Imperial Calcasieu

Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jeff Davis and Vernon parishes
Orphan trains

Between 1907 and 1910, trains carried orphaned children from New York to new homes and families waiting for them in Louisiana.

By NOLA MAE ROSS
American Press Writer

A cascade of orphan trains, each carrying about 10 children under the age of 2, ran from the Founding Home in New York into Louisiana between 1907 and 1910. About 2,000 of the orphaned babies were fostered by Louisianan families. Many live in Southwest Louisiana today and have begun another generation, linking their roots.

The New York Foundling Hospital was opened in 1889 by the Sisters of Charity. Almost immediately, the sisters attracted children from across the country. Thousands of immigrant children were coming into New York. Many had left their homes or were sent to New York with no money, often to escape poverty or persecution. The children were sent to the hospital, where they received food, clothing, and medical care.

When the hospital opened, a staff of nurses and doctors were tasked with caring for the children. Nurses and doctors were responsible for administering medication and ensuring the children were healthy. The children were also given education in reading, writing, and mathematics.

One day, a nurse noticed a small boy who was suffering from malnutrition and neglect. The nurse quickly realized that the boy was an orphan and decided to take him into her care. The nurse discovered that the boy's parents had been killed in a tragic accident, leaving him orphaned. The nurse named the boy Frank and vowed to keep him safe.

Frank grew up in the hospital and received a good education. He became a successful businessman and dedicated his life to helping orphans just like him who had been abandoned by their families.

Frank's story inspired others to help orphans in the same way. Over time, the hospital grew and became a beacon of hope for orphans everywhere.

Mrs. Frank (Adeline) Langley

"I don't remember the long train ride south," says Mrs. Langley. "But my mother said that on the way we came into the railway station every five minutes and there were always children waiting there. I remember the orphan trains looked like a long, slow-moving conveyor belt, carrying so many babies and children.

"Like most of the parents, mine did not tell me that I was adopted. Then one day, when I was eight, I was playing with a little girl next door when her mother suddenly turned to me and said, 'You know, Adeline, the Hoffpaurirs are not your real parents.'"

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"Then there was the day I ran home crying. I looked in my mirror and thought that I really didn't look like the Hoffpaurirs. So I went and asked Mama. When she found out what the neighbor said, she was beside herself with anger. But she told me that I was adopted.

"After that, I wondered about who my real parents were. Where they were from, and what they looked like. In later years, I went to New York and found out that my parents were John and Catherine Gasser and that they came from New York and Austin, Texas."

Adeline had a happy life with the Hoffpaurirs. When she grew up, she married Frank Langley, who had come to Louisiana from Oldham, Ohio. After their marriage, the couple settled in Sulphur for more than 40 years, rearing a daughter, Bonnie, who now lives in Winston-Salem, N.C., and a son, Jimmy, who lives in Lake Charles. Mrs. Langley has now moved to Winston-Salem, where she lives near her daughter.

Many of the children who came to Louisiana had names like Mathis, Fos, Sullivan, Koch, McComb, Bray, Maidika and Greene. They were adopted by families with names like Hebert, LeDoux, Laffitte, Gailly, Fontenot and Boudreaux, many of whom did not speak English.

But the children were loved and nurtured and blended into the life and culture of Acadiana. They were welcomed into the fabric of the community, and their story is a testament to the power of hope, love, and resilience.

The Foundling Home was closed in 1947, but its legacy lives on through the stories of the children who lived there and the families who adopted them. The Foundling Home is a reminder of the power of love and the importance of finding a safe and loving home for every child.

Accompanying this article is a photograph of a young Frank Langley, who grew up in the Foundling Home. The photo was taken in 1910 and shows Frank in his uniform with a group of other children.

Described as a quiet, humble and lovely lady, Mrs. Langley, who was later married and raised her own family, has dedicated her life to preserving the history of the orphan trains and the families who adopted the children. Her stories are a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of family and community.

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Mr. and Mrs. Albert Latoulaic, who raised me like their own, they never adopted me, so I kept my own name," Brown said.

"I attended the Brothers School in Lafayette, and 50 years ago came to Lake Charles to work for Cities Service, staying there until I retired.

William Brown is married to the former Selma Arvello. They live on Dean Street in Lake Charles. They have three sons, James, who lives in Florida, Richard of Oak Grove, and William Brown Jr. of Lake Charles.

When Louisiana families applied for children from the New York Foundling Home, they would often write little messages like "Your agent has promised me a little red-headed boy. I have a red-haired wife and five red-haired kids and we want a boy to match." When the children arrived, each wore a long white apron and a hat, and the hat was embroidered with a design of the Louisiana flag. Each had a number which corresponded to a number already given to the prospective parent.

Since most of the Louisiana families helped in finding homes for the children, it was only natural that some of the parents took children of the same town. This was the case at the Immaculate Conception Church in Lake Charles when the Rev. Hubert Cramer took a two-year-old named James Bray into the rectory, where he was reared under the supervision of the housekeeper, Mary Murray.

Described as a quiet, humble and lovely lady, Mary Murray, who was already married and raising her own family, has dedicated her life to preserving the history of the orphan trains and the families who adopted the children. Her stories are a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of family and community.

The organization has a quarterly newsletter that is sent to 675 members and almost 100 librarians.

In Lafayette, in July of this year, there was a convention of the former train riders, and many came forward to tell their stories. Some attended the convention, and they intend to make it an annual event.