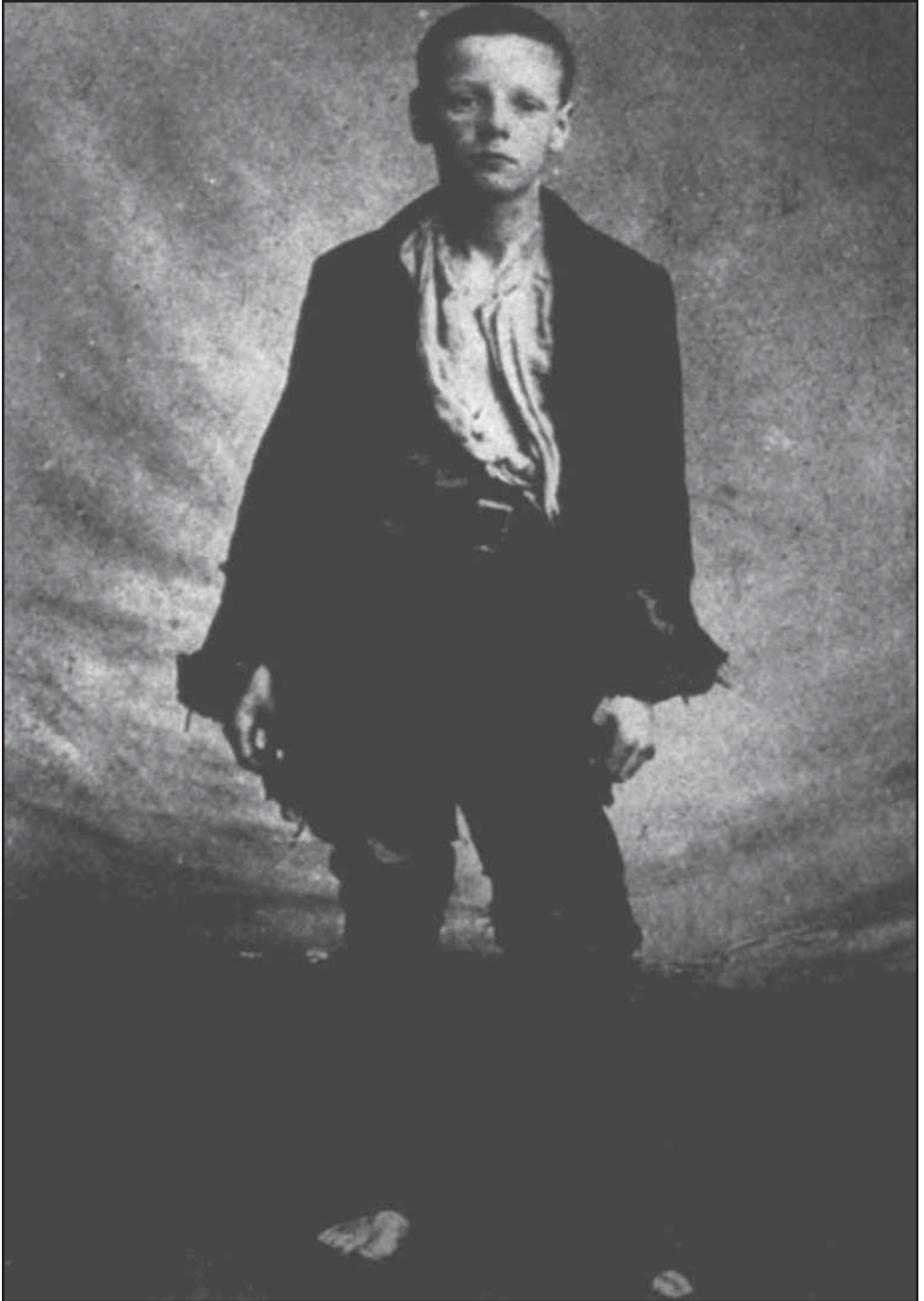


Figure 1: Intake photo, J.H. Eccleston, aged 10 in 1909.

Source: Eccleston, Annual Report for the Children's Emigration Homes, 1909, Middlemore Children's Emigration Homes fonds, MS 517/22, reel A-1994, LAC.

a small number of children were reallocated to New Brunswick for settlement on an annual basis. While such efforts were more experimental than systematic, a lack of local support for Middlemore children placed in Ontario forced the closing of the Guthrie Home and the subsequent redirection of all Middlemore children to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island in 1893. Without a distribution home of his own, however, Middlemore was forced to funnel most of his children through Emma Stirling's Home in the Annapolis Valley until the construction of Fairview in 1897.¹² Thereafter, upwards of 175 children arrived annually until emigration was cut-off by wartime exigencies in 1916. More than half of the 2,820 children received between 1893 and 1916 were settled in New Brunswick and, averaging just less than 12 years of age on arrival, two-thirds were boys.¹³

Stretching along an extended corridor between Moncton and Woodstock, the placement of Middlemore children followed a pattern that favoured rural, Protestant communities along the Intercolonial Railway. York County, being the site of the very first arrivals in 1885, was also the most popular and accounted for 28 per cent of all provincial placements. More distant Catholic enclaves, including the north shore counties and urban Saint John, were largely neglected. Children arrived in late May or early June of each year and were routinely accompanied by George Jackson, the homes' long-time Birmingham secretary, or Sir John Middlemore himself. Placements were facilitated in large part by local clergy, who helped to identify and register qualifying families as potential employers, and leading local citizens such as Colonel George J. Maunsell of Fredericton, who acted as superintendent of placement for New Brunswick during the organization's formative years. Standards were fairly strict: employers were to provide clean room and board as well as fair compensation in the form of wages and/or clothing; it was understood that children were to be provided the opportunity to attend both church and school, and would not be overworked; employers undertook to provide medical care at their own expense where and as required; and, while discipline was hardly discouraged, neither physical nor emotional abuse were tolerated.¹⁴ As Fairview Manager William Ray reminded one employer who used a horsewhip on his ward, "It was mutually understood that this sort of thing must not under any circumstances be resorted [to]."¹⁵

According to Middlemore scholar Patricia Roberts-Pichette, considerable effort went into the selection and placement of both boys and girls from the Children's Emigration Homes. Applicants seeking children, who normally exceeded the number of placements in any given year, were expected to demonstrate the economic means

12 Parker, *Uprooted*, 31.

13 By province, 1,506 of 2,820 (53.4 per cent) of children were placed in New Brunswick, 1,146 (40.6 per cent) in Nova Scotia, and 147 (5.2 per cent) in Prince Edward Island. The remainder were settled elsewhere in Canada, Maine, or locations unknown.

14 These standards are clearly spelled out within Middlemore's Settlement Agreement. While certainly open to abuse – Parker states, for instance, that education was a low priority among Barnardo boys – anecdotal evidence throughout Middlemore files suggests the exact opposite: Middlemore authorities in Canada were deeply concerned with the overall well-being of children in their care and took remedial steps to correct deficiencies when noted. See Parker, *Uprooted*, 144.

15 William Ray, Report, 12 Aug 1916, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/298, file George J.C. Morris (1913), LAC.

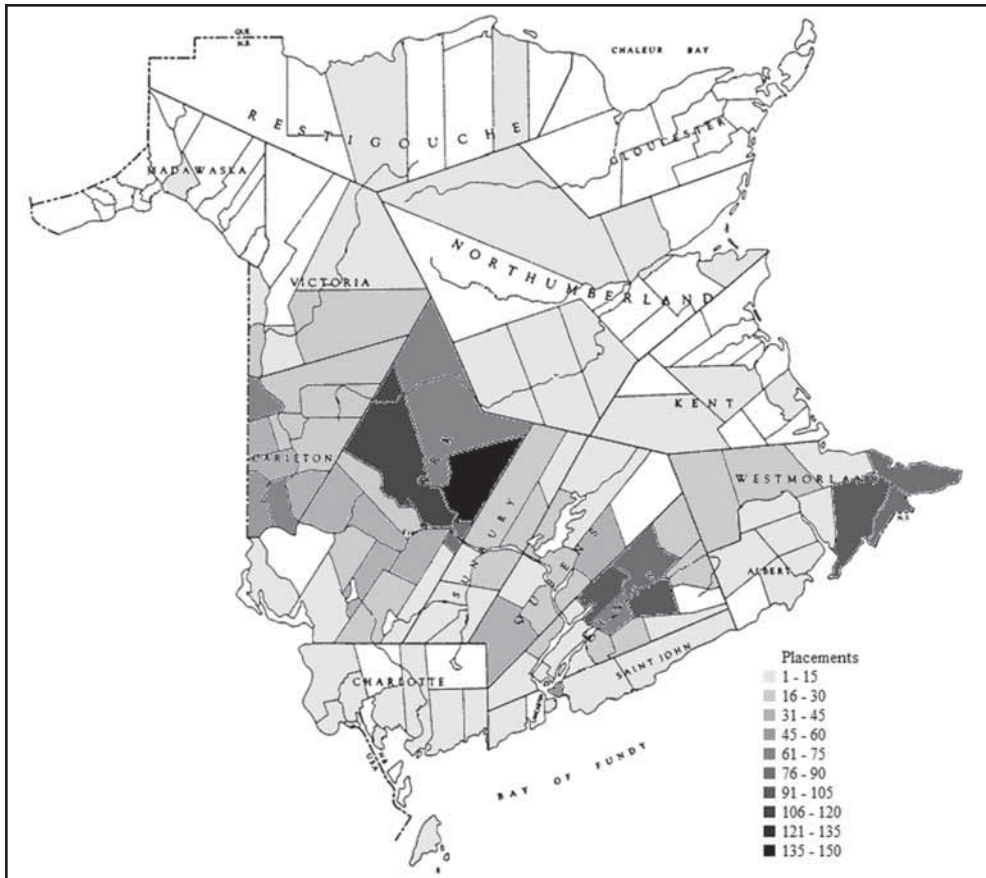


Figure 2: Distribution of Middlemore children in the Province of New Brunswick, 1893-1916.

Source: Open source map, with overlay shading to denote placement density by author.

at their disposal to care for these children. Furthermore, Middlemore was insistent that families be free of any potential rivalry between natural-born and immigrant children.¹⁶ Queens County, located midway between Fredericton and Saint John along the St. John River, provides an interesting case study for the 107 boys who were placed there before 1917. While coal mining would emerge as an important local industry during the Great War years, farming was still the dominant economic activity in the county, comprising 73 per cent of households in 1911 and 88 per cent of all successful Middlemore applications prior to 1914. Although some boys were placed on small farms or with families that rented rather than owned their own

16 Patricia Roberts-Pichette, "Great Canadian Expectations: The Middlemore Experience" (unpublished manuscript, 2013), chap. 6.

property, five of every six were placed in households that reported land holdings in excess of \$500.¹⁷ Approximately 12 per cent of boys were employed in farming operations that exceeded \$2,500. With regards to the presence of rival working-age males, Middlemore boys residing in Queens County were almost one-and-a-half times more likely to be settled among families that were composed of young children or no children at all. Immigrant boys were a particularly common feature among homes with unmarried men, childless couples, and older couples who had no other sources of labour (including male domestics and farm hands over the age of 12).¹⁸ So far as Middlemore was concerned, the most desirable households were those that provided the greatest benefit to the child to mature and the best advantage to the owner to assist in the day-to-day operations of the farm.

Other issues guided the placement of children. Religious instruction, for one, was a sensitive matter for Middlemore officials. While every effort was made to match employers and employees of the same faith, mistakes were not uncommon and often provoked a sectarian response. When Thomas Griffiths was erroneously placed in an Anglican home, the Catholic Emigration Association of Birmingham was quick to intervene with local clergy, demanding his immediate removal or to have George Jackson appear before a magistrate to answer a charge of breach of undertaking.¹⁹ Substantial effort was also made to keep siblings within reasonable reach of each other – if not within the same county, then within the same province. Close settlement was far from guaranteed, although exceptions were rare and imposed only when proximity disrupted the development of normal household relationships.

But what exactly constituted a “normal” household relationship? One of the early goals of the Children’s Immigration Homes was to promote adoption, particularly among younger arrivals, even if such a practice was officially discouraged in later years. It is equally clear that, whether based upon legal or moral authority, adoption was an impermanent concept. If some of those children who were not adopted eventually found acceptance within a home as one of the family, then it was likewise true that many of those officially adopted ultimately found their stay unwelcome. Jackson and his Fairview managers were free to remove children from homes they considered unfit, but many more adoptees were returned for no other reason than having misbehaved or for being unfit for the type of work expected of them. In reality, the process of adoption did not always substitute for the ordinary expectations of the employer-employee relationship that already existed.

17 New Brunswick, Queens County Assessment Lists, 1911, RS 154 C3, Public Archives of New Brunswick. When cross-tabulated against the 1911 Dominion census and Middlemore’s case files, 53.4 per cent of Queens County’s 2,234 households reported taxable real estate of \$500 or more, compared to 84.3 per cent of its 121 traceable applicants.

18 Curtis Mainville, “Communities at War: A Case Study of Queens County, New Brunswick, 1914-1918” (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2012). Data collected for this study were used as a basis for comparison with the subset of households that applied for and subsequently employed Middlemore boys. In total, 76.5 per cent of all Middlemore boys were settled in households having no other working-age male but the household head himself. These households, however, comprised only 52.3 per cent of county households.

19 Reverend George V. Hudson, Catholic Emigration Association of Birmingham, to Reverend Carney, Vicar of Fredericton, 2 May 1916, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/297, file Thomas Griffiths (1913), LAC.

That relationship, however, could be a very positive one. Middlemore boys stayed on average just over 44 months in each New Brunswick placement, permitting many to acculturate to Canadian norms and to develop distinctly Canadian relationships and ties. J.T. Danks, for one, resisted his mother's call to come home and embraced the farming lifestyle of his two Maritime placements.²⁰ Arthur Hudson arrived in 1909, moved to Calgary before the war, and joined the CEF in 1916 – only to return to Westmorland County, where he eventually employed his own Middlemore boys in farming. Persistence and a desire to pursue higher learning may have allowed Henry Hill to follow the ministry and J.T. Cook to earn a doctorate in education at Harvard University, but it was unexpected economic opportunities that allowed young men of substantially little means to advance themselves. Alfred Makepeace, one of four siblings to be settled along the St. John River valley, married his employer's daughter – a former Middlemore girl herself – and was one of several boys who were fortunate to inherit the family farm. Charles Turbill offers a similarly interesting story. Having run away several times early in his placement for what authorities described were bouts of loneliness, Turbill came to accept his situation as well as an increasing share of his aged employers' crop. They had no children of their own and, according to Middlemore reports, treated him like a son. Turbill was eventually sent to Business College in Maine, and upon his return he assumed complete responsibility for his employer's farm. By 1918, and at only 21 years of age, he was considered the sole means of support for his "family."²¹

Successes were plentiful, but the transition from a life on the streets of Birmingham to the farms of New Brunswick was not easy. In spite of G. Bogue Smart's insistence that "Canada must not be made an asylum for children who have evinced a criminal tendency," Middlemore boys exhibited behaviours that were frequently at odds with Canadian sensibilities and norms. Approximately one-fifth suffered from what inspectors or employers described as unacceptable behaviour, including accusations of rape, theft, and arson. Fairview Manager J. Sterling King, hoping to draw the attention of Canadian authorities to lax immigration standards, caused considerable embarrassment to the Fairview Home by publishing several notable examples and was fired for his troubles in 1914. The resulting investigation by immigration officials led to the conclusion that although it was never Middlemore's intention to mislead the Canadian government, the "return to the Home of unsatisfactory children, when avoidable, would appear not to have been encouraged."²² Chief among employers' complaints was perceived laziness. Considering that most employers expected due reciprocity for the wages they paid, failure on the part of boys to satisfy them, even after a lengthy period of adjustment, generally resulted in dismissal. Yet not all employment

20 Harriet Turney to George Jackson, 8 November 1911, and Danks to Miss Jackson, 24 January 1912, MS 517/288, file James Thomas Danks (1910), LAC.

21 Frank Gerow, Report, 16 July 1906, and J. Sterling King, Report, 18 March 1912, MS 517/277, file Charles Victor Turnbull [Turbill] (1905), LAC; see also Charles V. Turbill, Application for Leave of Absence Without Pay, 12 June 1918, RG 150-3, Canadian Expeditionary Force Personnel Files, acc. 1992-93/166, vol. 9820-55, LAC.

22 G. Bogue Smart to L. Lloyd, Superintendent, Fairview Home, 5 January 1905, RG 76, vol. 62, file 2869, pt. II, LAC; G. Bogue Smart, Memorandum of Findings, undated but probably October 1914, RG 76, vol. 62, file 2869, pt. IV, LAC.

standards were high. A prevailing sentiment to be found in placement files is one of a willingness to allow the child to overcome his or her faults. While generally successful, this type of situation also led to clashes between employer and employee. With age and skill development, children expected to be paid more. Employers, on the other hand, resisted paying full wages for what they considered to be only mediocre effort.

It was the role of Middlemore's Canadian inspectors, such as Frank A. Gerow, to mediate disagreements between employer and employee, and to remove the child from a home at the request of either party or at the inspector's own initiative if the situation required it. Rarely, however, did a child stay with only one employer. Over the course of their guardianship, Middlemore boys were settled an average of 1.5 times. This was only half the rate of Ontario's Barnardo boys, a rate that Parr attributes to the practice of moving children from poor farming districts to more prosperous regions as they matured and their labour value increased. This pattern does not appear to have prevailed in New Brunswick. Reasons for removal varied, but gravitated towards a number of common themes. Employers often requested a change when the child proved insolent, difficult to train, or posed a threat to others within the household. In other cases, there was a lingering perception that home children were physically incapable of the difficult work required of them in Canada or simply did not possess the mental capacity to learn. These complaints were not exclusive to the Middlemore organization: Parr noted similar observations and trends in her study of Barnardo's operations.²³ It should not come as a surprise, then, that a change in placements often improved a child's deportment. Considered lazy and impertinent at one location, a child might be found cooperative and helpful by a new employer – even if the effect was at times short-lived. Much depended upon the employer's expectations of the placement and not the child's.

Invariably, some employers looked upon these placements as nothing more than a form of social welfare in which they themselves sought to secure the best possible terms. Frank Tamlyn of Kings County, for instance, "concluded that he would sooner have a discontented lad on his hands than part with the pittance" of two dollars per month to his sixteen year-old employee, for "it would be unwise to give the boy so much money to waste."²⁴ Reduced to an arithmetical formula that Parker labels "a child's labour value," Parr likewise observed that such institutionalized servitude often created within children a state of uncertainty and isolation.²⁵ Having resided six years in the province with two different families, William Starling was clear about his place in the employer-employee relationship: "I am a stranger in a strange land and I have a hard time to live and work like a slave every day of my life and get nothing for it."²⁶ Middlemore authorities were not oblivious to the difficulties faced by some boys under their care, although it is equally clear that Jackson and his Canadian managers expected a certain degree of conformity to their

23 Parr, *Labouring Children*, 88, 108.

24 William Ray, Report, 7 September 1918, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/300, file Albert Edward Seymour (1914), LAC.

25 Parker, *Uprooted*, 138; Parr, *Labouring Children*, 82, 101-03.

26 William Starling to George Jackson, 1 July 1914, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/285, file William Starling (1908), LAC.

new circumstances.²⁷ A child who was cooperative, adaptable, and did not place too many demands upon the employer or the Fairview Home would likely have found acceptance within the household. Those children who were dissatisfied with their lot had few options but to change placements or strike out “on their own account” if they were over the age of 18, for employers were at a distinct advantage and would not tolerate a deteriorating situation for very long.²⁸

An overwhelming sense of isolation and continuous pressure from home to return to England may help to explain why so many children under the age of 18 ran away. Whether alone or in the company of others, for days at a time or permanently, this inability to settle down represented a significant reason for terminating a placement – second only to having reached the age of majority.²⁹ The idea of running away did not always translate into a desire to return home, although the connection was often inescapable: William Ames “says that he does not like the country and that he wants to go back to England,” reported Gerow in one annual inspection report in 1908. Only days earlier Gerow had come to the same conclusion regarding 15-year-old James Mudie, of Kings County: “This boy has a mania for running away. I had a talk with him. He told me that he wanted to get back to England and I do not doubt but that he will go the very first opportunity he gets.” Runaway behaviour, however, was often fraught with danger. While Ames was ultimately successful in his bid to get back home, the wayward Mudie was not as he drowned while at large under an assumed name only one year later.³⁰

Ambitions aside, the whole idea of repatriation was inherently uneven. Children who committed a serious crime in Canada or who were deemed to be so incorrigible as to make further placements impossible were often returned to England to be dealt with there. In most other cases, however, it was an entirely proactive process. Over the course of months, often years, both parent and child sought means to save enough money to pay for return passage – whether approved by Middlemore authorities or not. While the number of Middlemore boys who ultimately succeeded in returning to Britain by their own means is difficult to determine, the onset of war presented further opportunity to pursue this end. Moreover, it did so in a manner that was compatible with the goals of both emigrationists and government officials alike. While George Jackson and G. Bogue Smart took a close interest in the settlement of

27 J. Sterling King, “The children take some time to get used to our ways and customs. They are little strangers in a strange land and we ask for patience and kindness also strictness and correction . . .” (information circular, c. 1912), RG 76, vol. 62, file 2869, pt. III, LAC.

28 Technically speaking, Middlemore authorities were responsible for their children to the age of 21, a relationship described by G. Bogue Smart as *in loco parentis* or “in the place of a parent.” In practice, however, William Ray and others understood that legal guardianship was largely ineffective past the age of 18. See G. Bogue Smart, Speech to the International Conference of Managers of the Reformatory and Refuge Union, 16 June 1908, 14.

29 For those New Brunswick placements where the reason for termination could be identified, reaching the age of 18 and striking out on one’s account represented 646 of 823 or 78.5 per cent of final terminations. Running away was a distant second, numbering 126 or 15.3 per cent. Runaway behaviour was not an insignificant problem within the Children’s Emigration Homes, representing slightly less than one in every five placements in New Brunswick.

30 Frank Gerow, Report, 25 August 1908, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/276, file William Ames (1905), LAC; Gerow, Report, 18 August 1908; Sterling Parlee to Gerow, 16 November 1908, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/273, file James Mudie (1903), LAC.

children prior to 1914, they recognized that the demands of empire served an even higher purpose: a call to arms that could not be ignored and that Middlemore boys – at least the 388 from the Province of New Brunswick who volunteered for service – were only too willing to heed.³¹

With no perceived shortage of men willing to fight, the period between 1914 and 1916 has often been characterized as one of continuous enlistment rather than active recruitment. While this was certainly true of Ontario and the West, New Brunswick's enthusiasm for war has more often been criticized than applauded.³² On the one hand, Maritime out-migration had robbed the province of its ablest youth, including at least 115 Middlemore boys who found their way to the United States. For the majority of the province's youth who remained in New Brunswick, however, there was no shortage of work in the years leading up to war and little incentive to toil for a soldier's wage of only \$1.10 per day.³³ Demographic and economic factors aside, this did not stop militia units in Saint John, Fredericton, and Sussex from opening their doors to potential recruits even before war was declared on 4 August 1914. The subsequent formation of the 12th Battalion, CEF, followed closely by the "Fighting 26th," capped a pell-mell effort at regional representation within the first and second contingents respectively. Although the former would eventually draw men from across Quebec and the Maritimes, the latter was made up almost entirely of New Brunswick men. Additional infantry and artillery units connected to the province

31 In total, 1,058 males called New Brunswick their final placement, of which 344 were deemed ineligible for military service in Canada based upon their age, medical condition, or subsequent removal to the United States or Britain. Of the 714 considered eligible, 389 or 54.1 per cent volunteered for service. A further 25 (or 2.3 per cent) were conscripted under the Military Service Act of 1917. By comparison, Canadian volunteers amounted to 39.2 per cent; New Brunswick, according to statistics provided by C.A. Sharpe in "Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918: A Regional Analysis," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 15-29, topped 42.2 per cent.

32 CEF recruitment has been the subject of a number of recent Canadian studies: James St. G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (1989): 1-26; R.C. Brown and Donald Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting the CEF, 1914-1918," in *Reappraisals in Canadian History: Post Confederation, 2nd Edition*, ed. C.M. Wallace, R.M. Bray, and A.D. Gilbert (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1992), 300-19; and Mary MacKinnon, "Canadian Railway Workers and World War I Military Service," *Labour/Le Travail* 40, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 213-34. Several studies have focused on Maritime enlistment. Ian McKay, "The 1910s: The Stillborn Triumph of Progressive Reform," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, ed. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993), 192-229, and David MacKenzie, "Eastern Approaches: Maritime Canada and Newfoundland," in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David MacKenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 350-76, remain the most outspoken critics of New Brunswick's lackluster record, pointing to out-migration and the province's underwhelming recruiting effort as the likely culprits. Andrew Theobald, *The Bitter Harvest of War: New Brunswick and the Conscription Crisis of 1917* (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2008), on the other hand, points his finger squarely at the state of anglophone-francophone relations in the province and its impact on recruiting. Only Benjamin T.E. Fitch, "Doing Their Duty: Politics and Recruitment in the Maritimes During World War I" (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 2003) takes a more neutral view of New Brunswick during the Great War.

33 The *Canada Labour Gazette* illustrates the changing face of the Canadian economy, while affirming that New Brunswick fared well during the 1912-1914 recession.

would be formed, slowly perhaps, over the course of the war; this was aided, in no small part, by the expansion of military training facilities at Sussex and a steady stream of both Canadian and British-born recruits, including juvenile emigrants.

On the surface, Middlemore boys were far removed from Canadian attitudes and did not fit neatly into the mould of a typical soldier. If CEF volunteers tended to be older, urban, single, foreign-born males – a paradigm that has come to dominate historical analysis of wartime recruitment in Canada – Middlemore volunteers were extremely young, averaging just under 22 years of age at enlistment compared to the national average of 26.³⁴ Furthermore, the vast majority of these immigrants were employed in farming and lumbering, two industries that were far removed from city recruiters and the large pool of urban volunteers. Other than to suggest a degree of impulsiveness or an indifference to agriculture, these differences imply that motives for enlistment are considerably more complex than some historians would allow. Mark Moss, for instance, has taken great pains to demystify the “culture of manliness” before 1914. In asking “What young man would not have jumped at the chance to demonstrate his manliness in the great adventure?” however, it is far too easy to conflate his observations concerning recruitment in Ontario with the Canadian experience as a whole.³⁵ Yet, as Barbara Wilson and Adam Crerar so ably point out, not all Canadians, even those from Ontario, were driven by Anglo-Protestant, central-Canadian, middle-class ideals of imperialism.³⁶ Middlemore boys may have shared some of the patriotic zeal of other volunteers, but their needs were often subordinate to the martial undercurrent that characterized Canadian society in the years leading up to the Great War. Consequently, Mike O’Brien’s examination of competing ideals of manhood as a product of middle class orientation, particularly as it relates to the sense of belonging that those from the lower classes derived from military service, is much closer to the Middlemore experience.³⁷

It was, after all, no secret to those already serving the colours that Canada’s pre-war military force – both on land and at sea – was dominated by British expatriates.³⁸ Aboard the newly acquired HMCS *Niobe*, several Middlemore boys counted themselves as pioneers of Canada’s fledgling navy. Many others had been drawn to the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR), the dominion’s lone Permanent Force infantry unit based primarily in Fredericton and Halifax. One of 20 boys who are known to have joined that regiment, Private William Masters, who was never shy in expressing his

34 Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 279. The relative youth of Middlemore boys can be explained a number of ways. While there is no escaping the fact that the disproportionate number of underage recruits tended to reduce the average age of Middlemore volunteers, as a demographic group they were also much younger than Canadians generally.

35 Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27.

36 Barbara M. Wilson, *Ontario and the First World War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1977); Adam Crerar, “Ontario and the Great War,” in MacKenzie, *Canada and the First World War*, 230-71.

37 Mike O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914,” *Labour / Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998): 127.

38 Wagner suggests that military service provided a rare opportunity to break with their former lives and begin anew for those boys who could not adjust to farming. See Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 126.

desire to return to England, was cognizant of the fact that many of his full-time colleagues shared a common bond: "I think the Canadian Army is [*sic*] mostly consists of Englishmen and a lot of them are Middlemore boys."³⁹ This would have included such men as Private John Henry Brookes, who had deserted the RCR only to rejoin the colours at the outbreak of the war, and Private François Grandame, a former barracks warden for the infantry's Montreal garrison.⁴⁰ The most notable of these professional soldiers, however, was seven-year veteran Herbert Endall, later regimental sergeant major of the 26th Battalion and recipient of both the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Medal. Although he held a prominent position with New Brunswick's premier unit over the last 12 months of the war, largely unspoken was the fact that Endall's rise to the pinnacle of non-commissioned service came at the expense of his predecessors – all of whom had been killed at the Front.

Middlemore boys professed an even greater affinity for Canada's part-time militia. In the years leading up to 1914, the 71st York Regiment was a haven for military enthusiasts who wanted to serve the colours. While not a requirement for enlistment, militia experience tended to open the door for many who were anxious to join the first and second contingents. More than half of the 90 Middlemore boys who enlisted before April 1915, for instance, claimed prior military service. Few would have exceeded the seven years that Private William Grimes spent with the 74th New Brunswick Rangers in Sussex, but most could easily boast more than the three weeks that Gunner Arthur William Slade passed with the 3rd Canadian Garrison Artillery in Saint John. Like many others who were eager to join, some claimed time for service they obviously had not rendered. Battery Sergeant-Major Timothy Wilson, two-time winner of the Military Medal and recipient of the Meritorious Service Medal, claimed a total of 12 years experience with two different New Brunswick units, but was a mere 22 years of age upon enlistment. That he did not even bother to lie about his age must surely have drawn a raised eyebrow or two in Valcartier as he attempted to pass muster. The aforementioned Private Masters, however, provided what was undoubtedly the biggest white lie to military recruiters: while there is little doubt that he completed three years with the RCR, it was only wishful thinking on his part to have claimed another six years with the Imperial Army – unless he truly believed he could pass for 29 instead of his actual age of 22 when he enlisted in 1915.

It is difficult to believe that recruiters would be so trusting of such exaggerations, for enlistment standards before 1916 left little room for interpretation. Restricted to able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45, infantry volunteers were further

39 William Masters to George Jackson, undated but probably 1913, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/285, file William Masters (1908), LAC.

40 "Former R.C.R. Member Here Dies From His Wounds: John Henry Brooks Rejoined the Regiment After the Outbreak of War: Reported Missing But Was Killed in Action," *Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton), 20 May 1916. Grandame, born to a Belgian father and an English mother from Birmingham, was one of only a few Middlemore boys whose cultural and linguistic origins lay outside of England. Preferring to pass his postwar years in Montreal rather than New Brunswick, where he had married his English-born wife and where many of his siblings remained, Grandame perished prematurely in 1924. See Index to New Brunswick Marriages, 1909, RS 141 B7, no. 1901, Public Archives of New Brunswick; 1891 Census, RG 12, piece 2396, folio 78, p. 51, Public Records Office (Britain); and, Québec Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1967, online database, Ancestry.com.

limited to those who stood 5 feet 3 inches and higher and whose maximum chest expansion measured no less than 33½ inches.⁴¹ Physical restrictions aside, lying about one's age almost seemed to be a rite of passage for Middlemore boys wanting to enlist. At least one-fifth of all who joined the CEF voluntarily were under the age of 18 at the time of enlistment.⁴² So close to meeting eligibility requirements, perhaps these boys felt that the war would pass them by before they reached the age of lawful consent. Arriving in Canada only months before the outbreak of war, Albert Stanbridge ran away from his employer to join the 236th Battalion in 1916. He told recruiting officials that he was 19, but in reality had turned 16 only that very day. Harry Styche, having enlisted under the alias Charles Henry Smith, was only 15 years of age when he reached the front lines in 1916. He was but one of many Middlemore boys to use the name of their employers, their mother's maiden name, or entirely fictitious pseudonyms to cajole their way into the CEF.

Complicating the recruiting process was the fact that boys under the age of 18 required their employer's consent, eliciting different responses that depended primarily on the strength of the employer-employee relationship and the demand for wartime labour. In spite of labour shortages, some employers genuinely supported their employee's desire to enlist by assisting many of those who did not possess birth certificates by verifying their names and identities to military recruiters. Other employers gave their permission simply to rid themselves of an unwanted burden. Perhaps they hoped that the military would somehow instill desired values of discipline in these boys when they themselves had failed to do. Sydney Buswell was of particular concern to Middlemore authorities. After Buswell had dissatisfied four different employers and run away from a fifth, George Jackson concluded that only the military "would make him work & possibly make a man of him."⁴³ Permission, however, was not always forthcoming. Many employers felt that their interests would be better served if their employees stayed on the farm, although they were hard-pressed to stop them from leaving. William Kirk was intercepted at Fredericton and returned to his employer's farm at Taymouth, just north of the city. This was hardly the outcome he had anticipated given the number of youth from his community who were permitted to enlist:

I was to the city myself this spring and enlist for the 65th Siege Batty, Mounted, and was passed by the doctors having not one thing wrong with me. I stood 6 ft. 7 ins. in my bare feet and was sworn in by a man called [Sergeant] Maj. Brewer, and was to done [*sic*] the khaki next day when my master came to the city and got my discharge because it was his desire that I should stay home and help him farm. Still I have been discontented since.⁴⁴

41 "Night Lettergram to all Officers Commanding Divisions and Districts," 6 August 1914, in Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces*, Appendix 44, p. 37.

42 For an in-depth examination of underage enlistment, see Tim Cook, "'He was determined to go': Underage Soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 41, no. 81 (May 2008): 41-74.

43 George Jackson to William Ray, 30 October 1914, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/106, Letterbook, LAC.

44 Children's Emigration Homes, *Annual Report* (1918), 9.

William Hayes, rejected by recruiters as underage, was only convinced to return to his former service when it was pointed out to him that his employer was “very much in need of [the] boy’s services and agree[d] to pay him reasonable wage if he will stay with him.”⁴⁵ As the latter case suggests, inequities that may have existed before the war with regards to the paying of wages were frequently resolved by the acute shortage of labour that resulted from the prolongation of war and by the pressure for greater farm production within the province.

In the hectic months of 1915 and 1916, Prime Minister Borden’s ever-expanding wartime commitment, from an initial contribution of one division to half a million men, demanded a broad rethinking of recruitment policy: physical standards were systematically eased, recruiting leagues exercised greater authority in their search for volunteers, and recruiters themselves – often at the behest of unit commanders – exercised wider discretion in the selection of men.⁴⁶ As one Fredericton recruiter noted, “It seems too bad to let all this enthusiasm for service go to loss.”⁴⁷ Indeed, it seemed, if a strapping farm boy looked old enough to join then he was most certainly old enough to fight. These feelings were shared by Middlemore authorities.

William Ray, a former Middlemore boy himself, was not unsympathetic to the feelings of underage boys who wanted to enlist. As the one-time inspector for New Brunswick and Fairview manager after 1914, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the war and facilitated underage enlistment when it served the interests of both employer and employee. When the two conflicted, Ray likened himself to a neutral observer who was frequently forced to weigh the consequences of supporting an underage enlistment against the likelihood that a boy might abscond in any case.⁴⁸ He realized, for instance, that there was no home from which Percy Mason would not run away if given the chance. Rather than watch him hang around the army barracks in Halifax, Ray convinced military authorities to enlist Mason in 1916 “with the understanding that if later it was found impossible to do anything with him, we would take charge of him.”⁴⁹ Mason was only 14 years of age. Likewise,

45 William Ray, Report, 4 September 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/292, file William Hayes (1911), LAC.

46 Numerous historians have dealt with the evolving demands of politics on Canada’s wartime commitments: J.L. Granatstein, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980); Ronald G. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1986); and Stephen J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

47 Sergeant-Major H.T. Brewer to the Assistant Adjutant General, Military District 7, Recruiting Instructions (Generally), 2 April 1918, RG 24-C-8, vol. 4581, file 35A-1-1, LAC.

48 William Ray to George Jackson, 16 January 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/108, Letterbook, LAC. William Ray entered into a rather heated debate with George Jackson concerning the enlistment of underage boys. Jackson, Middlemore’s trusted secretary, insisted that no boy under the age of 18 be allowed to enlist. Ray, however, made it quite clear that this position was impossible to enforce given the lax attitude of Canadian recruiters and the perception that should he exercise this authority too frequently he might lose all credibility in the minds of those boys who were eager to enlist.

49 William Ray, Report, 28 February 1916, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/298, file Percy Mason (1913), LAC.

Benjamin Thomas was too young to join the CEF in August 1918, but was permitted to serve in Home Defence with the full knowledge of Middlemore officials:

Boy became discontented and was determined to enlist — employer did everything he could to persuade the lad from taking the step — a few days ago boy informed employer that he was going to join the Army — if not permitted to do so of his own free will, would run off — employer after considering the situation concluded that there was no alternative other than for boy to enlist, consequently drove him to railway station and procured ticket for his passage to St. John after wiring us of what had transpired — we could see no way of adjusting the situation, hence concurred with the arrangements — learned from Mrs. Huggard that boy had passed a satisfactory examination and had been detailed for Home defence with a battalion quartered at St. John, N.B.⁵⁰

Although Canadian officials may have turned a blind eye to underage recruits, the same cannot be said of command elements overseas. Although rarely repatriated, many boys who were discovered to be underage were removed from front line duty and sent to one of the several labour battalions marshalling in Britain or the Young Soldiers Battalion (YSB) at Buxton. Here they trained, received formal education, and waited patiently for their 19th birthday, when Canadian officials would allow them to return to France again.⁵¹ George Wicks Jones was among the first to join the CEF. A fairly large boy for his age, he was barely 15 years old when he was assigned to the 15th Battalion in 1914 and lived in constant fear of being discovered: “I am known to be the youngest in the Brigade at present & the people and home are getting a little anxious about me and are going to tell my age to the Comanding [*sic*] Officer.”⁵² He was not betrayed. Less fortunate — depending upon one’s perspective — was the case of Private Victor Parr. Professing to be born in 1899, he was relegated to the YSB upon his arrival in England in 1917. While he was denied the opportunity to fight in France, no one realized — including Parr himself — that he had actually been born in 1897 and so had been eligible to serve the whole time.⁵³ Such was the experience of those who sometimes had difficulty proving their age.

50 William Ray, Report, 4 September 1918, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/300, file Benjamin Thomas (1914), LAC.

51 Under existing regulations, the minimum enlistment age of 18 years did not change for the duration of the war. Differing British standards and the need to provide additional training to newly arrived Canadian soldiers, however, meant that few who enlisted after 1916 would be sent to France before reaching their 19th birthday. See Cook, “He was determined to go’,” 51.

52 George Wicks Jones to George Jackson, 25 November 1916, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/289, file George W. Jones (1910), LAC.

53 Victor James Parr, RG 150-3, acc. 1992-93/166, vol. 7608-12, LAC. Originally assigned to the RCR, Parr was reassigned to the YSB in December 1917 at the recorded age of 18. In spite of the fact that no official birth record was ever filed, immigration records and Middlemore’s own files suggest that he was born two years earlier than the date he provided recruiting officials. Although he listed his mother, then residing in Birmingham, as his next of kin, it does not appear as though any effort was made to correct the discrepancy.

Motives for enlistment were as varied as they were complex. It would be foolish to deny that many Middlemore boys were struck by a deep sense of patriotism and the need to do their “bit” for King and country. Having moved to Saskatchewan only a year or two before the war, Alfred Locke transferred what was a moderately productive farm to his younger brother so he could go to the front.⁵⁴ Charles Underwood, who settled in New Brunswick in 1909, expressed sorrow at leaving Canada, but felt it his duty “to Fight for the Mother Country.”⁵⁵ The most unusual story of persistence, however, belongs to stowaway David Gibbons. Private Gibbons, an underage enlistee of the 26th Battalion, was discovered seasick and dishevelled aboard the HMS *Caledonia* as it transported the unit to England in 1915. It would have been far too easy for Commanding Officer Lieutenant-Colonel J.A. McAvity to send Gibbons back to Canada, but many of his officers secretly commended the boy’s resolve. In certain ways it reflected their own determination to serve both king and country. In spite of his “childish face and youthful bearing,” Gibbons was sent to France, distinguished himself in combat, was promoted twice, and died a valued member of the battalion in 1917, all before having reached his 18th birthday.⁵⁶

Other Middlemore boys felt peer pressure to join the service. Walter Brown fell in with “one of the lads he came out from England with” who had enlisted, wrote his employer; even though he was turned down by military authorities on account of his defective eye, George Morris felt similarly called upon to join when many of the boys from his community of Northampton began to enlist.⁵⁷ But not all pressure was overt. Coming into continuous contact with each other at school and at church, Middlemore boys formed a tight community and were keenly aware that other boys within their county were enlisting. Many of those who were eligible to join merely wished to follow in the footsteps of the few friends they had. In a letter to Middlemore authorities written in 1916, Thomas Eades, who at that point had been rejected by recruiters twice on medical grounds, listed with pride all of the other boys of Debec, New Brunswick, who had already enlisted. Determined to enlist, his persistence paid off when he was drawn into one of the province’s forestry companies and sent to Britain in 1917.⁵⁸ Other boys were influenced by the example of their brothers and fathers who were serving at the front. Sent to Canada in 1911, Howard Smith had not planned on returning to England until after the war but felt compelled to do so soon when one of his brothers was killed and another gassed in France.⁵⁹ Revenge was certainly a strong motivation. Inflamed by the death of his own brothers, no one was more determined to get to the front than Walter Ballard:

54 Children’s Emigration Homes, *Annual Report* (1914), 4.

55 Charles Underwood to George Jackson, 18 October 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/287, file Charles Underwood (1909), LAC.

56 “Corp. D.E. Gibbons of Sussex Made of Heroic Metal. Boy Hero of 26th Stowed Away Twice to Get Overseas,” *Kings County Record* (Sussex, NB), 27 July 1917.

57 G.E. Hornbrook to William Ray, 2 May 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/299, file Walter Brown (1914), LAC.

58 Thomas Eades to George Jackson, 7 December 1916, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/284, file Thomas Eades (1908), LAC.

59 Howard Smith to George Jackson, 19 November 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/293, file Howard Smith (1911), LAC.

It was in the spring of 1915, while following a plow over the land, that he received a message that two of his brothers had been killed. Walter dropped the plow handles, cast off the reins that had been hanging around his shoulders, and went to the house. He gave order to have the team and other stock attended to and made ready to offer his services to the country. He boarded the train that night, May 31, 1915, for Sussex, where he joined the colors.⁶⁰

Of seven brothers to serve in uniform – three alone within the CEF – only Ballard's younger brother Alfred survived the war.⁶¹

Of course, not all boys wanted to return home or were willing to join the CEF to do so. Several expressed a resounding appreciation for farm work, and a desire to stay close to the soil. Others looked upon Canada as a haven from their former ills: "Mr. Ray said that most of the boys that came out here with me are away to the war," reported Henry Capewell, but "I thank the homes for they have made a farmer of me. I am a lot better than being in England."⁶² Having left New Brunswick in 1909 after 12 years in the province, Gerald Stewart landed a comfortable job in Hartford, Connecticut, as a trolley conductor. Writing to the agency only two months into the war, he too voiced his desire to return to Britain to find his family; he did not, however, join the CEF when the opportunity presented itself.⁶³ For some it appears that economic security was a disincentive to military service, much as it dissuaded many Canadian-born boys from enlisting.

For dozens of Middlemore boys, however, the decision to join the CEF was influenced by nothing more complicated than a desire to return home: "Henry [Philips] is getting along quite well but wishes to return to England," explained William Ray in one report; "consequently he is not trying to adapt himself to the conditions on this side."⁶⁴ An enlistee of the 104th Battalion in Sussex, Private Philips departed for Britain in 1916. William Ames wrote to Middlemore officials as early as 1908 to say that he did not like Canada and wanted to return home. He succeeded in enlisting in 1918. Middlemore boy Charles T. Homer was similarly motivated by a need to return to England. Having tried unsuccessfully to enlist as a bugler in the RCR in 1912 at the age of 12, then again as an underage soldier in the CEF in 1917, he was finally accepted in September of 1918. His poor timing, however, prevented him from returning to Britain before the end of the war.

"No man was born or lives that has not relatives or friends," declared Private Philip Jeffrey of the 115th Battalion.⁶⁵ He was not alone in his sentiments. For those

60 "Walter Ballard Had Real Brand of Patriotism: Leaves His Plow in the Field and Goes to Fight for His Country's Cause: Like Minute Man of Revolutionary War: One of Six Brothers to Make Supreme Sacrifice on the Fields of France," *Daily Gleaner*, 13 November 1918.

61 Alfred Ballard, Veteran of War, Died Last Night," *Daily Gleaner*, 27 March 1935.

62 Henry Capewell to George Jackson, 2 September 1918, and Capewell to Jackson, 16 May 1919, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/299, file Henry Capewell (1914), LAC.

63 Gerald Stewart to George Jackson, 19 October 1914, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/263, file Gerald Stewart (1897), LAC.

64 William Ray, Report, 19 October 1914, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/298, file Henry Phillips (1913), LAC.

65 Philip Jeffrey to George Jackson, undated but before 29 August 1916, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/264, file Philip Jeffrey (1898), LAC.

Middlemore boys who succeeded in reaching England, the Children's Emigration Homes proved to be a vital link between them and their British families. Private Harold Miles was chastised by another Middlemore boy he had run into at the YMCA for not having written to the homes' secretary: "We got talking of the old times in the Motherland & the conversation turned to you [Jackson]. He asked me if I ever wrote to you. When I told him I hadn't, he gave me a regular bawling out and told me you like to hear from all the boys."⁶⁶ His letter provided the perfect opportunity for Miles to thank Jackson for providing him with such a good home in Canada. More importantly, it allowed Miles to beg Jackson's assistance in finding two other boys who had come out to Canada with him. Not unlike Miles, Lionel Love had no family of which he was aware. His father had been killed in South Africa and his mother died shortly thereafter. Sent to Canada in 1903 at the age of five, Love merely wanted to know if there were any extended members of his family still living.⁶⁷

Periods of extended leave allowed a great number of boys to visit Birmingham, where many sought to reconnect with friends, family, and George Jackson himself. Even before war broke out, Harry Guest made a promise to visit the old country to find his brothers and sisters. Leaving behind a good-paying job with the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1915, he wrote to Birmingham to follow up on his plan upon his arrival with the 55th Battalion. No doubt he intended to tell his family about his own daughter, born three years earlier to a Middlemore girl at Harvey Station.⁶⁸ Signaller Albert Moreton was a frequent visitor to the Middlemore homes, exchanging information, photos, and condolences when Jackson's son was killed in action. Private Howard Smith certainly enjoyed his visit to Birmingham in 1917. He overstayed his leave by one day and was confined to barracks for five days in consequence. "I would of stayed longer," he confessed to Jackson, "only they write it down in your pay book."⁶⁹

The return to Birmingham had other consequences for Middlemore boys from New Brunswick besides their reunion with family members and old friends. Although leaves spent in the city resulted in a number of recorded cases of venereal disease, Birmingham also provided a disproportionate number of English brides for older expatriates.⁷⁰ Thirty soldiers, many of whom had been wounded in France, requested permission to marry during the course of the war. The youngest was

66 Harold Augustus Miles to George Jackson, 4 February 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/300, file Harold Augustus Miles (1914), LAC.

67 Lionel Percy Love to George Jackson, 28 April 1918, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/272, file Lionel Percy Love (1903), LAC.

68 Harry Guest to Sir John Middlemore, 21 December 1913; Guest to Middlemore, 21 November 1915, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/264, file Harry Guest (1898), LAC.

69 Howard Smith to George Jackson, 19 November 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/293, file Howard Smith (1911), LAC.

70 A cross-analysis of Middlemore and military records reveals that approximately 12 per cent of all Middlemore boys who served in the CEF contracted some form of venereal disease. While there does not appear to be any connection between this and observed behaviour by Middlemore authorities in Canada, those who contracted sexually transmitted diseases were 70 per cent more likely to be involved in incidents that undermined military discipline in the field. – i.e. theft, drunkenness, absence without authority, and failure to obey orders.

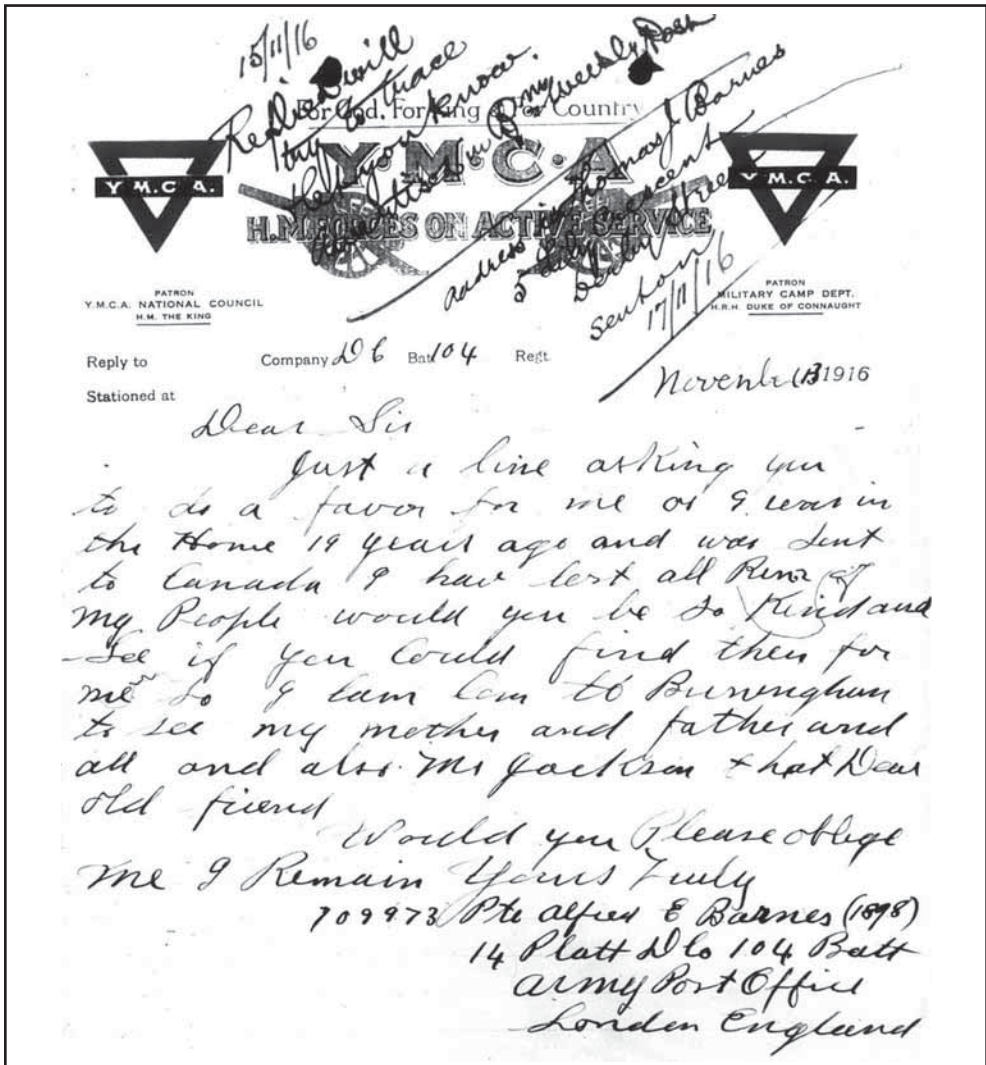


Figure 3: Letter from Alfred E. Barnes, November 1916.

Source: Middlemore Children's Emigration Homes fonds, MS 517/264, reel A-2011, LAC. Permission for publication obtained from the oldest surviving child of Barnes – Cecil Barnes, Cambridge Narrows, NB.

Private Ernest Nash, a mere 16 year old when he joined the CEF in 1914 and barely 18 when he married in early 1917. The marriage was brief, as Nash was killed at the Battle of Amiens only 18 months later.⁷¹ All of this certainly lends credence to the notion that Middlemore boys were drawn to their ancestral home during periods of leave and convalescence. It also hints at the complex financial bonds that were being

71 Ernest Nash, RG 150-3, acc. 1992-93/166, vol. 7235-57, LAC.

formed by war. Not all Middlemore boys were as devoted as Tom Hartley had been in sending money to family members before the war. A pay assignment that often amounted to \$20 or 60 per cent of a private's basic pay, however, plus a governmental pledge of \$30 per month to wives and widowed mothers in the form of a separation allowance, often made the difference between poverty and comfort for relatives residing in Britain.⁷² A total of 89 Middlemore boys directed at least part of their pay to foreign recipients, including 19 dependent mothers who qualified for separation allowance. Most resided in Birmingham.

As accommodating of their requests as George Jackson was, Middlemore files could not always provide the answers for which these boys were looking. Unsure as how to proceed, Philip Jeffrey and others heeded Jackson's advice, so often repeated to others, to place an advertisement in the *Birmingham Weekly Post* in search of family members. The "Lost Relatives and Loved Ones" column represented one of few avenues outside of the Children's Emigration Homes for Middlemore children to find relations in England; even so, just as many relatives employed the *Weekly Post* to find lost children as were sought out by those children. Occasionally, one of the dozen free appeals that were printed annually by Middlemore boys found success. Relatives of Howard Currall were vaguely aware that he had enlisted in the CEF in 1914 but were unsure if he had been sent to France or the Dardanelles. An appeal to the *Weekly Post* in 1916 revealed that Private Currall had in fact been repatriated to Canada earlier that year.⁷³ Similar advertisements placed by George Jackson on behalf of privates Alfred and William Barnes found both parents alive, well, and residing in Birmingham.⁷⁴

"I thank you for your kindness . . . [in] helping me to find my Mother las [*sic*] xmas," wrote Lance-Corporal William Cooper to George Jackson in 1915. Cooper, later a posthumous recipient of the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his capture of two machine guns and 50 enemy prisoners, was one of many boys who found great satisfaction in reuniting with lost family members.⁷⁵ Other reunions were far more complex. When William Hancox approached Middlemore authorities in 1916, he was training with the CEF in England and eager to find his mother. Although Jackson thought it only natural that the two should reunite, he initially discouraged any contact between them on account of her "repulsive" character. When that failed to dissuade Hancox, his mother was warned well in advance "not [to] offer him drink or shew him any indecency" under threat of punishment.⁷⁶ Sadly, even this pales in comparison to the case of Stanley Plummer who, with the promise of a small legacy on his 21st birthday, was continuously rebuffed in his efforts to discover his anonymous benefactor: "You see all the rest of the immigration children here have

72 For further insight into the financial requirements and implications of pay assignments and separation allowance, see Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldier's Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

73 *Birmingham Weekly Post*, 17 June 1916.

74 *Birmingham Weekly Post*, 2 December 1916.

75 William Cooper to George Jackson, 24 September 1915, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/268, file William Cooper (1901), LAC; *London Gazette*, 12 November 1918. Cooper was a recipient of the Military Medal in 1919; *London Gazette*, 11 February 1919.

76 E.C. Lewis, Secretary, Dudley Children's Convalescent Aid Society to George Jackson, 19 January 1917, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/286, file William Hancox (1909), LAC.

relatives in Eng[land],” he pleaded with Jackson in 1915, “so I would like very much to find out who I am.”⁷⁷ The Middlemore secretary was well aware of the connection, yet was bound to remain silent in this one case. To identify the boy’s mother was to put at risk her middle-class status, a station that had risen considerably since Plummer was released to the Fairview Home in 1902. A persistent boy, Plummer had little intention of joining the CEF until the need to find his family proved overwhelming. When he finally identified and confronted his mother while on leave, she steadfastly refused to acknowledge her relationship to the boy despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Ultimately, it proved to be a moot point: Private Plummer, having been rejected by the one person he wanted to find, was killed in action before he could persuade her to acknowledge him as her son. Plummer was one of 62 Middlemore boys from New Brunswick who died as a consequence of joining the CEF.⁷⁸

For those who survived the experience of war, the decision to return to Canada was as important as the decision to volunteer. Familial ties had, in many cases, been renewed. New ones had been created. Yet, given the opportunity to remain in Britain, all but 16 Middlemore boys elected to demobilize in Canada upon completion of service. Having looked upon themselves as British before enlistment, perhaps the experience of war transformed a great number of these boys into something that was distinctly Canadian. This is less a statement of nascent nationalism than the simple idea that, having joined the CEF in many cases to reconnect with family members abroad, most Middlemore boys found even greater satisfaction in the new bonds they had created. For some, this meant a return to the very life they sought to escape. For many more, it was a realization that Canada ultimately held better prospects for their future than Britain.

Does this validate the goals of emigrationists or merely represent an aberration within a movement that many historians consider inherently flawed? It is certainly difficult to find fault with Inspector G. Bogue Smart’s belief that juvenile emigrants had a positive impact on Canada’s contribution to the Great War. While this is hardly enough to call the larger “child-saving” movement a success, it may be sufficient to call into doubt its failure. Frustrated as they might have been in their ability to maintain a close connection with family relations in Britain, the degree to which Middlemore boys were able to direct their ambitions homeward between 1914 and 1918 was unprecedented. At the very least, it is suggestive of decision-making ability that goes well beyond what most historians of youth emigration are willing to concede. Runaway behaviour may be indicative of agency, but voluntary

77 Stanley Plummer to George Jackson, 10 Aug 1915, MG 28 I 492, MS 517/271, file Stanley Plummer (1902), LAC.

78 A total of 42 boys were killed in action, 13 died of wounds, 5 died of other causes, and 2 of unknown causes. At 27.1 per cent and 16.2 per cent, respectively, the fatality rate for those who enlisted in 1914 and 1915, given that they were much more likely to be sent to France, is several times higher than that of boys who joined in 1916 (8.2 per cent), 1917 (8.9 per cent), or 1918 (6.8 per cent). Many boys survived the war but were beyond full recovery. At least half a dozen more never reached their 40th birthday, including Walter Edwards, who was released as medically unfit in 1917 but died a year later of heart disease, and George Francis, who died of nephritis – an inflammation of the kidneys caused by poor living conditions in the trenches. See Walter Edwards, RE150-3, acc. 1922-93/166, vol. 2846-40, LAC, and George Francis, RG150-3, acc. 1992-93/166, vol. 3263-57, LAC.

enlistment, particularly among underage youth, puts them well beyond the point of being mere reactionaries to their circumstances.

It should come as absolutely no surprise, then, that Middlemore boys joined the military in such large numbers. Yet while Smart readily defended the juvenile emigration movement from its contemporary critics as late as 1917, his message has become lost within the ongoing historical discussion of CEF enlistment. Their relative age, circumstances of birth, patterns of settlement, and varying reactions to Canadian acculturation, however, clearly set these youth apart from other wartime recruits. Only by peeling away the generalities of how we look upon the Canadian Great War experience do we see their uniqueness. Not unlike blacks, Aboriginals, French-Canadians, industrial workers, and rural agriculturalists – whose voices are only now beginning to emerge – juvenile emigrants had their own reasons for enlisting, not only as individuals but also collectively. In the desire shared by so many of the Middlemore boys to rediscover home and family, much can be learned about juvenile emigration itself and about the complexities of motivation for enlistment during the Great War.