

Marchmont reunion

Some of the 69 former Bernardo boys and girls--many of whom first lived at Marchmont Home in Belleville when they arrived in Canada from England so many years ago--

posed for a group picture outside Hastings County Museum Sunday as they gathered for the first in what is hoped to be an annual reunion.

(Photo - Penny Gordon)

pail of water before he used it. And for Mr. Urban, like a number of other "home boys" and "home girls" it wasn't until they read Kenneth Bagnell's account of The Little Immigrants they realized not all of them were orphans. In the poverty found in England prior to, and during, the First World War, many mothers simply signed off their children--children who ultimately came to Canada from various British homes for orphaned and destitute children.

The discipline and hardships of those early years, however, did not so much hurt the development of these "home children" as it shaped their lives and their contributions to the country which became their home. Last winter, at 95, Mr. Urban slipped on some ice in front of a store. He went home for a pick and shovel and returned to clean up the ice so no one else could get hurt.

Ada Allan of Napanee came to Canada in 1923. She first went to one of the homes in Toronto. She likes the idea of reunions for "home children". When they were growing up, she explained, she and others like her felt it was a stigma to be a "home child".

"In today's world, you want to talk about it," she said, "and you have a right to."

Mrs. Allen understands why there were "home children" in those days. She says the depression in the 30s was nothing compared to hardships in England during the first world war. She remembers frost on the ceiling of the attic room she lived in, a stone "pig" which got cold even though it was supposed to keep the bed warm, and a straw mattress which had to be shaken out and rebuilt.

"It was rough," she said, "but you did what you were told. We were taught to help other people."