

Chapter 19 Children 4 Sale...All Aboard the Foundling Trains



The first orphan trains operated prior to the Civil War. **Over 250,000 children** were transported from New York to the Midwest over a 76-year period (1853-1929) in the largest mass migration of children in American history. As many as one in four were Irish. Some abolitionists feared that the orphan trains were being used as an extension of slavery, and there was reason behind their fear. Not all the orphans were being adopted. Many became slaves to farmers, child abusers and indentured servants with no rights or freedoms. The first Orphan Trains left Grand Central Station in late 1853 for Dowagiac, Michigan. The trains continued to run for 75 years. The last official train ran to Texas in 1929. Many children were sexually abused, mistreated, malnourished, and overworked in the Midwest farms. Trains would stop in midwestern and southern towns, and the children would file off and parade before the assembled townspeople, often on hastily constructed stages. Locals would inspect the

children, feel their muscles, look at their teeth, and question them. Contact between the children and their families back east was strongly discouraged. Many of these children ran away from the abusive new homes they were placed in.

These abandoned children were left to their own devices to obtain shelter and food, often stealing, begging, selling matches and/or papers to support themselves. These children were labeled as "Street Arabs", "the dangerous classes", and "street urchins" to name a few. In the mid 1800's and early 1900's of the United States history, these problems escalated and led Charles Loring Brace, a minister in New York, to found The Children's Aid Society in 1853 in New York City. A report in the New York Times dated May 10, 1860, cited the four distinct classes of needy they served: "*First – Friendless and deserving young women. Second – Destitute children between the ages of 3 and 14 years. Third – Motherless and orphan infants. Fourth. – Dependent mothers with children who should not be separated.*"

In the 1870s, the Catholic Church became concerned that many Catholic children were being sent to Protestant homes and were being inculcated with Protestant values. They began operating their own Placing Out program via the railroad sponsored by the New York Foundling Hospital. Priests in towns along the railroad routes were notified that the Foundling Hospital had children in need of homes. The priest would make an announcement at Sunday Mass and adults could sign up for a child, specifying gender and preferred hair and eye color. It was *common to have children separated from their siblings*, to not have birth certificates, and no further contact with their parents or siblings. In many cases the only legal document for the children would have been their baptismal certificate. By the age of 18, the children were released from their indenture and were expected to make their own way in life.

Foster Care Was Created to Harvest Children.

In the United States, foster care started as a result of the efforts of Charles Loring Brace. "In the mid-19th Century, some 30,000 homeless or neglected children lived in the New York City streets and slums. "Brace took these children off the streets and placed them with families in most states in the country. Brace believed the children would do best with a Christian farm family. He did this to save them from "a lifetime of suffering" He sent these children to families by train, which gave the name

The Orphan Train Movement. "This lasted from 1853 to the early 1890s 1929?" and transported more than 120,000 250,000? children to new lives.

"When Brace died in 1890, his sons took over his work of the Children's Aid Society until they retired. The Children's Aid Society created "a foster care approach that became the basis for the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997" called Concurrent Planning. This greatly impacted the foster care system.

Origins of US Foundling Homes



The New York Foundling Hospital in 1880.

In the late **1860s**, there was an epidemic of infanticide and child abandonment in New York City. The Sisters of St. Peter's Convent downtown on Barclay Street regularly found abandoned babies on their doorstep. Sister Mary Irene Fitzgibbon of St. Peter's approached Mother Mary Jerome, the Superior of the Sisters of Charity, regarding the need of rescuing these children. *Archbishop (later Cardinal) John McCloskey* urged the Sisters to open an asylum for such children.

On October 11, **1869**, three Sisters of Charity – Sisters Irene, Sister Teresa Vincent, and Ann Aloysia – opened The New York Foundling Asylum of the Sisters of Charity. They received one infant on their first night of operation. Forty-five more babies followed in that first month. To meet overwhelming demand, Foundling opened a boarding department in November and began placing children under the care of neighbors. Seventy-seven more babies followed in the next two months.

After two years, **The Foundling had accepted 2,500 babies**. The New-York Historical Society has a collection of the notes left with the abandoned babies, which is part of a larger collection of historic photographs of the Foundling maintained by the Society. **In 1872**, construction began on their massive new full block facility on land granted by the state between East 68th and 69th Streets and Lexington and Third Avenues. It opened in 1873, and an adoption department was established to find permanent homes for children.

New York Foundling Hospital –
circa 1894 - Byron Company -



Mt. St. Vincent
1846 Motherhood Home



1742 England Foundling Home

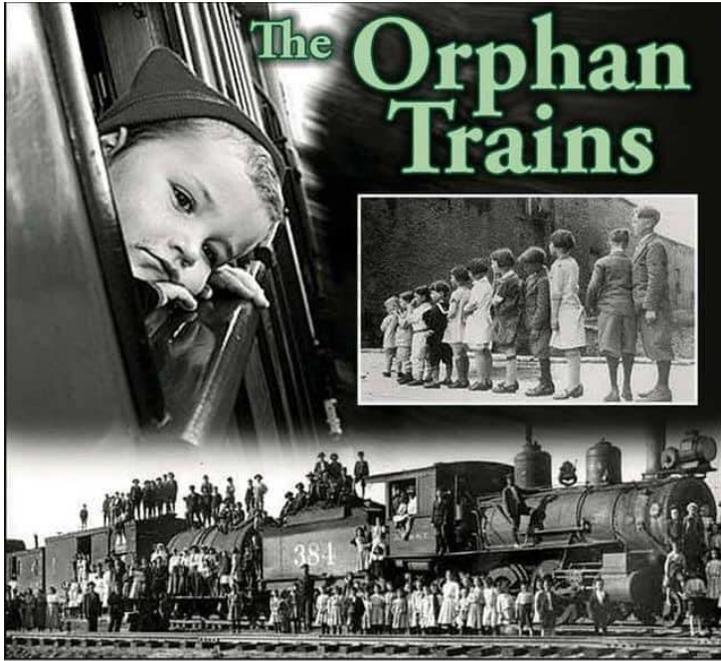


Front of the Foundling Hospital, Coram's Fields, Middlesex, designed by Theodore Jacobson (d.1772), 1742-52 (Wall 355).

1753 Foundling England



1753 engraving of the Foundling Hospital building.



The Orphan Trains - a phenomenon long since gone . . . when 200,000+ children were transported to new lives. A wistful look back, such as the young lad in the upper left, a 'cattle call' where kids would line up to be chosen by new foster parents, as seen above right . . . all in Orphan Trains . . . as seen above.

HOMES FOR CHILDREN WANTED!

A Company of Homeless Children from the East will Arrive at
Waukon, Thursday, November 13
 AT 2:00 O'CLOCK P. M.

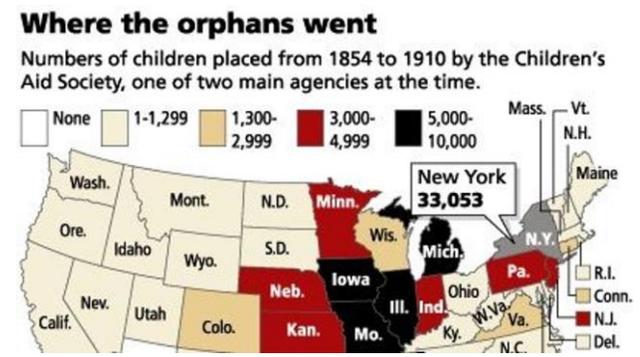
These children are of various ages and both sexes. Some are of the most beautiful type. They are all bright, having very good educations. The children of New York City are being sent to find good homes for them. Attention being given to those who are willing to take them. There are many children in need of good homes. Parents are asked to be kind and to take the children to the office of the Children's Home Society, 125 E. 11th St., New York City, where they will be placed in the hands of their new parents. The Children's Home Society is a non-profit organization and all the expenses are borne by the donors.

A. J. Anderson, Secretary, 125 E. 11th St., New York City. A. T. Hoffman, Director, 125 E. 11th St., New York City.

An Address will be Given by the Agents
 Conducted on the children's behalf. Location at the
ARMORY OPERA HOUSE
 Waukon, Thursday, Nov. 13th, at 2:00 P. M.

Richard W. Brown, Agent, 125 E. 11th St., New York City. Mrs. A. L. Hill, Agent, 125 E. 11th St., New York City. Mrs. A. M. Conover, Agent, 125 E. 11th St., New York City.

Don't Want New York Foundlings.
 Madison, Wis., Feb. 1.—The Wisconsin state board of control, having in charge the state charitable and reformatory institutions, is taking measures to stop the importation of foundlings from New York City. A car load of these children were received in Milwaukee last week from the New York Foundling Hospital, and were all given away to Poles without any adoption proceedings being taken. The members of the board consider this a menace to the state, as some of the children, it is feared, will become public charges and an effort will be made to stop the practice.



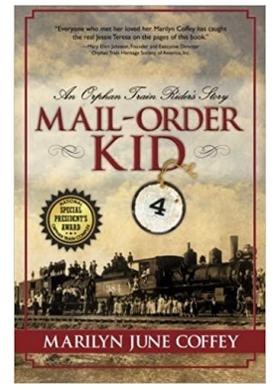
Homeless . . .
 . . . Children.

THE CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY
 HAS PROVIDED
 2390 Children With Homes, in Families.

All children received under the care of this association are of **SPECIAL PROMISE** in intelligence and health, and are in age from one month to twelve years, and are sent **FREE** to those receiving them, on ninety days trial, **UNLESS** a special contract is otherwise made.

Homes are wanted for the following children:
8 BOYS—Ages, 10, 6 and 4. Brothers, all fine. Brothers 6 and 4 years. English parents, fine looking, healthy. American! Has had his foot straightened. Walks now O. K. Six years old, dark hair and eyes, good looking and intelligent. American.
10 BABES—three months. One boy baby, has fine head and face, black eyes and hair, fat and pretty; three months old. Send two samples.

REV. M. B. V. VAN ARSDALL
 General Superintendent
 Room 48, 280 La Salle Street, CHICAGO.



Foundling Wheels



The wheel in which foundlings were placed

Foundling wheels were institutionalized by a papal bull issued in the 12th century by Pope Innocent III, who was shocked by the number of dead babies found in the Tiber. By 1204, there was a wheel in operation at the Santo Spirito Hospital in Rome, next to the Vatican. A 14th-century home for abandoned children in Naples, annexed to a church, is now a museum about foundlings. Many common family names in Italy can be traced to a foundling past: Esposito (because children were sometimes “exposed” on the steps of a convent), Proietti (from the Latin *proicio*, to throw away) or Innocenti (as in innocent of their father’s sin). In the Middle Ages, new mothers in Rome could abandon their unwanted babies in a “foundling wheel” – a revolving wooden barrel lodged in a wall, often in a convent, that allowed women to deposit their offspring without being seen. Now a Rome hospital, the Casilino Polyclinic, has introduced a technologically advanced version of the foundling wheel – not at all a *wheel but very much like an A.T.M. booth!*

United States – Baby hatches started operating in the state of **Indiana** in 2016. All 50 states have introduced "**safe-haven laws**" since **Texas** began on September 1, 1999. These allow parents to legally give up their newborn child (younger than 72 hours) anonymously to certain places known as "safe havens", such as **fire stations, police stations, and hospitals**. Foundling wheels spread to various parts of Europe and were used until the late 19th century. Modern foundling wheels have made a comeback in various places in Europe in recent decades, particularly in Germany. Switzerland, the Czech Republic and other European countries also have drop-off points for unwanted newborns. On mainland Italy and the island of Sicily, installed a device called '*la ruota* (or *rota*) *dei proietti*': the wheel of the castoffs, or 'the foundling wheel'. These wheels could be in the outside walls of churches or convents, or in larger cities, in the walls of foundling hospitals or orphanages.

The wheel was a kind of 'lazy Susan' that had a small platform on which a baby could be placed, then rotated into the building, without anyone on the inside seeing the person abandoning the child. That person then pulled a cord on the outside of the building, causing an internal bell or chimes to ring, alerting those inside that an infant had been deposited. In the larger towns, foundlings were baptized, then kept in a foundling home with others, and fed by wet-nurses in the employ of the home. There they may have stayed for several years until they were taken by townspeople as menial servants or laborers, or placed with a foster family. Or, sadly but more likely, they never left the institution, having died from malnutrition or from diseases passed on by the wet-nurses. In smaller towns, the foundling wheel may have been in the wall of the residence of a local midwife. She would have received the child, possibly suckled it immediately to keep it alive, or arranged for a wet-nurse to do so, then taken it to the church to be baptized and to the town hall to be registered. If the child was near death when found, many midwives were authorized by the church to baptize the infant, 'so that its soul would not be lost'. Civil officials were often similarly authorized. Sometimes children were literally abandoned on the street or on a doorstep, but the use of the foundling wheel was so widespread that even these children were often referred to as having been 'found in the wheel'



Foundling wheel at the "Ospedale degli Innocenti" in Florence