

## The Young Ambassadors Tour to Canada, 1928

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During training at the beginning of the internship, an archivist from the Bodleian Library brought out several boxes of archival material. As I looked through the photo album of Laurence Giles’ trip to Canada, images from Niagara Falls stood out to me because it reminded me of my experience wearing a red poncho on a boat tour of the Falls during my year aboard in Canada. I thought that it was fascinating that despite being almost 100 years apart, the experiences of young travellers did not differ much. Similarly to Levine, who writes about ‘armchair travel’, ‘I marvel[led] at both the differences and similarities of our experiences, comparing what I have seen or read of the sites they visited. I [was] struck by the collective experience of travel and memory, as much by the vast changes of the past century as by the ways that things remain the same.’<sup>1</sup>

### The diary, the competition, the tour

In July 1928, Laurence Giles set out on a tour of Canada as part of 50 Young Ambassadors who won the Free Travel and Scholarship Scheme organised by the Allied Newspapers.<sup>2</sup> The scheme was supported by both the British and Canadian governments, the Cunard Steam Ship Co., and the Canadian National Railways. Almost a quarter of a million young Britons participated in the competition by answering daily questions published in newspapers for four weeks, focused on the topic of Empire.<sup>3</sup> The lucky 25 girls and 25 boys, aged 14 to 21, went on a seven-week-long tour across the Dominion of Canada, traveling by ship and by train.<sup>4</sup> The youths were accompanied by organisers of the scheme, officials from the newspapers, representatives from the Cunard Steam Ship Co. and from the Canadian National Railways.<sup>5</sup>

The Young Ambassadors started their tour in London, with a visit to a newspaper printing press and an official luncheon hosted by the Lord Mayor of London, before travelling to Southampton by train. The RMS *Alaunia* departed Southampton, launching ‘a journey by sea and land of nearly 15,000 miles’, arriving in Quebec eight days later.<sup>6</sup> The youths travelled by train across the country, occasionally switching into cars when visiting individual towns. The tour spanned across the whole country, starting in Quebec, returning to the Maritime provinces, going all the way to Vancouver, and then looping back around, giving the Young

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Levine ‘Confessions of an Armchair Traveler’, in *Around the World: The Grand Tour in Photo Albums*, ed. by Barbara Levine and Kirsten M. Jensen (Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Empire Free Travel & Scholarship Scheme: Souvenir of the Luncheon*, in ‘Papers relating to tour of Canada, bulk: Bulk, 1928-1930, 1928-1930, 1956, 1964-1966’, 1928-1966, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Papers relating to tour of Canada, bulk: Bulk, 1928-1930, 1928-1930, 1956, 1964-1966’, 1928-1966, MS. 12073/1 File 3. [Hereafter Giles Papers].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

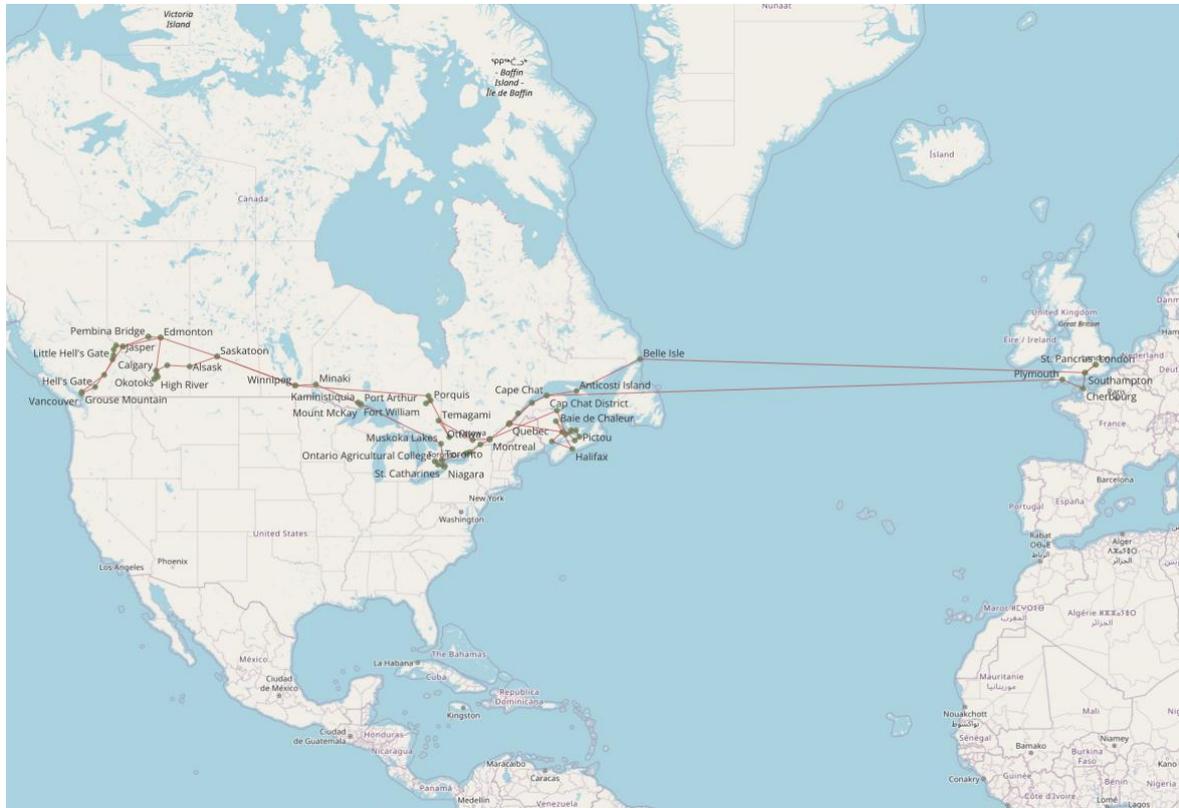
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Laurence Giles, *Canada, 1928: Being a contemporary chronicle of the Tour of the Young Ambassadors of Empire in that year* (p. 9, 38-39), in Giles Papers.

Ambassadors the opportunity to admire both Canadian towns and nature. The Young Ambassadors visited government buildings, universities, farms, factories, and shops. They attended dinners hosted by government officials almost everywhere they went as their ‘privileged [...] position [of being selected as Young Ambassadors] allowed access to official spaces.’<sup>7</sup>



**Map 1. Route of the YA Tour.**  
Source: created by the author.

Laurence Giles who celebrated his nineteenth birthday onboard of the RMS *Alaunia*, came from Erdington and was a graduate of King Edward VI School, Birmingham, embarking on the Canadian adventure before starting his studies at Queen’s College, Oxford.<sup>8</sup> Giles kept a daily diary of the tour, which he typed up in 1930.<sup>9</sup> Along with the diary, he left behind a photo album with a booklet explaining the location of each photo, miscellaneous documents including letters sent home and official luncheon booklet, and a scrapbook filled with newspaper articles on the trip.

Although at face value the tour might seem as simply a fun trip, which in fact it was, when analysed further, it becomes evident that the tour of Young Ambassadors was entwined in the

<sup>7</sup> Katie Pickles, ‘Exhibiting Canada: Empire, migration and the 1928 English Schoolgirl Tour’, in *Female imperialism and national identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire*, ed., Katie Pickles (Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, pp. 83-84, in Giles Papers; John Owen Smith, ‘Laurence Giles, 12 Aug 1909-12 Jan 2007: A Tribute’, *John Owen Smith* <<http://www.johnowensmith.co.uk/headley/laurecegiles.htm>> [accessed 19 October 2025]; The Queen’s College, University of Oxford Archive, email to Karolina Glasek, August 2025; *Who’s Who among the Fifty “Young Ambassadors”*, Giles Papers

<sup>9</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, pp. 1-2, Giles Papers.

Britain’s inter-war empire project. This essay will analyse to what extent the official goals of the tour were reflected or differed from the lived experience of the Young Ambassadors.

### Literature review

The 1928 Young Ambassadors tour sits at an intersection of two historiographies: one focused on the school journey movement, the other on government settlement schemes.

The 1928 Young Ambassadors tour was an outgrowth of the School Journey Movement. The historian Winfield argues that by the inter-war period, the school journey movement ‘had grown into a country-wide effort to promote international amity and the will of peace among a generation of students growing up in the aftermath of the First World War’. School journeys would, it was hoped, foster friendships with European, American, and Commonwealth students – and ideally promote imperial unity through ‘mutual affection and common heritage’ of imperial subjects too.<sup>10</sup> The tours took place in the context of bilateral negotiations on emigration between Britain and Canada, resulting in the 1922 Empire Settlement Act, under which ‘Canada would offer limited assistance to three classes of intending British migrants: household workers; agricultural workers nominated by a Canadian farmer; and children between eight and fourteen years of age sponsored by an, established voluntary society.’<sup>11</sup>

Harper and Winfield have analysed the 22 tours organised by School Empire Tour Committee (SET) for more than 500 boys from public schools between 1927 and 1939, to British colonies, including Canada, but also Australia, New Zealand, India, the Caribbean, and South and East Africa.<sup>12</sup> Pickles has also shown that a 1928 public schoolgirl tour, one of only four undertaken by girls between 1928 and 1938, also ‘encourag[ed] empire unity’.<sup>13</sup> For the 1928 girl tour’s co-organisers, the Imperial Order Daughters of Empire, the tour would attract British immigrants at a time when fears of a declining Anglo-Celtic numerical superiority with the arrival of immigrants from other ethnic backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> The Canadian government received criticism for collaborating with private railway companies to recruit immigrants from Europe of non-Anglo origin.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the Canadian government launched the ‘3,000 Families Scheme’, aimed at British families, and the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King negotiated an agreement with Whitehall and private transport companies to reduce the cost of passage to Canada. As a result ‘the number of assisted immigrants more than doubled’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Marjory Harper, ‘Personal Contact Is Worth a Ton of Text-Books’: Educational Tours of the Empire, 1926–39’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32.3 (2004), p.48; Sarah Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire: The “School Empire Tours” and their significance for conceptual understandings (1927-1939)’, *History of Education Review*, 40.1 (2011), p. 82, 84.

<sup>11</sup> John A. Schultz, ‘Leaven for the Lump’: Canada and Empire Settlement, 1918–1939’, in *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, ed. by Stephen Constantine (Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> Harper, ‘Educational Tours of the Empire,’ p.54; Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire’, p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> Pickles, ‘Exhibiting Canada,’ pp. 78-79.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> John A. Schultz, ‘Leaven for the Lump’: Canada and Empire Settlement, 1918–1939’, in *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, ed. by Stephen Constantine (Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-161.

Set against the backdrop of ongoing imperial debates about migration and settlement in both Britain and Canada, SET touring aimed to construct a ‘a narrative of hegemonic Anglo-Canada’, achieved through the replication of British norms and the emphasis of similarities between Britain and the Dominion.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the schoolgirls were shown the best of Canada, and the idea of a united British race was emphasised to them, in order to promote settlement.<sup>18</sup> ‘Assisting British youths to take up a life in the dominion had proved a popular idea,’ writes Schultz, ‘especially among those who saw in Empire settlement the means of perpetuating the British race in Canada’.<sup>19</sup> This view was reflected in the various settlement schemes including the ‘Boys Training Scheme’ of 1927 which brought British boys to Canada and provided them with agricultural training.<sup>20</sup>

The young Britons who went on tours were expected to take on the role of ambassadors to Britain when abroad, but to also become ambassadors of the country visited upon return. Thus, Empire tourers became ‘a hand of friendship’.<sup>21</sup> Both Harper and Pickles are more explicit in their analysis, describing the youths as ‘propagandists’ of Empire, who were expected to share their experiences.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the diaries published in *Echoes* magazine (the magazine of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire) and radio broadcasts served as propaganda and reveal the interests of the organisers of the tour.<sup>23</sup> The desire to send the most representative individuals explains the selection process, with the justification that children from public schools best embodied British values.<sup>24</sup> In the case of girls, this ambassadorial role would be procreational, with SET propagandists hoping that they would help to populate the colonies with children of British ancestry.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the settlement schemes enjoyed limited success.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, by the end of the decade, Canadians once again turned against immigration because of the belief that the subsidised immigrants were ‘wholly unfit’, rather than being representative of ‘the best [British] stock’.<sup>27</sup> A more restrictive immigration regime followed, leading by 1930 to the end of Canada’s involvement in the Empire settlement scheme.<sup>28</sup>

The Young Ambassadors tour taken by Laurence Giles shines fresh light on youth tours taken by both girls and boys, focussing attention away from privileged youths of public school backgrounds. The 1928 tourers came from a variety of social backgrounds and geographic areas, and had an equal proportion of male and female tourers. While it is important to remember that the diary was written from a single, male point of view and is therefore not representative of all tours taken by young people in the 1920s, it does reveal the experience of an individual. Moreover, it reveals the experience of a tourer themselves, which can be

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<sup>17</sup> Pickles, ‘Exhibiting Canada,’ p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Schultz, ‘Canada and Empire Settlement,’ p.162.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> Harper, ‘Educational Tours of the Empire,’ p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Pickles, ‘Exhibiting Canada,’ p. 80.

<sup>24</sup> Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 84, 90.

<sup>25</sup> Harper, ‘Educational Tours of the Empire,’ p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Schultz, ‘Canada and Empire Settlement,’ p. 163.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166, 168.

contrasted with the media reports, which according to Giles were exaggerated.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the primary sources highlight the political nature of touring by showing how individuals were part of Britain’s empire project, whether they were aware of it or not.

### A Democratic Tour

The majority of inter-war tours recruited children from public schools, young Britons perceived to best represent the British character and more able to meet the high costs of the tours. For example, the average cost of a tour organised by the School Empire Tour Committee was £140 and lasted around 4 months.<sup>30</sup> This was a steep price, equivalent to over £7600 in today’s money.<sup>31</sup> The organisers of the Young Ambassadors tour emphasised that ‘[t]his Scheme was conceived to bring that opportunity within reach of all in the British Isles, free and without restriction, irrespective of class or means, the type of school attended or the kind of employment followed.’<sup>32</sup>

The Organising Director, Frank L. Lascot, argued in a booklet published to commemorate the official luncheon ahead of the tour, that ‘[e]very part of the country and all grades of society are represented.’<sup>33</sup> He went on that some of the Young Ambassadors are ‘the son of a ship’s plater, the daughter of a church dignitary, the son of a football trainer, a girl telephonist, and a farmer’s daughter who is a student at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.’<sup>34</sup>

A second booklet offered ‘interesting biographical details’ of the Young Ambassadors who ‘are splendidly representative of the youth of the Motherland’.<sup>35</sup> For example, Laurence C. Giles the ‘[s]on of a brassfounder’, was hoping to ‘do advanced work in Greek, Latin or history, and literary work’. John D.C. Dick the ‘[s]on of a housekeeper’, was completing an ‘[a]pprentice[ship] with Royal Bank of Scotland.’ Mona Hughes the ‘[d]aughter of a schoolmaster’, was an ‘Undergraduate at Sheffield University’.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, what united all of the Young Ambassadors was their hard work and ambitions. Many of them achieved high grades in school exams, won university scholarships, held athletic achievements.<sup>37</sup> Thus, while the Young Ambassadors tour was designed to democratise participation to all social classes, some aspects of the tour were similar to the public school pattern, namely, the individuals selected were seen as representing the best British values, allowing the youths to take on an ambassadorial role.

### Socialising amongst Young Ambassadors led to British unity

I wish I could reproduce Urquhart’s racy account of his escape: when Lady Marjorie came in he just cowered doon wi’ Hector intae a bunk and he doesna ken how many girrls he was sitting on, ye see (chuckle). An’ then Lady Marjorie sees the bulge, ye see, and says (growl)

<sup>29</sup> Laurence Giles, *Letter from 26 August 1928* and *Letter from 27 August 1928*, in Giles Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Inflation Calculator’, *Bank of England* <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>> [accessed 20 October 2025].

<sup>32</sup> *Empire Free Travel & Scholarship Scheme: Souvenir of the Luncheon*, in Giles Papers.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Who’s Who among the Fifty “Young Ambassadors”*, in Giles Papers.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

“Com on oot of theirr” and as Hector cam out she banged him on his heid, and (chuckle) while she was occupied with Hector he just dodged under her arm and awa’.<sup>38</sup>

On top of the diversity of social classes, the Young Ambassadors were recruited from all parts of Britain, including Glasgow (Scotland), Hillsborough (Northern Ireland), Llangollen (Wales), Brighton (England). Giles’ attempt to transcribe the Glaswegian accent of Thomas ‘Urquhart’ Matthew portrays the awareness of the Young Ambassadors of their diversity.

Current scholarship emphasises imperial unity as a key aim of school touring.<sup>39</sup> But Giles’ diary reveals that unity among the Young Ambassadors was the chief outcome. For example, Giles wrote that ‘[w]e are a rag in our cabin – Tyneside, Cockney, Brummagem and Glasgow; we have a priceless time trying to understand each other’s expressions.’<sup>40</sup> The positive tone of the sentence suggests that the boys enjoyed encountering people from different parts of Britain and finding differences between themselves.

The sense of friendship is evident in a letter home, in which Giles wrote that ‘on the whole they’re [50 Young Ambassadors] a topping game & I have many friends, several of whom I hope I’ll never lose touch with – Hargrave, Nell, Rob Riddle and Urquhart Matthew for instance.’<sup>41</sup> While naturally the Young Ambassadors lost touch with one another over time, the long-term success of British unity can be measured by looking at the 1956 Newsletter, where several of the Young Ambassadors wrote that they have stayed in touch over the years.<sup>42</sup>

Friendships were formed from the closeness of touring together – and from the long stretches of boredom at sea or in railway cars. For example, impromptu events like ‘a pillow fight’ highlight the organic growth of friendships between the youths.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, regional pride and connection to one’s own home grew on board of the ship when ‘playing an inter-regional deck-tennis tournament among the 50’.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, the encounters with individual Canadians were only brief, which explains why the diary reveals only the first impressions of the individuals encountered on tour and why forming stronger bonds with the individual Canadians was impossible.

### Meeting Canadians

Tour organisers hoped imperial unity would be achieved through social bonds between British and dominion youths; thus, ‘boys and girls of a similar age and social standing [were] introduced in an endless round of dances, picnics and sporting events’.<sup>45</sup> This is clearly evident in the Young Ambassador tour. However, due to the diversity of the participants of the tour, the encounters with Canadians were also much more diverse in their social backgrounds.

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<sup>38</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 110, Giles Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Harper, ‘Educational Tours of the Empire,’ p. 48; Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 82, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, pp. 22-23, Giles Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Giles, *Letter from 22 August 1928*, in Giles Papers.

<sup>42</sup> *News-Letter 1956*, in Giles Papers.

<sup>43</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 224, Giles Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 31, Giles Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 90.

Some of these encounters were more successful than others. Giles described a dance party at the Government House of Prince Edward Island as ‘really quite jolly, though, even when introduced to P.E.I. Girls and their forward American ways.’<sup>46</sup> This hints at more of an imperial distinction rather than imperial unity, highlighting how Canadian culture was also highly influenced by the United States, consequently forging its unique Canadian identity.

In contrast, Giles had a more enjoyable time during a dinner at Winnipeg when he forged a connection with the son of his host and his friends, ‘four or five athletic University graduates’, during discussions on sports, athletic scholarships, and American universities.<sup>47</sup> The young men shared a common topic, with Giles himself being a ‘[m]ember of school Rugby XV, and deputy house-captain of football.’<sup>48</sup> The unity was formed because of a common interest rather than a common ethnic heritage. While public school tours aimed to introduce youths from similar social standings, the diverse nature of the Young Ambassadors tour must have made that more challenging.<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, temporary connections and even fascinations formed. In Hamilton, Giles recalled ‘I met yet another Birmingham man (the best I’ve met yet, by the way, was a Vancouver Brassfounder who knew Fred Giles & Sons., and dealt with the actual grocer we keep in affluence).’<sup>50</sup> Once again, it was a sense of commonality with one’s family and neighbourhood that arose excitement, rather than simply ethnic background. Similarly, a newspaper article from the scrapbook mentions how individuals, including an Irish man, went out of their way to meet Young Ambassadors from their hometowns.<sup>51</sup> However, these connections once again signify British, rather than imperial, unity.

While Canadian involvement in the settlement scheme was ‘flaky’, their participation in the school tours suggests that there was still desire to maintain some sort of relationship with Britain.<sup>52</sup> The Young Ambassadors tour was organised with the support of Canadian government and the participants were welcomed by government officials everywhere they went including Ottawa where even Prime Minister Macenzie King was meant to attend the dinner, but unforeseen circumstances meant that he was ‘called to the West’.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, ordinary citizens were also active participants in the Young Ambassadors tour. For example, in Moncton, the Young Ambassadors were met by a crowd of about 100 who wanted to meet people from ‘from the Old Country as they are always calling it’.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, upon arrival in Timmins, the Young Ambassadors were ‘welcomed by a large crowd with a brass band’.<sup>55</sup> Maybe it was the novelty and the temporality of the visits that arose support amongst

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<sup>46</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, pp. 58-59, Giles Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, pp. 106-109, Giles Papers.

<sup>48</sup> *Who’s Who among the Fifty “Young Ambassadors”*, Giles Papers.

<sup>49</sup> Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 219, Giles Papers.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Fifty Young Ambassadors Home Again’, in Laurence Giles, *Canada 1928 Timmins-End*, in ‘Scrapbooks of the Canada tour containing news cuttings, letters, invitations, menus, tickets, programmes, postcards and drawings., 1928’, Giles Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Schultz, ‘Canada and Empire Settlement,’ pp. 168-169.

<sup>53</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 66, Giles Papers.

<sup>54</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 45, Giles Papers.

<sup>55</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 84, Giles Papers.

Canadians, rather than long-term settlement which often became economically burdensome to the taxpayers.<sup>56</sup> Alternatively, it might be a reflection of the fact that Canadian public was supportive of settlement schemes aimed at young people.<sup>57</sup> While it cannot be said for certain nor generalised to the whole population, the primary sources give a sense that the Canadians were ambivalent about their own supposed Britishness, once again highlighting a unique Canadian identity.

### Promoting emigration

Launched just six years after the 1922 Empire Settlement Act the Young Ambassadors tour promoted emigration. Officials praised the tour for its ability to redress Britain’s alleged over-population and balance the empire. For example, Sir John C.W. Reith (Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation) stated that “... A [Young Ambassadors] Scheme such as this, which may point the way to a voluntary adjustment of these inequalities (the distribution of population throughout the Empire), deserves the whole-hearted support of men and women of good-will.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the Viscount Burnham, G.C.M.G. claimed that “... Your Scheme is admirable because it introduces the personal touch which is needed to strengthen the bonds of Empire, and people the wide spaces of the Dominions with sturdy young Britons.”<sup>59</sup> As Pickles and Harper have emphasised, there was a desire to maintain an Anglo-Saxon hegemony in Canada and thus, an imperial unity based on ethnicity was promoted.<sup>60</sup> The fact that the officials decided to print these extracts from the opinions of the individuals highlights that the theme of emigration was important to the organisers of the Young Ambassadors tour.

Emigration was promoted through various speeches given by officials during official meals and events, much to Giles’ seeming boredom. During ‘a pretty simple lunch’ in Moncton, Giles summarised the speech ‘Moncton was the hub of the province: Why not settle in New Brunswick ? and so forth.’<sup>61</sup> Emigration was explicitly promoted to the youths. Giles continued, ‘Lindsay tells me the great problem of the Maritimes is this one of population: it is losing settlers by thousands to the golden West.’<sup>62</sup> Evidently, this was an opportunity for Giles to learn more about the situation in Britain’s former settler colony. However, the straightforward tone, especially in comparison to vivid descriptions of other events, indicates a lack of enthusiasm about the topic.

During a visit ‘to the C.N.R. [Canadian National Railway] Immigration Hall’ in Winnipeg, where the Young Ambassadors ‘were addressed by various immigration officials’, Giles claimed that ‘it is amazing how many of the leading Canadians, especially in politics [...] are immigrants themselves.’<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Giles noted down ‘the significant immigration figures for British emigrants to Canada’ shared by one of the speakers.<sup>64</sup> This is a contrast in attitude from the beginning of the tour in New Brunswick, which suggests that the tour might have been

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<sup>56</sup> Schultz, ‘Canada and Empire Settlement,’ pp. 165-166.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>58</sup> *Empire Free Travel & Scholarship Scheme: Souvenir of the Luncheon*, in Giles Papers.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Pickles, ‘Exhibiting Canada,’ p. 81; Harper, ‘Educational Tours of the Empire,’ p.70.

<sup>61</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 47, Giles Papers.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 97, Giles Papers.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

influential on Giles’ view of emigration. Thus, while Giles was impressed by some of the facts about Canadian migration, the repetitious message bored him.

Nonetheless, Giles seems to have been bored once again several weeks later. During ‘a civic luncheon’ in Hamilton, Giles recalled a speech ‘Also the usual (and encouraging) “What we need is more men and women from Britain: we are loyal and we want to remain a British country.” In Hamilton there are six to seven hundred manufacturing industries.’<sup>65</sup> Giles portrayed the monotone nature of the themes covered by officials. The officials were sneaky in their approach when promoting emigration by linking it to specific industries, emphasising that these were the workplaces that potential immigrants could expect.

As the settlement scheme sought to encourage emigration in agriculture, one way to do that was through visits to farms and factories.<sup>66</sup> This was the case during a 1926 tour of Australia, which was promoted ‘as a desirable location for settlement to the tourists.’<sup>67</sup> Thus, ‘[t]he major features of the tour mirrored this emigration theme with visits to agricultural colleges, experimental institutes, goldmines, factories, sheep stations, steel works, fruit farms and many other places of work and training for settlers.’<sup>68</sup> The Young Ambassadors visited many similar places. Giles described how during a visit to Manitoba Agricultural College, ‘knowing next to nothing of agriculture, I found myself absurdly interested and peppered the professional guide with questions.’<sup>69</sup> This highlights that Giles was interested in the places shown; thus, the goal of piquing interest in the agricultural sector was achieved. In this sense, the official goal of promoting agriculture was reflected in the lived experience of Giles.

On top of revealing British plans regarding settlement schemes, the diary also revealed the attitudes to immigration held by both Canadian officials and ordinary citizens. The desire for hardworking immigrants was a recurring theme through various speeches. After a speech made by Mr Dunning, ‘a self-made immigrant’, during an official dinner in Ottawa, Giles felt that ‘[i]t was very interesting to see the instant applause for his references to Canada not wanting the (ordinary) lazy Englishman, who wants Government help all the time; Lindsay had spoken to me of this and in devious ways I had gleaned the Englishman’s unsuspected unpopularity in Canada.’<sup>70</sup> Canadians did not sugarcoat immigration, highlighting that ‘an immigrant must be ready and quick to take any job without trouble with his pride’.<sup>71</sup> This touches upon the fears of Canadians who opposed the Empire Settlement Act due to the economic burden of unemployed immigrants, many of them English, already in their country.<sup>72</sup>

While Giles might not have been too keen on emigration, the topic did have some allure on individual tourers. A newspaper article from the scrapbook stated that one of the Young Ambassadors did not return to England, as she had accepted a job offer in Regina. Moreover,

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<sup>65</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 219, Giles Papers.

<sup>66</sup> Schultz, ‘Canada and Empire Settlement,’ p. 155.

<sup>67</sup> Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 103, Giles Papers.

<sup>70</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, pp. 71-72, Giles Papers.

<sup>71</sup> Giles, *Canada, 1928*, p. 77, Giles Papers.

<sup>72</sup> Schultz, ‘Canada and Empire Settlement,’ pp. 152-153.

the article claims that several Young Ambassadors have been offered jobs in different places in Canada.<sup>73</sup> Thus, despite the controversies regarding the settlement schemes, Canadians were willing to bet on polite and proper immigrants of ‘British stock’. The 1956 Newsletter also shows that individuals decided to settle abroad. For example, Fred Mace settled in Canada in 1929, while Winfried Lloyd moved to Australia in the 1950s.<sup>74</sup> While it is more certain that those who moved straight away were influenced by the tour, those who moved later on could have been shaped by other experiences.

### After the tour

Although the tour took place between 28th July and 16th September, it did not end there. Giles compiled a beautiful leather-bound diary, a photo album, and two scrapbooks filled with newspaper articles, postcards, and paper menus, as well as a folder with miscellaneous documents including letters sent home and a luncheon booklet. One of the postcards in the scrapbook that Giles sent home said ‘P.S. keep this’, which implies that he was keen to keep souvenirs from his time in Canada.<sup>75</sup>

Giles entered Queen’s College, Oxford on a scholarship in Michaelmas term of 1928, where the Pro-Provost noted the Young Ambassadors tour in the entrance book.<sup>76</sup> Upon graduating with a Classics degree, he became a colonial administrator in Nigeria in 1932. The Young Ambassadors maintained a connection by creating a newsletter in 1939, and in 1956, sharing how their lives have changed since the tour. Following a successful career, Giles returned to England in 1956 where he took on a job at the Imperial Chemical Industries.<sup>77</sup> He visited Canada once more on a work trip.<sup>78</sup> Once retired, Giles became highly involved in the Bramshott & Liphook Preservation Society, even writing a book about Canadian troops stationed in the village during both World Wars.<sup>79</sup> Most importantly, he carried the memories of the tour with him throughout his life.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the goals of the Young Ambassadors Tour were met to a limited extent. Namely, the scheme democratised touring for the group of 50, while maintaining similar characteristics to public-school tours reserved for the privileged. However, plans for other tours never came into fruition with travel remaining an opportunity limited to a few. The goal of promoting emigration achieved some success with several of the participants eventually emigrating within the Commonwealth. Nonetheless, the goal of achieving imperial unity was

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Fifty Young Ambassadors Home Again’, in Laurence Giles, *Canada 1928 Timmins-End*, Giles Papers

<sup>74</sup> ‘Young Ambassador Turns Farmer’, in Laurence Giles, *Canada 1928 Timmins-End*, Giles Papers; *News-Letter 1956*, pp. 9-10, Giles Papers.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Canada Owns Most Powerful Locomotive in British Empire’, in Laurence Giles, *Canada 1928*, Giles Papers.

<sup>76</sup> John Owen Smith, ‘Laurence Giles, 12 Aug 1909-12 Jan 2007: A Tribute’, *John Owen Smith* <<http://www.johnowensmith.co.uk/headley/laurencegiles.htm>> [accessed 19 October 2025]; The Queen’s College, University of Oxford Archive, email to Karolina Glasek, August 2025.

<sup>77</sup> John Owen Smith, ‘Laurence Giles, 12 Aug 1909-12 Jan 2007: A Tribute’, *John Owen Smith* <<http://www.johnowensmith.co.uk/headley/laurencegiles.htm>> [accessed 19 October 2025].

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Giles, email to Karolina Glasek, September 2025.

<sup>79</sup> Laurence Giles, *Liphook, Bramshott and the Canadians* (Bramshott & Liphook Preservation Society, 1986); John Owen Smith, ‘Laurence Giles, 12 Aug 1909-12 Jan 2007: A Tribute’, *John Owen Smith* <<http://www.johnowensmith.co.uk/headley/laurencegiles.htm>> [accessed 19 October 2025].

not met due to the short encounters with Canadians that made the establishment of closer connections rather difficult.

On top of revealing the goals of the organisers, the case study also portrays touring as a form of experiential learning. The tour showed the 50 that there was a wider world out there, during a time when not many had the opportunity to see it personally for themselves. Albeit short, the encounters with Canadians showed the Young Ambassadors the similarities and differences between the countries, revealing unique national identities despite the organiser’s push to highlight the Britishness that supposedly united the nations. Most importantly, the tour created a sense of British unity between the Young Ambassadors as they befriended individuals from all parts of Britain.

As well as educational, it was also a fun trip for a group of young people. Thus, it might be argued that, for some, the tour may have ‘offered nothing more than an enjoyable climax to their school careers, and who did not realise they were tools in a wider imperial agenda.’<sup>80</sup> However, the fact that Giles retained the memorabilia suggests that he saw the tour as valuable and important in his life experience. Moreover, Giles’ career choice, a colonial administrator in Nigeria between 1932 and 1956, raises questions about the extent of influence of the tour.

While Harper argues that after World War II the tours were unsuccessful in achieving their goal of strengthening imperial unity, Winfield recognises their long-term legacy up to the present day.<sup>81</sup> Winfield argues that ‘friendships were forged and careers launched as a direct consequence of the programme’ and that it ‘gave rise to the “gap year” concept in the years that followed the Second World War.’<sup>82</sup> This can be extended to the concept of a year abroad where connections are formed, with the Erasmus Programme ‘foster[ing] a stronger sense of European citizenship and unity among participants.’<sup>83</sup> Without my year abroad which piqued my interest in anything Canadian, I would have probably never picked up the diary to share Giles’ story with the world.

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<sup>80</sup> Harper, ‘Educational Tours of the Empire,’ p. 71.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69, 71.

<sup>82</sup> Winfield, ‘Travelling the Empire,’ p. 91.

<sup>83</sup> Erasmus Student Network, *Participation in Learning Mobility as a Driving Force to Change the European Union* (Erasmus Student Network, 2024), p. 6.