

“Good hands out to good homes” A File in the Graeme Patterson Fonds at the Trinity College Archives

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Volume 109, Number 1, Spring 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1039202ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039202ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Lassam, S. & Fickling, B. (2017). “Good hands out to good homes”: A File in the Graeme Patterson Fonds at the Trinity College Archives. *Ontario History*, 109(1), 132–138. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039202ar>

Archival Sources

"Good hands out to good homes"

A File in the Graeme Patterson Fonds at the Trinity College Archives

by Sylvia Lassam and Ben Fickling*

Professor Graeme Patterson (1934-1993) was professor of history at the University of Toronto whose special interests included Upper Canada, Pre-Confederation Canada, and the history of Native Canadians. He wrote, as well as essays, book reviews, and numerous entries for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, the Interpretation of History* in 1990. Patterson was a graduate of Trinity College and lived in College until his death at the age of 58. His family had a long history in western Ontario, particularly the town of Paris. Among his papers is a file pertaining to his ancestor, Norman Hamilton (1806-1874), a wealthy Paris businessman. Through marriage to his second

wife, Elizabeth Ebbs, Norman Hamilton was related to Eliza Crisp; her letters to Hamilton contain considerable information about boys and girls sent from the slums of London to western Ontario during the years 1869-1873.

The file contains a letter of solicitation from the Rev. Edward Spooner, Vicar of Hester, Hounslow, that refers to

A lady who has been well known to me for many years, and for whose energy, judgment and business-like habits I can thoroughly vouch, spent some months last summer and autumn in Canada. She found there a great demand not so much for adult emigrants, as for boys and girls and having placed herself in communication with several gentlemen of the highest respectability in the Colony, they have pledged themselves at once to receive and to find good situations for 200

* Sylvia Lassam is the Rolph-Bell Archivist at Trinity College in Toronto. Ben Fickling is a Trinity College student. The letters in this file were transcribed with the assistance of Pearce Carefoote, Librarian at the Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

EMIGRATION OF BOYS AND GIRLS FROM LONDON TO WESTERN CANADA.

SIR,

Permit me to call the attention of the Benevolent to a most desirable method of improving the condition of the friendless boys and girls who abound in London. A lady who has been well known to me for many years, and for whose energy, judgment, and business-like habits I can thoroughly vouch, spent some months last summer and autumn in Canada. She found there a great demand, not so much for adult emigrants, as for boys and girls, and having placed herself in communication with several gentlemen of the highest respectability in the Colony, they have pledged themselves at once to receive and to find good situations for 200 boys and 100 girls from the ages of 14 to 18 in the farm-houses of Western Canada. They have also pledged themselves to look after them when settled, to see that they are properly cared for, and that their wages are duly paid. The rate of wages is four dollars a month. If industrious the lads can, after a time, obtain each of them a grant of land for himself, and the girls have excellent prospects before them.

Such a position for the homeless children of our great metropolis is indeed a boon, and without ignoring the efforts being made in other directions, I would make an earnest appeal for subscriptions to enable us to send them out. I do this with the more confidence because of the arrangements made for their reception and location in their new country, which will prevent their being cast friendless on a foreign shore.

One hundred and seventy-five boys from various refuges, having certificates of good character, are already registered for emigration, and a large number of girls of well certified character can at once be found to avail themselves of a like escape from the destitution in which they are placed. It is for these industrious boys and girls that I am now pleading, and knowing as I do, from my former experience in a large and poor London parish, how desirable such a step would be for them, I appeal with the greatest earnestness to the Benevolent to help us in rescuing many of the boys and girls in London from what will otherwise inevitably prove to them a life of wretchedness, if not one of sin and shame.

I remain, your obedient servant,

EDWARD SPOONER, Vicar of Heston.

Heston Vicarage, Hounslow, W., April 21.

Our plan has met with the earnest approval of many distinguished persons, amongst whom I can name the Earl of Shaftesbury, Sir W. H. Bodkin, assistant judge; Henry Pownall, Esq., chairman of the Middlesex Quarter Sessions; Charles Reed, Esq., M.P.; Mrs. Tait, Addington Park, &c.

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE ACCOUNT OF THE "EMIGRATION FUND FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN TO CANADA,"

will be gladly received by Messrs. Barclay, Bevan, and Co., 54, Lombard-street; Messrs. Glyn and Co., 67, Lombard-street; Messrs. Hall, Bevan, and Co., bankers, Brighton; Miss Spooner, Addington Park, Croydon; Mrs. Spooner, Heston Vicarage, Hounslow, W.

In addition to the above we have the pleasure of adding names of gentlemen in Brighton who have given their hearty approval to the plan; some of them give handsome donations, and will be most happy to receive the subscriptions of all the benevolent friends in Brighton who will thus *help those who are truly anxious to help themselves*.—

R. A. Bevan, Esq., Union Bank, Treasurer.

Cordy Burrows, Esq., J.P., Pavilion Place.
George Duddell, Esq., Queen's Park.
Rev. E. B. Elliott, Lewes Crescent.
Douglas Fox, Esq., Chesham Place, Kemp Town.
D. Friend, Esq., Prestonville.
Rev. Dr. Griffith, Brighton College.

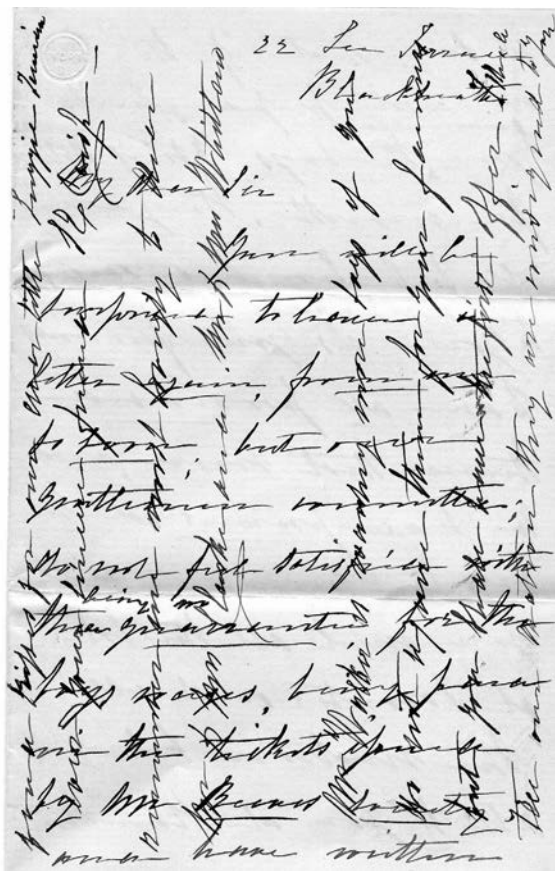
Daniel Hack, Esq., Sunnyside.
Rev. Paxton Hood, Cliftonville.
James Ireland, Esq., Conway House, Dyke Road.
Rev. E. V. Price, Buckingham Place.
W. J. Smith, Esq., 43, North Street.
Marriage Wallis, Esq., Norman Villa.

The cost of outfit and shipment is from £6 to £7 per head. The girls will be sent out under the care of reliable matrons; the boys, in parties of 20 each, under the care of the captains of Messrs. Allen's steamers, who will give them up to the gentlemen in Canada who will await their arrival and take them to their homes.

Graeme H. Patterson fonds, Trinity College Archives.

boys and 100 girls from the ages of 14 to 18 in the farm-houses of Western Canada. They have pledged themselves to look after them

when settled, to see that they are properly cared for, and that their wages are duly paid. The rate of wages is four dollars a month. If



industrious the lads can, after a time, obtain each of them a grant of land for himself, and the girls have excellent prospects for them.

Given the context of the letters that accompany this document it seems clear that this “lady” was Miss Eliza Crisp and the respectable gentlemen were Norman Hamilton and his associates in Paris and Hamilton. Eliza was the daughter of Henry Crisp, a Non-Conformist minister from Hertford, England, accepted for service in India by the London Missionary Society. Henry and his bride, Eliza Staffe Crisp, sailed for the southern tip of India in 1827. In 1828 they had a daughter, Mary Eliza; in 1829 their second

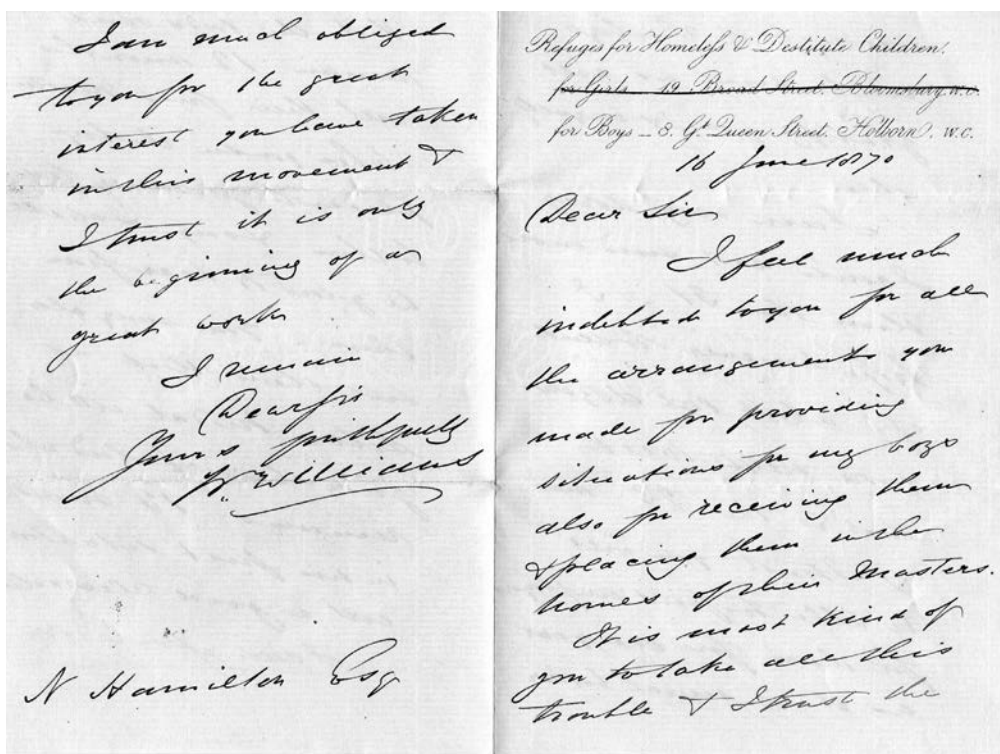
Eliza Crisp to Norman Hamilton, c.1868. Graeme H. Patterson fonds, Trinity College Archives.

daughter, Eliza Worsley Crisp, was born but her mother died in childbirth. Henry Crisp remained in India with his daughters, dying of tropical fever two years later. Eliza and Mary were sent back to England. Tracking their whereabouts every ten years through the census suggests they grew up in genteel poverty, living with relatives or as boarders in rooming houses in London, Bath, and Brighton. The solicitation document quoted above is undated, but it seems likely that Miss Crisp visited Norman Hamilton in 1868 or 1869.

The file contains 31 letters, all addressed to Norman Hamilton, of which 13 are from Miss Crisp. Most of the letters were written in 1870. Miss Crisp’s first dated letter to Norman Hamilton, in 1869, refers to a plan already in place to send a

number of lads who might be required for service on the farms around you... their ages will vary from 14 to 17 years old, they are most of them orphans who have been taught to read and write and now are looking forward to get on in the New World, they will not be gentleman’s sons!!! But I hope they will be found honest and industrious; poor lads who will be willing to do what they are told, and make themselves useful.

Miss Crisp’s letters are full of reminiscences of her own trip to Canada. She makes reference to the people she met, including Mr. J. Walker of Hamilton, who became a key contact for boys and girls sent to that city. Other correspondents include Mr. Pilkington, chaplain of the Middlesex Industrial School in Feltham;



Correspondence with Norman Hamilton from Mr. Williams (1870) regarding the placement of boys in Canada. Graeme H. Patterson fonds, Trinity College Archives.

Mr. Gent of the Ragged School Union; George James of the Kentish Town Ragged School; Henry Ellis of London, and Mr. Duddell of Brighton, and Mr. Williams of No. 8 Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Fields, London. There are several variations on the name of the school associated with this address, including the Boys Home, Refuge for Homeless and Destitute Children, the Refuge for Homeless Boys, and the National Refuges for Homeless and Destitute Children. These correspondents are business-like, usually pressing Norman Hamilton for news of the boys. It's interesting that although the claim was made that most

of the children were orphans, there are two references to parents. George James, superintendent of the Kentish Town Ragged School, asks for news of George Hales and William Shirly, whose parents are anxious about them, and the mother of James C. Horton expresses fear for her son's safety through a letter from Henry Ellis. Other notes attest to the real relationships that existed between the boys and those who cared for them in England. Mr. Williams of the Boys Home specifically asks that Robert and William Hayward (brothers) and Henry Griffin be kept together. Nearly all the correspondents repeatedly thank Norman

17b.

Middlesex Indul. School
Feltham Hounslow
July 18th 1870.

I hereby certify that T. Baker
aged 16 has been 3 years an
inmate of this school; he was
brought to us as a neglected
and destitute child - on account
of the drunkenness of his father
his conduct here has been
exemplary, honest, truthful,
and civil, and I believe he
will be found a very useful
lad

N. G. Pilkington
Chaplain

*Letter of reference for one Thomas Baker.
Graeme H. Patterson fonds, Trinity Col-
lege Archives.*

sailing dates. These lists match up with passenger lists available on the LAC Home Children website.

Eliza Crisp remains a mystery. Her letters are emotional and personal but she reveals little about her own circumstances. We know that during the time she was writing to Norman Hamilton she travelled to France and Switzerland (making passing references to the Franco-Prussian War), but we don't know why. She never mentions her sister Mary, although the two spinsters lived together their entire lives. We can assume that she had some kind of involvement in evangelical church circles, but there is no precise information on which to base

Hamilton for his kindness to the boys and press him for details of their new life. There is also mention of government payments and grants. Miss Crisp refers to the eligibility of the boys to free grants of land from the Canadian government if they remain in their positions for seven years. Mr. Williams asks that the boys be told that they will receive a Silver Medal if they remain in their first situation for a year "with a good character." There are lists of names included with three letters, and many references to ships and precise

this assumption. The 1881 census for the first time places her as the head of a household that included her sister and a servant. Norman Hamilton had died in 1874. Perhaps there was a bequest in his will. Mary died in 1892 in Sussex; at the end of her life Eliza Crisp lived in Colchester and died there in 1910.

This orphaned child of missionary parents seems to have dedicated her life to helping children. Perhaps it was during her visit to the Hamilton family in Canada that she prevailed upon Nor-

List of boys from Brighton to Western Canada

| | | | |
|---------------------|-----|--------|----------------|
| Henry Parsons | Age | Humber | name of Master |
| George Apted | 15 | Humber | in Ontario - |
| Frank Rogers | 14 | Humber | |
| Samuel Egerton | 13 | Humber | |
| William Rogers | 15 | Humber | |
| Henry Rogers | 15 | Humber | |
| Charles Rogers | 15 | Humber | |
| William Clarke | 15 | Humber | |
| Henry Charles Smith | 15 | Humber | |
| Thomas Bennett | 14 | Humber | |
| Charles Smith | 14 | Humber | |
| George Taylor | 15 | Humber | |
| William Hunter | 14 | Humber | |
| Henry Rogers | 14 | Humber | |

List of boys sent from Brighton to Western Canada, 1870. Graeme H. Patterson fonds, Trinity College Archives.

man Hamilton to act as the Canadian agent for boys and girls from the Ragged Schools of England to start a new life on Canadian farms. Miss Crisp's enterprise was relatively modest. Dr. Thomas Barnardo, for instance, started a school that sent thousands of youngsters, some very young, to the colonies. Maria Rye maintained a home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, from which 5,000 girls from the poor houses were sent out as servants and farm workers. Our letters indicate that Miss Crisp facilitated the immigration of hundreds, not thousands, of children. She took very seriously her responsibility to Mr. Hamilton and his associates in Canada and searched diligently in a number of institutions for the right sort of child. One can only imagine the selection proc-

ess as she sized them up. Her letters show that she had an idealistic vision of life in Canada. Sitting on the veranda of her wealthy cousin's comfortable home she could never have imagined the isolation and vulnerability many of her chosen boys would experience on farms in rural Ontario. This letter from November 1869, outlines her methodology and her motives:

Your kind note informing the boys had come duly to London, and I am soon very busy each day, selecting them very carefully from the Schools, and orphan houses, round London; - I have been this morning to a very large School...; they have some boys of a very excellent character whom they feel will be eligible; on Tuesday I selected 30 from a lot of those orphan boys in London; and on Monday I hope to enroll 50 more

from an agricultural School, at Woking in Hampshire; I think they are all of the right stamp; and all have good characters for honesty, industry and perseverance – I hope to make up 55 good ones for Paris; I feel it very important that we should send the right sort of boys, and if these prove good, and true, you may want more, by and by, and so we may continue to send good hands out to good homes, in Canada and benefit all parties;----- I feel intensely anxious they should prove all right in their future lives, we are sending only those, whom we feel to be really good lads, likely to prove good servants on the farms; -- --- I cannot tell you how grateful I feel to you for offering to see them all, when they are out, in their places you will indeed be doing a great service, to every one of them, thus to pave their way and protect them for this first year, of their services in the new country; --- we ask our Heavenly Father direct our Hopes in this matter and bless you most abundantly in your own land and in your family as well as among the poor orphans lads who are coming to you.

Norman Hamilton's voice is unheard. An American by birth, Hamilton came to the Paris area about 1832 and

made himself a fortune first with a distillery, then with milling and pork packing. He was also a "munificent contributor to the Congregational Church."¹ He built a beautiful home on the banks of the Grand River, a Greek Revival cobblestone house that still exists. Perhaps towards the end of his life his motivation to help destitute children was pure; perhaps he and Mr. Walker of Hamilton made money by supplying labour to the farms and industries of the area. The names and dates in our letters should assist researchers to discover the precise nature of the trade in child immigrants.

What became of the children? The letters are clear in the hopes they all had: that the "fresh air of Canada" would make them healthy. Miss Crisp says: "It is a glorious thing to think of sending out lads to a country where they will have a chance of getting on." The correspondence contained in the Graeme Patterson fonds should be a help in discovering how they did get on, by linking their young lives to those who controlled their fate.

¹ F. Douglas Reville, *History of the County of Brant*, Vol. 2. (Brantford, 1920), 418.