

Isobel Harvey Report

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Report on study made of Fairbridge Farm School during the month of August 1944

In making this short study of Fairbridge as viewed from the inside, there are certain factors which should be kept in mind. We realize that the majority of these children come from over-crowded city homes, where the amenities of living, according to the Canadian way of life, are absent. In fact, in Canada, very few of us have any idea of the conditions under which these children lived - of the over-crowded tenements, dirt, lack of sanitary facilities, etc. But, in recognizing this, we must keep firm hold on the basic concept set out by Kingsley Fairbridge - that these children were sent out from England to have opportunities which they could not have at home - to live the good life possible to children in the Dominions, and to become good citizens of the country to which they were sent. Therefore, Fairbridge Farm School must be judged on these points, - the good life which the children lead- the opportunities which they receive in common with other Canadian children, and their training as Canadians which will enable them to take their place in the Canadian democracy. There is one other point, too, upon which the whole scheme must be judged, and that is whether the children sent to Fairbridge are mentally and physically capable of profiting by their inclusion in the scheme.

Let us look first at the very material aspects - the cottages, the dishes, the food and the sanitary facilities.

The cottage plan was chosen because probably it is accepted as the institutional plan which most closely approximates family life. The cottages are double, heated with the same wood furnace. There is a kitchen in each with a wood stove. The dormitory, housing fifteen children, along with a dining-room, cottage mother's bedroom, bath and sitting-room, are on the main floor. In an inadequately heated basement are the lavatories and the children's playroom which is unfurnished. The person or people who planned these cottages apparently did not recognize the necessity for having a toilet on the dormitory floor. Any child has to go down a hall, down stairs to a cold basement if he has to get up in the night. The playroom is most uninviting. In some of the cottages, the dining-room is used as a recreation room: in others, where the cottage mother is soft-hearted, the children crowd into her tiny sitting-room with its fireplace. The dormitories are bright and airy, but the windows are close enough to the ground to allow an easy descent or ascent should the children wish to make it. Boys and girls have been found many times in one another's dormitories, both according to statements from the staff, and other records. It is true the girls' cottages are at one end of the grounds and the boys' at the other, but there is in reality little distance between the two.

The cottages are planned on an outmoded plan which allows the cottage mother little opportunity to foster any feeling of home. It is true they are better than the homes the children left in England, but, according to many children they and the school are not what was promised to their parents. One little girl interviewed said with tears that her mother had sent her because she was assured this was a grand place, there were horses to ride and everything, and there wasn't even one horse. Most of the children seem to feel cheated, and their allegiance is still to their own families back in England, poor though they may be.

CLOTHING (GIRLS): The clothing of the girls, except on Sunday, presents a very poor appearance. In fact, at dinner time, when most of the children appear in aprons designed by the school clothing head, one might imagine they were residents of an orphanage in the last century. An older girl, in commenting on the clothing situation, said she thought the girls would try to look nicer if they had any decent dresses. She had apart from her Sunday dress, and her school dress, two cotton frocks, and remarked that she wore them winter and summer and did not like either of them. A characteristic of adolescent girls is a love of pretty frocks, and it would seem that the administration is at fault in not providing someone with taste to teach the girls to dress economically and prettily.

FOOD – PREPARATION: The food is badly prepared in the main dining-room. Everything is over-cooked and unattractively served. The cook refuses to accept any suggestions from the matron, talks against the cottage mothers to the girls who are helping her, and encourages them to talk. If she takes a dislike to a cottage mother, she takes it out on the food served to that table. Some time ago, there was a ridiculous squabble because Mrs. [REDACTED] asked for a glass of milk with her dinner. The matter was eventually taken to Mr. [REDACTED] and then one day Mrs. [REDACTED] found a piece of wire one morning in the breakfast food, the next day a piece of glass. One might dismiss this as accident had not the same thing happened to Miss [REDACTED] when the cook took a dislike to her. Apart from the spoiling of good food, it would seem most unsafe to have a woman of this type in the kitchen exerting an influence on adolescent girls. The matron would like to get a new cook, but she must deal with the Selective Service in Duncan, and in four months according to her story, she has had no application. She was advised to ask permission to run an advertisement.

FOOD-QUALITY AND VARIETY: One would judge that good food was purchased, but it has a dreadful sameness day after day, especially the children's food. For breakfast they get porridge, a cup of milk, and bread with butter or jam or syrup. The cottage mothers sit at the same table and eat bacon and eggs and toast. There is no citrus fruit served at all, therefore some of the ill-health may be laid to vitamin deficiency. With a farm the size of the Fairbridge one, it seems strange that long since arrangements had not been made to can sufficient tomato juice in place of citrus fruits. There are too many starchy puddings served. In fact, the only well-balanced meal seems to be the supper, which is prepared and eaten in the cottages. The milk is supposed to be whole milk, but certainly what was served with the porridge was not. The matron suggested that this might be due to the cook's failure to stir the milk in the can from which she was running it off by tap. I would also be inclined to doubt whether the children received their full butter ration. Even in the cottages, bread is not unlimited, and on one occasion when a twelve-year old had made the cooks for supper, each hungry little boy received one small cookie. More variety in foods and more generous allowances would seem to be indicated. Numerous older girls and cottage mothers echoed these criticisms. The girls also asked how they could be expected to cook to the satisfaction of employers when they got such poor training in the kitchen. One thing that strikes a Canadian is that the children all eat off metal dishes and drink from a metal mug, while the cottage mothers and staff members have china. That also is reminiscent of an orphanage of the last century, and must make the child feel that he is underprivileged and different. To look at the matter practically, it is bad training for children to go out from an institution at sixteen without having had experience of handling and using the breakable china which is in common use in Canada.

CLEANLINESS: With the exception of the cottages belonging to Miss [REDACTED], Mrs. [REDACTED] and Mrs. [REDACTED], the children looked and were dirty. Miss [REDACTED] had worked out an adequate bath programme to allow one bath a day to each of her children. Mrs. [REDACTED] puts two boys into a bathtub

together and schedules all her baths for Wednesdays and Saturdays, the other nights the boys wash their feet and from their waists up. There is only one bath for the fifteen children in each cottage, the matron keeping her bathroom to herself. There has been no attempt to educate the children in the use of showers and, as hot water is not plentiful, showers are not encouraged. Children were seen at the Clinic who had dirt encrusted under their arms and other parts of their bodies. Some of them had such a heavy body odour that the nurse was sickened. A fresh gown and sheet had to be used for every patient examined. Fairbridge is a dusty or muddy place, according to the weather, and it would be pleasanter for those who have to associate with the children if they were taught cleanliness.

PERSONAL HYGIENE: No attempt is made to teach adolescent girls how to keep themselves dainty. The use of deodorants, care of the hair, teeth and nails, should be the job of someone. How employers put up with the girls when they go out, is beyond me. The follow-up officer for the girls told me that she could not get the girls in employment to keep themselves clean. Cleanliness is a matter of establishing a routine which becomes a habit. Girls of sixteen in employment should not have to start in on this.

HEALTH: The health of the children examined and as shown by other records read reveals more than the ordinary number of colds which might point both to a vitamin deficiency and also to the fact that cotton is the school wear even in cold weather. It might also show inadequate heating in the cottages; (one staff member told me when she sat in her room in winter she wore leggings, a heavy coat and gloves.) There are records where recurring tonsillitis continued over a long period without any steps being taken to have the offending tonsils removed. One little lad who is dull at school had tonsillitis six times before anything was done. There is no doubt the school medical service has been hardly hit by the war, but if a larger salary were set aside for the school nursing service, it might be possible to get an older, more experienced nurse, who would handle the health situation better. The medical records are poor. Children are admitted to Fairbridge with chronic conditions which make them a continued expense to the school. One youngster suffering from chronic Otitis Media, [medical term for middle ear infection.] was admitted and, after much medical care and hospitalization, was much improved and had a dry ear. She wanted to swim this summer, and, although the ear specialist had always vetoed it, a general practitioner was consulted who apparently did not bother to read the record, and allowed her to swim. She was back in hospital, just where she started, this month. Numerous children have been admitted with very bad eyesight. One boy was accompanied by directions which on the medical card show no sign of being carried out. Another whole family was handicapped through school by bad eyesight. Two boys who were examined were found to be wearing glasses, which they had outgrown physically. The nursing service should check these things, but the nurse who is at present in charge, although quit a nice girl, is not a registered nurse, is high-strung and irritable and has had, according to her own story, one nervous breakdown. An older, more experienced nurse, with an understanding of children and an ability to assume more responsibility, could make up in part for the fact that doctor's visits have dwindled to once in six weeks. Dr. [REDACTED]'s recommendation of hospitalization for the five chronic enuretics [urinary incontinence] he saw will be no use unless a different type of nurse can be put on the job. It was suggested to the Principal that an extra nurse be obtained for a period of three months as night duty will be necessary. He agreed to this. Apparently enuresis has been accepted in a fatalistic manner; at least, one would judge so when a sixteen-year old girl of average intelligence, who has been at Fairbridge eight years, still has a wet bed every night.

DISCIPLINE: This is not the form of discipline known to Canadians where we endeavour at least to teach self-discipline. The children are harried over every mistake that most mothers would wisely

overlook. Corporal punishment is said to be very rare, but according to the children, that statement is untrue. Girls of twelve and over are sent to a man for strapping, often for merely high spirits, such as a pillow fight. The man at present was taken on the staff as bunkhouse cook. Then the necessity for regimentation of the children makes any child who is different liable to punishment. One twelve-year old with the stature of an eight year old came out in 1941; he was through the Blitz in England and was emotionally affected so that he dawdled over everything, even coming home from school. His cottage mother knew he had come from a home where he was physically abused. To cure him of dawdling home from school she took a stick and gave him a whipping. She was a bit scared afterwards because he turned grey and shook for the rest of the day. "But," said she, "he never dawdled again, and now he has learned to take his punishment like a little man." Yet she wonders why he does not grow. Over and over in the records you find that the ability to take punishment is emphasized, while the ability to discipline oneself is scarcely mentioned. One older girl commented to me that she was not afraid of Mr. [REDACTED] because [REDACTED] had thrown him over a table, and she was twice as strong as [REDACTED]. I told her that was an appalling thing to say but she only laughed. Punishment varies from whipping and strapping to extra work, gating and being silenced for a time. If the boys chatter when washing the dishes they are threatened with being put on silence. Cottage mothers have too much power with the younger children, whom they discipline as they please, and no one is informed as far as I could gather. The continual shouting at the children is, I presume, a form of discipline. I commented on this to the Principal, and said I thought it was unnecessary and asked him if he did it. He said he certainly did whenever he got angry.

EDUCATION: There is no acceptance among the staff of the Canadian idea of education, that each child should, as far as possible, have all the education of which he is capable, and that he should be placed in a job for which his particular training and gifts fit him. With few exceptions, the children examined show retardation and a lack of interest in school. This might very easily be traced to their feeling that they have to leave school at fifteen anyway and particular effort along scholastic lines is not of any avail. There has been an effort made in some cases to have a girl work for her board and attend school, but these do not seem to have been particularly successful. One child said she was so marked by her clothes and her accent that she never belonged to the school group. Her only chance of belonging would have been to join in sports and go to the school parties, but she always had to stay at home and look after her employer's children at these times. One child, who has been attending King Edward High School and said to be progressing favourably under this plan, failed in one subject and deliberately did not write in two others. In spite of argument on the part of the authorities she went to Vancouver and joined the Army.

PERSONNEL: All members of the staff were not contacted personally, but the Matron, Mrs. [REDACTED] was seen constantly and most problems discussed with her. Three cottage mothers, Miss [REDACTED], Mrs. [REDACTED] and Miss [REDACTED] were interviewed; the duties master Mr. [REDACTED], and the clothing mistress Miss [REDACTED] were met casually at meals in the dining hall, where all cottage mothers could be observed at the head of their cottage tables. There appeared to be three very adequate cottage mothers as far as discipline, interest in their children and cleanliness were concerned, Miss [REDACTED], Mrs. [REDACTED] and Miss [REDACTED]; with guidance and instruction these three should do well. They lack sensitivity to the emotional needs of children, - scream and shout at the children constantly and are imbued with the Fairbridge doctrine that these children are different from Canadian children and must be shouted at and disciplined firmly, and that you must not be too kind to them. Mrs. [REDACTED] and particularly Miss [REDACTED] made some very fine suggestions for the improvement of the school. Mrs. [REDACTED] was not

interviewed. Miss [REDACTED], who was a nurse at the Mental Hospital before coming to Fairbridge, and also a masseuse at Harrison Hot Springs, had no suggestions to make except as to the comfort of the cottage mothers, and showed no understanding of children or of the dangers of a co-educational institution. She is a rather stupid, stubborn person who should not be doing this work, for which she has had no experience and training. The cottage parents, who have been put in charge of one of the boys' cottages, seem to be a good sort, but lacking in training and education.

The cottage mothers are the foundation stone of a cottage system such as this. They are the children's substitutes for their own mothers, yet they change so rapidly that it is impossible for most children to get any security from them. One small boy had had nine different cottage mothers, according to the records, and I was told that the number was larger. The cottage mothers have long days with no time off. On their fortnightly half day they have no place to go, as Duncan is a small town, and the school provides no common room for the cottage mothers. The relief worker who takes over when they go on holidays is so inadequate that they come back to chaos. There is no person on the staff capable of guiding the cottage mothers, and there seems to be a complete break between them and the school staff. No conferences are held where all those who are working with a child meet together. The half-yearly reports reveal this very clearly where the school, the cottage and the medical service all give opposing reports on the child.

Mrs. [REDACTED], the matron, is a rather baffling person. She is charming to meet, full of excellent ideas about the school, has good sense about job placement, and is alive to the dangers of a co-educational institution. Added to all this, she seems to be the most hated person in the school. She is at outs with several cottage mothers, with the cook, the duties master, and particularly with the older girls. They hate her with a vehemence which is heart-breaking. They feel she is not fair; she shouts at them, orders them around and has no understanding. The usual routine in an interview with an older girl was to have her dissolve into tears and reiterate "I hate Mrs. [REDACTED]." This feeling was not confined to girls in her own cottage but seems to spread among most of the older girls. One girl of superior intelligence was so infuriated when interviewed that the Principal was warned by me that Mrs. [REDACTED] had better be careful.

The duties master, Mr. [REDACTED], has a name for fooling with the girls, and was seen twice walking down the path with a teen-age girl hanging on to either arm. The Principal has warned him more than once about this in the hearing of staff members. However, this and other stories of fooling might not be considered seriously had not one fifteen-year old girl stated in her interview that she did not go to his house anymore because she got scared. When pressed further, she stated he had put his arms around her and kissed her and she did not know what he wanted, so she did not go back. When asked if any other girls got scared she remarked vaguely that if he got anyone it was [REDACTED]. One other girl is also said to have suddenly ceased visiting the [REDACTED]. As this seemed to be a matter for the Police, these names are withheld.

PLACEMENT: The placement policy is in serious need of revision. The Principal assured me when I told him he was using far too superior homes for the placement of his girls that he was aware of this and they were stopping it. Yet it was only at the insistence of the Matron and myself that we stopped two very dangerous placements during the week I was there; one of a girl with considerable sex experience in a girls' boarding-school to be a companion to the children - the other an unstable also experienced girl in a superior home in Vancouver, where she would be left with the care of small children - the exact duplicate of the placement in which she had failed before.

There seems to be some sort of pressure brought upon the school, in some way tied up with money, so that the child is not considered sufficiently in the placement.

FOLLOW-UP: Mrs. [REDACTED] is doing as good a job on the girls as her knowledge and training will permit. She is not keen on her job and would, I think, be glad to be relieved of it. There is no follow-up of the boys. The Principal states he does it by letter which is next to useless. No boy or girl should be sent out from Fairbridge without knowing to whom to turn in difficulty. That is the policy laid down in England, which has never been carried out in British Columbia.

WAGES: One half of a Fairbridge child's wages are paid by the employer to the school. One old Fairbridgean with whom I talked said she earned \$15.00 a month and only had \$7.50 to dress herself on, buy car fare, drugs and essentials. In her file, it was noted that she stole. That offence should be charged to the school and not to her. It would seem that as Fairbridge has no guardianship of the children, it is treading on very dangerous ground appropriating this money. In one file of an old Fairbridgean a girl now in the C.W.A.C.'s, there was a letter to the Principal asking for \$20.00 from her fund so that she might go to New York from Ottawa from her Christmas leave. Although she had carefully explained that it was her payment on a war bond that was keeping her short the Principal refused because he said she should earn her holidays. There may have been special reasons for his action, but to a girl who might at any time be sent on active service it seemed a little hard, particularly when she had earned the money herself. Another old Fairbridgean said she had to live for two years on \$12.50 a month and that none of the clothes that were given her were even wearable outside Fairbridge. Another girl, overhearing her, said that you were supposed to ask for clothes if you couldn't get along. The first girl said immediately that she would have died before she asked for anything.

I had an opportunity of interviewing four old Fairbridgeans who had an hour before been talking to the Principal. He told me that they had nothing but praise for Fairbridge. It seemed a pity he could not have heard their conversation with me. They said they were handicapped by their lack of knowledge of Canadians, their accents, their clothes and their inability to make friends. One youngster, who had bad feet, following an operation for club feet, said she slept in a basement room and the family were two flights up. She was scared to death because her window was on a level with the ground, and so lonely she cried herself to sleep for months. I asked what they thought of the policy of all the girls going into domestic work, and they agreed that most of the trouble started there. The child with the club feet had been a brilliant student and begged to stay at school, but was refused the opportunity. Now she is a rather embittered girl of twenty-one in a dead end job. All these old girls agreed that the school had deteriorated. They thought the children behaved badly and that the cottage mothers were a poor type. When they came out, there was fun in the school, plays and picnics and parties, and now there was practically nothing.

The proximity of the cottages and the lack of organized group activity, except sports, seems to encourage romance, and of an evening the place was full of pairs of boys and girls walking off together. There is no supervision of this freedom, and from various remarks by both children and staff one would judge there are irregularities of conduct going on constantly. The Principal does not seem to worry about this particularly. When this and the homosexual activities which have so alarmed others were discussed with him, he stated that the British people are over-sexed. This rationalizing, however, does not explain why the Government group or overseas children of some two hundred odd have produced only one sex delinquent. We all recognize that we cannot guard against all sexual relations of this sort, but it is certainly necessary that the Head of Administration and his staff be aware of the dangers and also of the remedies.

The administration of the school would seem to be very weak in the fact that there does not seem to be a strong loyalty throughout the staff, nor is the staff sufficiently consulted in matters concerning the children. The Principal apparently makes all decisions regardless of staff opinion.

One concrete evidence of lack of administration is the absence of true records of children at Fairbridge. When a child is received, a piece of paper with his name, birth date, name of father and mother and their employment and his religion, starts the file. Generally, after that there is some correspondence about his godparent who contributes \$150.00 a year for his upkeep. The rest of the file, with very few exceptions, consists of the half-yearly reports which are sent to his own parents and his godparents, and therefore must contain nothing that would upset either party. Consequently, there is no true record of the child's development, just a sentence or two from the cottage mother about how he does his work in the cottage, his school standing with a comment, and his weight and height and the comment – "Health Excellent", no matter what his medical cards say.

If this school is to continue, it would be necessary to collect the back history from England, and start a real personal file. A letter to the parents and the godparents could be sent every six months, but the file would contain a true picture and history of the child. There was no mention of five boys' files of the fact that they were material witnesses in the [REDACTED] case and had also been the victims of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Experiences such as these have a terrific effect on a child, and should be taken into account when dealing with the child. The Principal carries a good deal of this knowledge in his head and I feel would hesitate to disclose it even to a psychiatrist who was trying to help the child. Mr. [REDACTED] feels that a psychiatrist does very little for a child - he only needs a friend to show him the right way.

A Child Welfare worker viewing Fairbridge is left with a feeling of helplessness. The basic idea, antagonistic to every concept of Canadian Child Welfare, that these children are poor English children and, therefore, different from the ordinary child, is rooted so firmly in practically every staff member's mind that there is no use arguing against it. I was told over and over again by the Principal that I was incapable of understanding these children because they were English children. Anything they do, any trait they develop, is laid to the class from which they come. In fact, Fairbridge seems to be class conscious to an astonishing degree - even the Canadian cottage mothers get the same idea. One fifteen-year old girl who has very superior intelligence was placed in the trainee course for domestic work, thereby having to give up half her academic work, the only thing she cares about. She has become utterly unmanageable but, if you mention her, each person from the Principal down, tells the story of how this youngster said in rebellion, "My mother raised me in the gutter, and I'll go back to the gutter." That statement to them made it clear that it was not the school discipline but the child and the class from which she came that was at fault. Mr. [REDACTED] himself apparently believes in an aristocracy or the intelligentsia, for he told Miss [REDACTED] that in spite of her idealistic outlook she would have to come down to his belief that 5% of the world would always rule the other 95%. Miss [REDACTED] said anyway it would not be the same 5%. Canadian ideals of democracy are not being taught here. In fact, nothing that is Canadian is taught and the children make very derogatory remarks about Canadians. But, as one staff member remarked, their only experience of Canadians had been a series of poor cottage mothers.

I do feel that the school is not fulfilling Kingsley Fairbridge's ideals as it should. Those in authority have forgotten that an idea to continue must grow. They have accepted Fairbridge's idea of farm and domestic training, forgetting that times change, and they still place a child in a job decided for him many years ago by the founder of the scheme no matter what his own desires and talents may be. Both staff and children remarked to me that were Kingsley Fairbridge alive today the whole policy of the school would have changed with the times.

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