ORPHAN CHILDREN COME TO CITY

Baby Train Festive Occasion in Local History

By ALTON E. BROUSSARD

It was a highly festive and exciting occasion in the history of Lafayette. May 7, 1900, was the moment when the Baby Train from New York City pulled into the Lafayette railroad yards. The shipment of the children included in the Baby Train was a highly festive and exciting occasion in the history of Louisiana.

When engineer Dick Tannor applied his brake valve to bring the Baby Train to a stop, the children were already arriving. The children, who had been waiting so eagerly, were the most excited of all. They were eager to see their new home and to meet their new foster families.

The priests would have sometimes before they could converse with one another. The boy, Robert, could speak English and Simon spoke French. The priests had been waiting so eagerly.

Details of the distribution of the children in the Lafayette area were made by the late Father William J. Teachings, pastor of Lafayette, and almost everybody who was anybody apparently assisted with arrangements for the reception of the orphans and their foster parents from throughout the Lafayette area.

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One lonely little girl, Ella Orthman, now Mrs. Chester Hebert, 907 Myrtle Place, Lafayette, spotted motherly Mrs. Arthur Mouton in the crowd, threw her arms around her neck and gleefully yelled "Mother!"

Red Tape Cut

Mr. and Mrs. Mouton, both of who are now dead, couldn't dispute such persuasive evidence. The Sisters somehow arranged to assign Ella to the Moutons. This heart-tugging scene was one of many repeated at depots in Catholic south Louisiana between 1907 and 1910. Details of the great exodus of children are hard to come by. No single source of information has been found and apparently none exists. Fragments of information must be pieced together from sharp, memory eyewitnesses and from information told to the orphans, most of which are now in their 60's, and none of whom were old enough to remember.

For example, a similar contingent of 56 orphans were shipped to Opelousas, but it isn't clear whether they were in special cars which had been routed through Lafayette on Train No. 9. Probably Train No. 9 left the Opelousas coaches to be picked up by the S. P. Bumble Bee, a local train that made up in Morgan City and proceeded to Lafayette, Opelousas and Alexandria.

Interest Revived In Story

Despite the excitement generated in Lafayette by the arrival of the "Baby Train" in 1907, the story seems to have been almost obliterated except in the memories of the city's old-timers. At least until Joan Coussan, 12-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Coussan, revived interest in the story when she wrote a prize-winning paper on the event. The Advertiser story is concerned with the local aspects of the Baby Train story, but details of the entire program are far ranging and Broussard's research turned up information and details of interest to many orphans, their relatives and friends in various parts of Louisiana. All of this material will be deposited in a library, probably the archives of the Dupre Library of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, so that it may be available to anyone.

Additional information is collected almost weekly as word of the research spreads, Broussard said, and this will be deposited in the library as it arrives. His address is Box 647, USL, Lafayette, where he is a professor of journalism.
'Baby Train' Was Festive Time In Local History

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E. Stafford, ordered all possible equipment muffled and quieted when the Baby Train came through. Stafford and another district official, Paul W., were in the forefront at the depot reception.

Sisters Bring Food

N. P. Moss, president of the First National Bank, had arranged with the Gordon Hotel to house the out-of-town foster parents who had to stay overnight with their new children. Food had been prepared by the Sisters of Mt. Carmel Academy.

Bill Lewis, proud operator of the city's only public two-seated streetcar, had his small Liou Saoud, driver of the horse-drawn bus, graciously provided free transportation.

Doctors John Telson and J. T. Trahan made house calls to examine the orphans before they became the responsibility of their foster parents.

All in all, it was a day for Lafayette to remember for a generation.

Years rolled by and the young orphans who had been taken away from their homes and hearts to Lafayette did not forget. As some of these, known as "indigents," grew up, they would often return to the city where they had spent their childhoods. Their stories, if published, might have been entertaining, but certainly not better than those of the people who opened their homes and hearts to them.

Among Lafayette residents who were passengers on the Baby Train were Mrs. Chester Hect, 907 Myrtle, the former Ella Orthman; Robert "Bob" Chiasson, 2950 W. Congress; Frank Chopin, 212 Chestnut; Mrs. Placide Cormier, 621 Evangeline Dr.; Charles Walker, 414 Garfield; Mrs. Clara Cooper, 1311 Johnston; and three others who requested that their names not be published.

Mrs. Hect was the young woman who claimed her foster sister had thrown her from about her neck and crying, "Mother!" Although her foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Morton, had a natural daughter, the love for Ella was undiminished.

"They spoiled me too much. I was a bad little girl, but they gave me everything," she related.

Mother Identified

Mrs. Hect found out that her mother, Rebecca Chiasson, had been taken away from her when she was about two years old and was reared by Mr. and Mrs. Adam Chiasson who had no other children. As most of the other orphans did, Frank remembers hearing "indigents" crying unexpectedly at his home each year to check on the foster arrangements.

Railroad Strike

Frank Chopin dropped out of high school during a railroad strike and was reared by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Chopin, whose real name was Holland. The strike was called a "Railroad Strike" and was reared by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Chopin, who were reared by Dr. and Mrs. James D. &.F. Haiford, ordered all possible equipment muffled and quieted so that there would be no legal claim for carrying the Baby Train.

Charles Walker thought his family name was Green but research revealed that it was Greenberg. Charles attended high school in Opelousas and took an industry job in Port Arthur, Texas. Later he came to Lafayette where he was under the late Paul Elmer, at that time circulation manager of the Advertiser. After Elmer left the job, Charles was employed by the late publisher, Tom Callahan, to succeed Elmer.

Walker was later employed by the New Orleans Times-Picayune and remained with that newspaper for 30 years. He has retired and is now in a local nursing home. Mrs. Walker makes the bed in their home at 314 Garfield.

Mrs. Placide Cormier, 621 Evangeline Dr., whose real name was Minnie, was reared by Mr. and Mrs. Adam Romero of Carencro. Mr. Romero was a carpenter.

Mrs. Cormier giggled as she recalled how, when she was about two years old, her foster parents sat her on the floor and taught her to "how to put your shoes on your feet." Charles and Miss Fuselier were the "parents" to the orphans.

"I was a curious child," she said, "and when the other children would come to check on my rearing, my mother and my father were in every case to "go outside and play.""

Life Was Good

Instead, the child would tell her foster parents what she had learned that day. She was an adopted daughter.

"I had a wonderful life," she remembers. "My foster mother and father were good people. They didn't ask for anything."

Of the three orphans living in the foster homes, only one of their names was published. One is a man and the other two housewives. The Sisters found the condition of one of the three unsatisfactory and the other two were adopted by another Lafayette family.

Mrs. Clara Cooper arrived on the Opelousas Baby Train and was reared by Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Fuselier of that city. Mr. Fuselier was a long-time and well-known grocery store operator of Opelousas.

Mrs. Cooper was never told by her foster parents that she was an adopted child and did not find out until after her death.

Other orphans reared on the Lafayette area include the following:

Sam Green of Carencro, who arrived in Opelousas when he was 15 months old. Mr. and Mrs. Camille Cormier of the Carencro area.

Carello Orphan Dies

Gordon Baker also arrived on the Baby Train and was reared by Mr. and Mrs. Telesphere Cormier. He died in 1945.

Mrs. W. J. Seguigne, released from the hospital, was reared by Dr. and Mrs. Pierre Duley Duplessis of Youngsville.

Jee Aillet, widely known for her ability in charity work and athletic performances, was reared by Dr. and Mrs. Isidore Plais Horn but Mrs. Horn died before the child arrived. Mr. and Mrs. L. W. Walker, an Opelousas family, who was also childless, placed the baby.

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Of the three orphans living in the foster homes, only one of their names was published. One is a man and the other two housewives.

However, the Sisters could not have adopted them as orphans were not taken away when they were mistreated. Instead, an "Indenture" was used as a legal and binding instrument to care for the orphans.

Courthouse Construction Is Authorized

NEW ORLEANS (AP) Congressmen Hale Boggs and F. Edward Hebert said Thursday that a House Public Works Committee has authorized $27 million for courthouse and federal office building in Lafayette Square.

The lighter claw of the common lobster is used in cutting up food and the heavy claw for crushing.