

Women's Emigration 1903–1906

This new version of this database includes women in two previous BIFHSGO databases (“Women's Emigration” and “Emigration 1906”). In addition, names in the 1906 database have been corrected.

This emigration movement was led by the Hon. Mrs. Ellen Joyce, who was the head of the British Women's Emigration Association (BWEA) from 1901 until 1919. The aim of the BWEA was to encourage middle-class women to immigrate to the colonies because of a perceived surplus of women in England and Wales, while there was a dearth of British women in the colonies, particularly in Canada and Australia. The 1901 Census revealed that there were a million more women than men in England and Wales (from a total population of about 13.5 million).

Mrs. Joyce was married to a Church of England clergyman, the Reverend James Gerald Joyce, and they resided at St. John's Croft, Winchester, Hampshire, England. Most of her work appears to have been carried out from this house, as the address appears frequently in her correspondence.

The young women who immigrated to Canada ranged in age from 14 to the mid-40s, and the majority went to Ontario or Western Canada. Most were single, but a few of the older women were widows. All were said to be of “good character.” The women's safety during and after their travel was uppermost in the BWEA's thinking, and contact was maintained after their arrival to assist with integration into Canadian society. This was particularly true of the women coming through the Girls Friendly Society, where Anglican congregations were the welcoming link.

The BWEA encouraged and assisted educated young women to immigrate to Canada to take up positions as domestic workers and governesses. Mrs. Joyce was a strong imperialist and felt it vital to spread British culture and maintain the colonies as part of the British Empire.

Mrs. Joyce was also anti-suffrage and anti-feminist and, in her speeches, said: "There is no bigger attitude or higher aspiration than to be one of the Daughters of a Christian Empire. The GFS [Girls Friendly Society] has done the very best Imperial work that has been done, in sending women who have been under the highest influences from [other] cultured, refined, religious women, to become the mothers of a race, not dwarfed by poverty; or cramped by pressure as in the Nest and Nursery of the Mother-Land; but free, contented, God-fearing women in the Great Garden of the British Empire. Let us enthuse ourselves and then enthuse others with the idea that the Empire and not the island is women's sphere. Empire building ought not to be left to accident. It is the finest, most interesting, the most satisfactory bit of work an Englishwoman can lay her hands to do."

The Times (London, England) of Friday, 23 May 1924 published the following under “Deaths:”

JOYCE – On the 21st. May, at St. John's Croft, Winchester, Ellen, widow of Rev. James Gerald Joyce, daughter of Francis William Rice, 5th Baron Dynevor, aged 92. Service Winchester Cathedral, 12.15 pm. Interment Stratfieldsaye, to-morrow (Saturday) 3 p.m. (nearest station, Mortimer).

There is a memorial to Mrs. Joyce in Winchester Cathedral that reads as follows:

To the revered memory of the Hon Ellen Joyce OBE
Lady of Grace of St. John of erusale
Wife of the Rev Gerald Joyce

Born Jan 12 1832 Died May 21 1924
In gratitude for her devoted work
On behalf of the women and girls
Of the Empire and as a pioneer
Of protected emigration

Any records in England that contained information on individual women were destroyed in 1964; therefore, the records held by Library and Archives Canada have added significance for any persons researching women's immigration to Canada.