



Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed

Stephen O'Connor

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A powerful blend of history, biography, and adventure, ORPHAN TRAINS fills a grievous gap in the American story. Tracing the evolution of the Children's Aid Society, this dramatic narrative tells the fascinating tale of one of the most famous — and sometimes infamous — child welfare programs: the orphan trains, which spirited away some 250,000 abandoned children into the homes of rural families in the Midwest.

In mid-nineteenth-century New York, vagrant children, whether orphans or runaways, filled the streets. The city's solution for years had been to sweep these children into prisons or almshouses. But a young minister named Charles Loring Brace took a different tack. With the creation of the Children's Aid Society in 1853, he provided homeless youngsters with shelter, education, and, for many, a new family out west. The family matching process was haphazard, to say the least: at town meetings, farming families took their pick of the orphan train riders. Some youngsters, such as James Brady, who became governor of Alaska, found loving homes, while others, such as Charley Miller, who shot two boys on a train in Wyoming, saw no end to their misery. Complete with extraordinary photographs and deeply moving stories, Orphan Trains gives invaluable insights into a creative genius whose pioneering, if controversial, efforts inform child rescue work today.

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