Entry type: Organisation
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Women’s Migration and Overseas Appointment Society

(1862 -)

Born 18620101

Summary

The Female Middle Class Emigration Society, founded by Maria Rye and Jane Lewin in 1862, was one of a number of organisations that emerged in the late nineteenth century and sought to tackle the perceived ‘surplus women’ problem in the United Kingdom. Like the Colonial Intelligence League, and the South African Colonisation Society, its aim was to assist unemployed, educated British women with emigration by finding them employment, usually as governesses or clerks, in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada. These three organisations amalgamated in 1919 to form the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women.

Details

The effort to encourage educated middle class women to emigrate in an effort to relieve the pressures of population growth and the perceived problem of the number of ‘superfluous’ unmarried women, led to the foundation of several organisations to assist the latter group. In 1884, several former members of the Women’s Emigration Society came together to form the United Englishwoman’s Emigration Register, which would go on to become the United Englishwoman’s Emigration Association (UEEA) in February of that year. Its aims were to emigrate women of good character, to ensure their safety during and after their travel and to keep in touch with them for some time after their arrival. In November 1885, Ellen Joyce and Mrs Adelaide Ross replaced Miss Louisa Hubbard at the head of the organisation. By 1888, the group began to work in co-operation with the Scotch Girl’s Friendly Association and the Scottish YWCA, prompting a change of name. The following year the new United British Women’s Emigration Association changed the original constitution, centralising what had been a loose grouping of independent workers and outlining their responsibilities, roles and relationships. Their expansion continued, from the establishment of Irish and Scottish branches in 1889 to one in Staffordshire and one for Wiltshire and Somerset that same year, while another was established in Bath in 1891. Homes for emigrants waiting to depart were created in Liverpool in 1887 and in London in 1893. The majority of emigrants which passed through them in the 1890s were destined for Canada, New Zealand or Australia, but towards the end of the century, the flow of emigrants to South Africa increased to such a degree that it became necessary to set up a South African Expansion Scheme Committee. This would go on to become the independent South African Colonisation Society. In 1901, the parent organisation dropped the ‘united’ element of its name and continued to expand in their own fields, opening a hostel at Kelowna in British Colombia in 1913. After the outbreak of the First World War the number of emigrants declined. In 1917, a Joint Council of Women’s Emigration Societies was established to deal with the situation after the war and liaise with central government. This co-operation between the British Women’s Emigration Association, the Colonial Intelligence League and the South African Colonisation Society finally resulted in their amalgamation into the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women in December 1919.

Published resources

Book Section
[Letters from emigrants.], 1894

Journal Article
A chance to bloom : Female migration and salvationists in Australia and Canada, 1890s to 1939, Langfield, Mechele, 2002

Conference Paper
British Women's Emigration at the Turn of the Last Century - An alternative "citizenship"?, Spensky, Martine, 2001

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of New South Wales
British Women's Emigration Association - Records, 1862-1949 [M 468]

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Collections held by the Fawcett Library relating to Australia and New Zealand [microform] : [M2291-2314], 1858-1967

John Oxley Library, Manuscripts and Business Records Collection
R 381 Lady Musgrave Lodge Committee Records

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
British Women's Emigration Association - Records, 1862-1949 [M 468]

Fawcett Library - collections held by the Fawcett Library relating to Australia and New Zealand [M2291-2314], 1858-1967

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