

Common Mystics Podcast

Season 3 Episode 3: More Voices From The Road- The Orphan Trains

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00:00:09 In this episode of Common Mystics, we revisit our past travels to discuss truly incredible events that impacted the lives of thousands of children, and that continue to reverberate with their descendants today. I'm Jennifer James. I'm Jill Stanley. We're psychics. We're sisters. We are Common Mystics. We find extraordinary stories in ordinary places, and today we bring you the orphan trains. I can't even right now.

00:00:39 I know. To even think of such a thing. Like to say, "orphan trains," and it actually has been a thing. Right. It's hard to even utter the term. It's a true statement. Let me just remind our listeners what we do and what we're doing in this very special bonus series.

00:00:55 Please. Please do. Yeah. So, you guys know what we do. We get in the car, we drive around, we feel out stories with our psychic abilities and we're always looking for a story that is verifiable, unknown to us, and that helps or gives voice to the voiceless. But sometimes Jennifer, sometimes when we're going through the research to validate our hits, sometimes we find an additional story that may not be the current story we're working on, but those souls just don't leave us. And that has been our inspiration for this, this bonus series, "More Voices from the Road."

00:01:38 And this is the third and last of this series, I could not get the orphan trains out of my head, and I'm so glad that we're talking about them today. It really is a huge event in American history that I never heard about. Me either. Oh, it's mind blowing. So we're excited to bring voice to the orphans and the descendants of the orphans that were a part of the orphan trains. Tell me a little bit how we knew that we had to give voice to the orphans, Jen.

00:02:10 You might recall, listeners, that we were on the road in 2021, and we were out west and Missouri and Arkansas, [South Dakota] South Dakota, and when we were driving around. Jill, what were you picking up on?

00:02:25 Well, there was this really gritty vibe of like, street crime, poverty, stealing bread, things like that. Like this impoverished- think "Oliver Twist" kind of energy, right? I'm like, people just pick a pocket or two. That was the kind of energy I was picking up on.

00:02:47 I heard the word "Ireland," and it was so odd at the time because it had nothing to do with the stories that we- I mean, we were thinking about other things, so that seemed completely random. But yeah, "Ireland."

00:03:01 Absolutely. Oh, and then the song. Oh, "America, the Beautiful." Random. It was just running in your head. Yeah, random. Just very random. And again, these are notes that you were putting down in the notebook. That didn't correlate with any other story. Correct.

00:03:16 Correct. And then, it was so weird. I had this complete vision in my head of a girl in old time clothing, almost like a scarf around her head. She was on a farm, but she wasn't part of it. She was like in the field looking at the farmhouse and the farm and she felt odd and isolated and disconnected from that world, but yet she was in it.

00:03:43 That's a great vision. Thank you. That's like, I mean, I love the imagery, and it really does encapsulate what we're talking about. Oh, thank you. But as we were driving around, time and time again, we were being drawn to the railroad.

00:03:58 Yes, we sure were. And then, do you remember this? Honestly, I was up all night in South Dakota because I kept hearing a train. Do you remember that? When we were in Sioux city?

00:04:12 Yes I do, and you were like, were you hearing the train? And I'm like, no. All night long. Just the honking of the horn of the train. I was like, I just can't. So much so that when we left the next morning, we went to the nearest train depot, so I could look around and be like, what the hell, people. How are you running these trains all night? Wow.

00:04:30 That was spirit. Those are the orphan trains calling you. It turns out, I believe you're right. Tell me a little bit about the orphan trains, because this really is mind blowing. So, first of all, I want to say that much of the information that I brought to this story came from a book called, "Orphan Trains to Missouri," by Patrick and Trickett. You can find it on Amazon. I found it to be both informative, but also very readable and entertaining. So, pick that up if you're interested in this subject at all.

00:05:06 We've been throwing the term, "orphan train" around a lot already, and we're like two minutes in. Can you please describe what exactly it is that we are talking about?

00:05:17 Literally a train with orphans on it that goes from the east coast to the west for people to adopt. Wow. Yeah. So we're going to get into how this even came about as a concept, but yeah

00:05:36 Already mind blowing, right? I've never heard of such a thing. Let's get into it because I have so many questions. Okay. Okay. So the first thing you need to know about how this all started was, of course we know that the United States is really made up of groups of immigrants that have come in. Right? Absolutely. Since the time of the tribes, like something that we talk about all the time. And during the 1800s, there were certain waves of immigrants who came in from certain parts of the world. And between 1830 and 1860, most immigrants that came to the United States came from Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. You might have heard of the Irish Potato Famine. Have you heard of that, Jill?

00:06:17 I have and even as you're talking right now, I keep thinking "Far and Away," the movie with Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise. Yes. Yes. So, the Irish Potato Famine was a big deal. It happened in the 1840s, a million Irish people starved because of this famine and three to four million emigrated to places like Canada, Australia and the United States. So that brought a huge influx of Irish in particular to the United States during this wave.

00:06:52 Ask me if the Irish were the only group coming. Well, I have so many questions. First, were the Irish the only group coming, and how were the already established quote unquote "Americans" of these new immigrants to the country?

00:07:07 That's a loaded question, Jill. Well, I mean the answer is obvious. The established people here were not happy with the influx of Irish coming to the United States, particularly in populated areas, as we will see, but the Irish weren't the only group. And later, another wave of immigration would come during the 1800s and early 1900s, and they would include people from Germany, Scandinavia, and other countries around the Mediterranean area.

00:07:38 Okay, but I want to get back to one important reason that people were coming to the United States in particular has to do with our friend, T. Jeff. Who's T. Jeff? Thomas Jefferson. Oh my goodness. Lord. That is not going to take off. T. Jeff.? No, and we are cutting everything that you just said because I am like, cringing for you. T. Jeff. is not going to take off, Jennifer. That's his pimp name. That is not his pimp name. T. Jeff.

00:08:13 Jill, we're editing all this out. You better because I can tell you- I can't call him T. Jeff.? You are not calling him T. Jeff. Okay. T. Jeff. Yeah, and this goes back to our Merriweather conversation that like, the land that they got in addition to the expedition, the monies from the expedition, is bullshit. Yes. I just want to say that. Yes, exactly.

00:08:37 It does go back to Thomas Jefferson because remember the Louisiana purchase and suddenly he had all this land? And he's just given it away for free. Right because he wanted white people to possess it. And so all of this land was available and it never occurred to me before researching this story, that it wasn't just Americans making that mad dash to the west. People from different parts of the world were coming to America for this free land. There was even a song about it.

00:09:06 What's the song? I'm not going to sing it, but I'll tell you some of the lyrics. Okay. "Come along, come along! Make no delay! Come from every nation. Come from every way. Our land is broad enough. Don't be alarmed, for Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm." See, now again, I go back to Merriweather and we're talking about that 1600 acres. That was not a big thing.

00:09:33 Okay, you need to stop. You need to let that go, Jill. I was bringing that up again because it wasn't enough money. They weren't paid enough. So, some immigrants were able to come to the United States, get to the Midwest and really do well. Namely, the Germans. German immigrants really settled, and they were successful farmers and homesteaders, particularly in the Missouri River Valley area. Nice.

00:10:00 However, most of the time when poor immigrants from other parts of the world come to the United States, they really don't have the means or the cash to get out west even. Right? I mean, that would not have been easy. You remember the Oregon Trail? Like that's not easy. I died every time. I never made it. Right. Never ever made it.

00:10:24 And so if they come here and they realize, oh crap, there's no way we have the means to get west for this free land, and even if they could, how many of them actually had the skills to be homesteaders and farmers? You know? Few of them. It takes a very special type of, you know, determination and talent to just make it from nothing. I know that I couldn't,

00:10:45 You know, honestly, I feel like what would be a challenge, even if you were farming in like Ireland or Germany or Scandinavia, the land here, the climate here is different. So you would have to relearn everything you know about agriculture.

00:11:00 Right. Exactly. Thank you for making that point. So instead, what did they do if they got here and realized that they can't get out west and take advantage of this free land? Of course, they settled in the metropolitan areas out east, namely New York City, because that's where they could have found work, particularly in the factories.

00:11:23 Absolutely. And back then, there were no labor laws. So not only were men and women, but also children were meant to work, some as young as four, in the factories. There's so much written about this and it's surprising and heartbreaking at the same time.

00:11:42 And still recent. We're only talking about 200 years ago. Exactly. Less than 200, actually. So as poor people were crowded in these tenements in New York City, there started to be this, this situation where poor children would be all over the city streets.

00:12:02 Which makes sense. Absolutely. Some of these children were legit orphans who had nobody to take care of them, and we're just living off the streets by their wits, avoiding the

cops and the social workers, who were of course, trying to get them off the streets. So some were legit orphans.

00:12:20 Okay. But many of them weren't orphans. Many of them just had poor parents or had poor families. And at the time between like, 1840 and the early 1900s, there were more immigrants, more poor people than there were jobs available, even in the factories. So some people were unemployed and had no income, but even those people who worked in the factories, it wasn't good. Like you said, there were no labor laws. Jill, factory conditions were so bad that they were often unhealthy and dangerous. So if you got sick or if you got injured, there was no disability. You just couldn't work and suddenly you were out of a job and someone else would just take your place because there were so many people. So because of this, there were a lot of poor children on the streets. Questions? Comments?

00:13:13 Um, there's a couple things. When I think of orphans, I think of children without any parents, but the definition of orphan at the time was like, the inability for parents to take care of their children. Not just the lack of a parent.

00:13:34 Oh, is that true? Yeah. It's like a lack of parenting available to the child. Well, I did not know that. Yes. Also, the people, the class system in New York City was that the people that were of means would look at these immigrants as people with bad blood. They thought that people that were impoverished were afflicted with a poverty gene in their family, by which there was just no way that they're going to be able to make it. So they were referred to as, like, bad blood. You don't want to mix with them. They have that poverty gene.

00:14:09 Interesting. So there's a bunch of stuff going on in New York City. You have the very rich. You have the very poor. They're on top of one another. And the poor is just looked like they just can't help. It. They're just poor.

00:14:22 They're born that way. You were born poor. So the cops in New York City actually had a term for all the children that were crowding the streets. What was it? They called them "Street Arabs" which is probably like an ethnic slur. Yeah. There's a bunch of uncomfortable feelings I get from that.

00:14:45 Yeah, but that's what they were called. But Jill, some of these children, they were legitimately trying to earn money. Well, sure. The little newsboys? That was a real thing. "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" I know. Right. They were really selling newspapers or shoe shiners. They would be shining shoes or selling matches on the street.

00:15:11 So, these were like legitimate ways to make money. If you were a kid on the streets. By the way, you totally would have been a "Street Arab," like if that was a thing in like 1987. You were like hustling on the streets

00:15:21 A hundred percent. A hundred percent. But I mean, those are really cute jobs. I get like warm, fuzzy visuals when I think of the little boy. "Extra! Extra!" But some of these kids were prostitutes. That's true. I mean, let's be real. It wasn't all like, a cute and cuddly boy with his dog selling papers.

00:15:40 That's true, and some of them were begging, pick-pocketing and stealing purses. So, some of them were just doing what they had to do to get by. And so they were a part of the crime syndicate, you know?

00:15:54 I think I would've been like the head child of the crime syndicate. Oh, you think so? Oh, yes I would. I'd be like you pick that purse, bring it back here.

00:16:03 Can I just tell you something really quick? This is a side tangent, but I cannot not share this because it's ridiculous. So, I talked about selling matches, like kids used to sell matches on the street. Have you ever heard of "The Little Match Girl?"

00:16:18 No. Well, it's a story by Hans Christian Anderson. It's like a fairy tale. When I was in my first year teaching, I used to go to the library and take out like, 40 children's books at a time and just deposit them in a big basket, and then during nap time at this Catholic school where I taught kindergarten, I would just grab a book and read it, and "The Little Match Girl" was one of the books I took off the shelf at the library. I sat down. I started reading it. It's a Christmas fairytale about a little girl, what could go wrong?

00:16:48 So, I started reading it to my class. Jill, she is a poor girl selling matches on the street. She doesn't sell enough matches. So she's afraid to go home to her father, who's going to beat her. So she lights the matches one at a time to keep warm in the city and ends up freezing to death.

00:17:11 You are a kindergarten teacher. I read this to my class. Were there tears? You know, only half of them were paying attention. I don't think I did serious harm, but I remember one little girl saying, "She died?" And I go, "And went to heaven. Yay! Time for recess."

00:17:35 Oh, my God. That's not my fault. Jennifer. There should be like a big red sticker on children's books that can do irreparable psychological damage. That is not on me. Sorry. Jennifer, somewhere in the Chicagoland area, there is a young adult talking about like, can you believe my kindergarten teacher told us a story about a little girl who'd rather [Seriously though, Jill] freeze to death, then go home to their abusive parents. Okay. No, that's fine.

00:18:10 Okay. So, anyway, I don't know if I should cut that or not. You know, I think I'm concerned. Talk about PSA. . All you teachers out there, read the books before you bring them to class. . I never did that again. I never did that again. At least, read the reviews.

00:18:29 So, anyway, a lot of these kids had it really, really bad on the streets. It was a big problem. There were social workers trying to clean up the streets and there were orphanages for children who were in this scene, but there just weren't enough orphanages. There just weren't enough spaces for all of these children.

00:18:48 So what did they do? Was there any solution to this overpopulated crime ridden child crime syndicate? Well, enter Charles Loring Brace. He is our protagonist in this story. He was a rich New Yorker and he was concerned about all of the children running the streets.

00:19:13 Tell me something. Tell me the deets. Did he come from money? Did he make money? He was wealthy. I believe he came from money. In 1853, he and his wealthy friends founded the Children's Aid Society of New York.

00:19:28 Okay. That sounds charitable. Yeah, and the goal was to provide food, lodging clothing to the street children, and also provide them with education and trade opportunities. Oh, well, that's nice. What did that look like? Well, they started taking them off the streets and putting them in orphanages or trying to set them up as apprentices. Okay.

00:19:53 And so they did that, but that was really slow going because there were only so many spaces, only so many people who could help out all of these thousands of children on the streets. So he came up with a new and radical plan, which was of course, to ship the children west, to be adopted by foster families in the rural American west

00:20:20 Let's take a time-out there. Let's take a break because I want to let that digest. So, he was rounding up children and putting them on a train. Yes. To be shipped out west? Yes.

They do. So, this is really interesting. Get into how it actually works. What are the deets when it comes to the orphan trains?

00:20:41 The Children's Aid Society of New York sent notices to rural towns that were along the railroad line. So, they sent notices to stores, churches, community centers, and they put advertisements in the newspapers. You can actually find old advertisements [I can't] for these children. It's chilling and off putting that they would be in the newspapers.

00:21:10 Yeah, for sure. Also there was a meeting place that was established, right? . So the children would come to a stop in a small town and then they'd be taken to a quote-unquote "place to be presented." It was often a church, a hotel or a courthouse, but sometimes it was just at the train depot. They would just be put up on a platform to be paraded around.

00:21:34 Like literally they were just looking for any large space to accommodate people at like a flea market for children. Yes. Yeah, exactly. Okay. Oh, by the way, you know how we say today, you're putting someone up for an adoption? Yes.

00:21:51 That terminology came from the orphan trains because they would put them on a platform. The kids were put up, literally. They were on a stage or like an elevated area. That is crazy. I had no idea where that term came from. I didn't even think about it before. It just seemed right, like just up for adoption and I didn't know what that meant. Wow. Cringe.

00:22:13 They didn't just put them on the train by themselves. They were put in groups of about 30 and there were agents, quote, unquote "agents." A man, and a woman who were employed by the society to ride the trains with the children, to get them ready, to get them up on the platform to be presented. They'd ride with the kids from one stop to the next stop. And then those who weren't selected, they would ride back with them. And if they weren't selected, they'd go back into an orphanage in New York.

00:22:46 Oh my gosh. Geez. Oh Pete. Yeah. Potential foster parents were vetted by local citizens in each town so that they didn't just let any old crackpot come and you know, take an orphan and adopt a child. You had to go through a vetting process.

00:23:08 Yeah, but the people that were vetting them are their own people. Yeah, that's true. Locals. Local businessman, right. So if you knew somebody, you could probably get a child. Exactly. Right. I'm not saying it was full-proof, but they didn't just accept anyone. It's a thinly... It's a very thin veil to me because if they really were putting these families under strict scrutiny, it would be an outside independent. That is true. And they did not do that. They did not. They did not. Now the foster parents signed an agreement or contract and it stated that the arrangement would not be permanent until an agent of the society visited the home. And it also said that if you adopted one of these children, they needed to be treated as members of the family. Not as like, um, not as like, uh, an indentured servant, for instance,

00:24:02 But literally, literally these children were indentured servants. And the contracts that the quote unquote "foster families" were signing was up when the child was either 18 or 21. So by definition, the way we think of servitude, these children were, even though these contracts were signed. Just saying.

00:24:26 And there was a way that the society planned on checking up on these children. Mm hmm. The parties taking the children, in other words, the foster parents were supposed to write twice a year about how it was going. So writing letters to the society. The children were also urged to write to the society as well and let them know how things were going. And the

foster parents were allowed to back out of an agreement, back out of the contract, if the child proved quote unquote, “unsatisfactory,” I have so many questions.

00:25:05 One more thing. The society did require that the home would be visited once a year, but that turned out to be impossible for them to do. That was my question. It seems like the amount of paperwork that this orphan train is generating seems improbable that anyone would actually audit the requirements that these families are signing up for. Right?

00:25:34 Right. I mean, especially when you look at the numbers. The numbers were astounding. In all, over the 75 years that the orphan trains ran, up to 400,000 children were placed in homes or at least rode away on the orphan trains and were picked up by family. So we're talking about this huge, huge number.

00:25:59 Yeah. From 1853 to 1929, this was an unofficial policy that people were doing. Yes. That's right. And there were historians, as they look back, they theorize that the amount of information they have on the actual goings ons of the orphan trains is only a fraction [I believe that] of the amount of people that actually went through the process.

00:26:27 I believe that. I believe that. Jill, I know we've been pretty critical, but some good things did come out of the orphan trains. I take issue with the word critical because I don't think I'm being critical. I'm just looking at it from a modern eye. It wasn't an insult. I think I am. It's easy to be critical.

00:26:50 I don't think I'm being critical. Okay, this is what I honestly think. I think that this would have been a good policy if one, the mission was actually different than what I perceive it to actually be. If the focus was actually on the wellbeing of the children and giving them opportunity, then this may have been a good policy. Yes. But it obviously wasn't and we'll get into it.

00:27:20 Well, the goal was to get as many kids out as possible. Like, that was the practical goal to get these kids off the streets, instead of let's really look at each child and make sure that those procedures and policies are in place to make sure that each child gets to a good place for that child. Right? And that's not what they did, but despite that, there were good things that came out of the orphan trains. Alright. Well, many of the children that were taken off the city streets did find good homes in the Midwestern rural communities.

00:27:56 Okay. Okay. When you say there were success stories, where did we learn that information? Was it like the guy Brace saying like, hey, they like it there? Like where did he get that?

00:28:08 The last orphan trains ran in 1929, as you have already said. So, modern history has actual accounts from the orphan train riders who were interviewed as adults, and many of them, if not all of them, really express gratitude and appreciation for their foster families. And they were happy with the way their lives turned out. And the society kept notes on the successes. And in one of their yearly publications, they wrote about all of the politicians, the clergyman, the judges, the professionals, and the good citizens that the orphan train riders turned out to be, right? So, that was among their successes. Like, society was patting themselves on the back. Look at these. They were “Street Arabs.” You know, we shipped them out west and they became wonderful, successful people. Ah ha.

00:29:10 Can I tell you one little story? Please. Please do. It's About Willie Dunnaway. That's a cute name.

00:29:18 This is directly out of that book that I was telling you about, "Orphan Trains to Missouri," by Patrick and Trickle. Willy Dunaway was on an orphan train that went to Bentonville, Arkansas. He reported that his foster parents chose him because he was bad on the platform. Like onstage, he was running around. He was bothering the other kids. There was a bell apparently on the stage and he kept ringing the bell.

00:29:44 That's amazing. I know, but his foster parents chose him. And later they said that they thought it quote unquote "showed ambition." Isn't that cute? That is adorable. So they took him home, and on the first day his foster mother asked him what he wanted to drink with dinner. Does he want milk or water? And he replied that he wanted beer.

00:30:07 Yes. Yes. He was three years old. Oh my God in heaven. He said he wanted beer. But in hindsight he said, I must have had an interesting three-and-a-half years in New York city, and he considered himself to be the most fortunate man on earth to have been raised by his foster family. And I just got the chills. So there are really, really good things that came out of these experiences.

00:30:31 I like hearing about the good things. Continue. Tell me more about good things that happened from this experience before I get to be a Debbie Downer. Okay. Well, remember how I told you that the society hired agents to ride the trains with the children? Yes, yes you did. Okay. Many good people were really committed to helping these children.

00:30:51 That makes me happy. Yes, and there was one couple called The Swans. In 1904, Reverend Swan and his wife, Hattie Swan became agents with the society of New York. Their job was to travel to and from New York, bringing groups of the children out west. And they actually made their permanent home right on the railroad, so that they could get on and off really easily. That's really sweet.

00:31:17 I mean, it shows you their commitment if they chose their permanent home to be on the train, like on the train line. Well, children remembered The Swans for their kindness and their humor. Reverend Swan, he has such Santa Claus energy about him. He was short and round with a quote unquote, "ready smile," and the children called him Grandpa Swan.

00:31:46 I love it. I love it so much. Once he was traveling with a group of about 20 children, and a stranger asked him, "are all of these children yours?" And he replied, "yes, sir. Every one of them." So he just had that kind of sweet, loving energy about him. I absolutely love that. And in my own research, there was a story about his wife Hattie. So Miss Hattie would come visit the kids that were placed every year. And one of the children would call her Miss Hattie, and then she would just have a conversation with him as he was playing, talking about his life and how he was. She was acclimating. That is really what she was doing, but he didn't know why Miss Hattie was coming every year to check on him. He was like, she would just play with me in the yard and ask me questions. That's how it should be. .

00:32:37 I love that. Yeah. Reverend Swan, he would also. He and his wife made sure that they visited these children in their homes. Now on one occasion, Jill, I have to tell you, and I love this so much. Tell me.

00:32:51 This is like my favorite thing. I'm going to try not to start crying right here. On occasion, when the children weren't a good fit, they would take the children themselves and foster them themselves until they could be put into a permanent home. This one little girl, her

name was Elsie and she couldn't find a foster family to take her in because she had a facial deformity, and the Reverend and Mrs. Swan adopted her themselves.

00:33:21 Oh, I love it. I know. Isn't that the sweetest thing? That legit is the sweetest thing. I want to snuggle that girl. The Swans are remembered in their permanent home, Sedalia, Missouri. They're known today for their generosity and kindness, and their work with the society has over time been praised and admired. So really good people. They're not the only example, but there are shining beacons of an example of people who really served these children well.

00:33:52 I hear about this couple again and again, because they really were the exception. They really cared about these people. Ouch. I know. So there is a lot of bait and switch and a lot of disingenuous intentions when it comes to this situation in American history. And I think that it's, it's worth noting that if this were so successful, if this was such a good thing for these children and the intentions were pure, we would hear about it more in history. And the fact that we don't, that we stumbled upon this psychically and field need to give voice to these children tells me that tells me something shady AF was going on. So please, Jennifer, let's get to the other side of this coin.

00:34:46 Yeah. So, there's a lot of tragedy that happened with the orphan train. Some we know about and some we don't, but part of the problem was that from the very beginning, this concept was based on myth. There was nothing realistic about Brace's vision of Midwestern life. I'm going to read a quote. Please.

00:35:11 This is a quote from Charles Loring Brace. He said, "In every American community, especially in a Western one, there are many spare places at the table of life. There is no harassing struggle for existence. They have enough for themselves and the stranger, too. Those who are able? Pay the fares of the children or otherwise make some gift to the society and a little band of young wayfarers and homeless rovers in the world find themselves in comfortable and kind homes with all the boundless advantages and opportunities of the Western farmers life about them. Really? Has this guy ever been to a farm? What the hell is he talking about? Like there's no struggle for existence on a farm? Like, did you listen to that quote?

00:36:06 On farm life, the whole thing is a struggle for existence. Can I just say that the children who went to the farm and worked like morning till night, seven days a week, year round, and they did dangerous, dangerous work, you know? As well as hard labor.

00 :36:27 It sounds like PR. Of course. Yeah, he's whitewashing the whole situation to make it sound like he's sending these kids off to paradise, when he's really just sending them for hard labor.

00:36:40 Okay. There are so many questions I have. Yes. I agree with that. A hundred percent. He's sending a very specific kind of kid for hard labor to work on the farms in the west. Yes. He was taking children, targeting specific demographics of children, and saying it was to help them acclimate to the west and to these farm families. He wasn't taking African-Americans and history says that he does that because he's a staunch abolitionist. No, he thought that it would be more complicated if he was being black kids to the west.

00:37:11 Yeah. I don't follow. I don't follow the connection between him being an abolitionist and him not wanting to send little African-American children to the west to be adopted. Because he was saying that those children wouldn't be [accepted by white families?] Wouldn't be accepted and wouldn't be released the [indentured servitude?]

00:37:34 Yes, indentured servitude. Unofficial indentured servitude. Also, he wasn't taking Catholics. He was only targeting Protestant children. Protestant children, whether or not they were orphaned, right? Whether they had parents or not. And they were taking children that did not have red hair and freckles. You couldn't have red hair? No. No, he was being very specific on the type of children he was sending out west. So he was sending white Protestant children out west. Without red hair and that had no handicap. Oh.

00:38:18 So if you were black, red headed of any ethnicity that can show on your skin or face or Catholic, then you were not getting on these trains. I am dropping the bull shit gauntlet down right now and telling why. Why? The way this program was funded, not only by the aristocrats in New York city, like the "Daddy Warbucks", but also the railroad. The railroads were just developing during that time in the 1800s, and there was a labor shortage in the west. So they were banking on these children coming west so that they could provide the labor to these families and to create the infrastructure, to make the goods, to bring back and to utilize the railroad. So this free labor provided by the children actually directly benefited the railroads?

00:39:18 Yes. Wow. As a matter of fact, in this program, like we keep saying, it ran from 1853 to 1929, but what happened in 1929? Yes, the stock market crashed, but also the last developed train depot was created in the west. Oh. So, after there was no longer a need for and when everything hit the fan, the railroad was like, I'm not giving passes anymore to these kids. That makes a lot of sense. It makes a lot of sense that the railroads would want strong towns along the way.

00:39:58 Right. Developed towns. Right, and in order to develop the town, you need a population of workers. Wow. A population of workers and you need products. I did not realize that. Thank you for bringing that up. But another aside, you said "Daddy Warbucks?" Yeah. The "Daddy Warbucks" as in New York city, like funding this? Yeah.

00:40:17 I just have to say Little Orphan Annie was a redhead. I never realized that she would not have been wanted. She would not have been adopted because she was redheaded. I had no idea. That was completely lost on me until you just said that just now.

00:40:34 And now when you just said that, you know where I went? You know where I went? Wendy's? Oh my God. Oh my God. Where? Where did you go? Tell me. Tell me. I went "Anne of Green Gables," not Double Stacks. Wow. You don't even remember.

00:40:54 No, because Dave Thomas' daughter is a red head, and so we all need to eat at Wendy's to support the red heads. Oh my God. "Anne of Green Gables," Jen. And Rachel Lynn and all that negative talk she had about Anne. And Ann's hair, right? Yeah. I never realized there was such a stigma in history over red hair. Oh my gosh.

00:41:22 Uh, So I mean, we've been talking so much about this already, but obviously this orphan train plan never took into account the emotional upheaval that it caused so many children, like you said, they were removed from the only environment they ever knew. So a lot of them, it was the first time they ever left New York city. And can you imagine Jill? I can just envision myself sitting on a train, going westward with a group. And after each stop, and like not getting picked and the group getting smaller. And then not getting picked and the group getting even smaller. It's like middle school. Like being picked for a sports team, and like everybody's being picked around you, but you're not being picked.

00:42:07 That happened to me my entire life. And then at the end of the step, you just have to be shipped back, you know, be put in an orphanage. Traumatic.

00:42:16 If I were on the train, I don't know if I would be rooting to get adopted or not. I mean, honestly, because some of these children had parents and families. There was one story and I'm sorry to interrupt you, but there was one story about a woman who needed to work, but couldn't watch her kids. So she had brought her children to the Foundling hospital, like a hospital for children that were born without parents or their parents were going to give them up for adoption. This woman brought her children to the hospital so she can do her job. So she's like, can you just watch him for me for a couple hours? She came back and her children were put up on the orphan trains, and she never got her kids back.

00:42:52 There are a lot of stories like that. But yeah. No, that was just crazy. Oh. And if you went with your siblings, they were almost always separated. That would suck. And so on YouTube, I watched this documentary about the orphan trains, and there was a brother and his little brother on the train and they tried to separate them because they just wanted the older brother and the little brother cried so hard that they were adopted together. Like the woman was like, I just can't. Just bring them both. I don't even care. Isn't that the cutest thing? That makes me happy.

00:43:29 There are so many stories. There are so many stories about the orphan trains, and a lot of them illustrate that the Children's Aid Society was not always super careful about who they picked up. Like you said, they would sometimes have living parents.

00:43:46 Not only that, but the parents would leave letters for the children. They'd be like, okay, you gave my children away. I understand, but can you please give them these letters to let them know that I love them and wanted them. And there are boxes in the archives in New York city [Oh God, don't tell me.] of these parents' letters. I'm serious. I'm not kidding. They never got to the kids because there was such shoddy clerical work going on, that they couldn't match up the actual children, the actual orphans to these letters, so they're just like in a box.

00:44:18 You're breaking my heart. I'm just telling you the truth because some of these children had parents and families. It wasn't even just poor children. They were like indiscriminately, just getting rid of kids. There was this story about Kathleen and Deborah. They were sisters from a wealthy family in New York city. They were left with their governess while their parents were traveling Europe. Apparently, their parents were gone for a long ass time because the governess lost touch with them and didn't know what to do. So she dropped the sisters off at the Children's Aid Society.

00:44:55 Wow. Okay. First of all, I heard about the story on the YouTube documentary, but the governess? Yeah? One job. One job. She had one job. Like literally, one job. I want to know how long they were in Europe, like was it a year? I don't know. I don't know. I can't. I cannot get into the governess' brain, but they were sent to Missouri on the orphan trains and they were taken in by a Mrs. Scott. Now Mrs. Scott, to her credit, couldn't bear to separate the two girls, so she adopted them both. When the parents returned from Europe, they were like, where the hell are our children? Oh my God. They hired a private investigator, who found them.

00:45:37 Which is a miracle in itself. It is. Because there really were shoddy records. But then, a curve ball. The biological parents decided to let them stay in Missouri in their new life. These are not the parents of the year right here. Oh my God. This whole situation is so messed up. So messed up. Can you imagine how messed up the Kathleen and Deborah are? They were probably biters.

00:46:11 We've been dancing around this, but a lot of the children, we've already said this, a lot of them found good homes. But a lot of them did not find loving homes. And years later, we would find out that some train riders were reported as being abused, neglected, or suffering extremely hard labor on these farms.

00:46:38 Let's just be realistic about what a good life on these farms would be, right? Like the best case scenario is that you have a loving family that actually cares about your education and doesn't treat you as an other, but you're acclimated into their family. Right. But then you also have other kids. Right. You are the orphan to these other kids. Like the whole community knows that you came off the train. That's exactly right. There'd be a stigma about just who you were. Exactly. So, the best case scenario is still very bittersweet. Like I'm glad I was able to make it, but I don't know who I am. Right. I don't know where I came from, and I hadn't had the chance to be among my own people. Right. And they would never know. Please tell me about the last orphan trains in 1929, and then I want to tell you about some of my research notes that really stick out to me and I want to share them with you.

00:47:42 Okay. So, the orphan trains ended in 1929. You had already mentioned that it coincided with the stock market crash. It also coincided with the end of the last train depot, is what you said? Mm hmm. But also by then, most states in the United States were adopting stricter adoption policies and laws. The orphan trains ran for over 75 years, and researchers estimated that between 150,000 and 400,000 children were shipped west.

00:48:16 So, think of the United States as an established country for like, not even 300 years. Think about that. Like a third of our country's existence, we were shipping orphans out west. That's a long time. That's a long time to be doing this. If you watch "The Orphan Train" documentary, there's a bunch of them on YouTube, but if you watch it, the orphan train riders themselves and the descendants of the riders really look at Brace as like this philanthropist. Really? Yes, yes.

00:48:53 Wow. Yes. Not the pompous prick that I see? Yes. Wow. Yeah. Yeah. So the entire thing was flawed from the very beginning. I don't see Brace as a philanthropist at all. I see him as wanting to clean up his city. He wanted to clean up his city so that he could enjoy his city, you know? And his rich people could have some pride about their city being clean and having less crime on the streets. And really the focus was not on helping the children because if it was then the focus would not be on shipping as many out as possible, which it was, and would be more on making sure that the children who were placed were happy.

00:49:39 So who in this scenario, do you think we're giving voice to? Who has been haunting us, or at least you, cause you were haunted? I am. I'm kind of tortured by this. I think there are so many children who were taken on by families who disappeared, who ran away, who had to make ends meet, and who suffered

00:49:59 Beaten Oh, my gosh. I don't even want to go there in my head. Yes. I think terrible, terrible things happened to some of the most vulnerable people. I'm just so hurt. My heart is just so hurt for the children that we don't know about because they didn't write it and nobody went to find out what happened to them. But I'm also sad for the children who were placed and who had to completely abandon everything they knew before and just take on like an alter ego to cope with their new circumstances. I think that that's hard as well.

00:50:37 So 1 in every 25 modern Americans have personal history that has been affected by the orphan trains. So that's like, huge. Huge. That's like way huge, and that explains

why you've been tortured by this. First of all, the ghostly train noises at night were a little scary. Yeah. There's nothing creepier than children and then like ghostly train noises. You don't need to do that to people. I hear you. I hear you, spirits of unrest. But that was a little scary and I had to drive the next day,

00:51:13 Looking back, all of our hits seem so right on, you know? With the poverty crimes and the stealing food. Obviously, the children on the streets were doing that. Me, having Ireland come to mind and you with "America, The Beautiful" song. Mm hmm. And that the whole idea of the girl who's on the farm, who's feeling pensive and detached from it. I mean, it all just made sense. So, I knew we had to talk about this story it,

00:51:45 But why do you think now we're giving boys to these orphans? I think that Charles Loring Brace created this seemingly benevolent society, but it was really done for very selfish reasons, and there were some very serious unintended consequences that came of it. I think today we have to be careful of even those most benevolent large scale enterprises, because sometimes there is an ulterior motive and there are oftentimes unintended consequences that aren't good for people and that might hurt people because of it. Thoughts?

00:52:35 I agree 100 percent. Do you? I think that it's very easy for people with money, power, and prestige to create a narrative that people can buy into. And people are going to buy into anything that sounds benevolent, you know? Let's help the orphans.

00:52:53 Oh my gosh. Yeah, we're going to help the orphans. We're going to do this. You wouldn't even ask questions. You're like, yeah. Of course. I want to help children. What can we do?

00:53:01 Right. And you don't always take that extra step to be like, how are you helping the orphans? Which orphans are you helping? How are we going to make sure that we're helping the orphans? Do you know what I mean? I just think we have to be smarter. I mean, I'm talking for myself. I think I need to be smarter about where, where I put my money and where my money's going.

00:53:22 I honestly believe that part of my strength as a person is knowing who I came from and that I was loved, and for me to be a successful person, I think I'm doing that on the shoulders of my mom, my grandma, my sisters, and to be alone in a community that I don't have that kind of support and still succeed, seems like such a strong feat for some of these people and characters in history that had to go through this devastating separation. You know what I mean? Even the successful orphans, I'm saying, was a real uphill battle in my mind.

00:54:06 So, I'm glad that we're bringing light to this period of American history and some of these deeds. Check out "The Orphan Train" documentaries on YouTube. They're really good. Also, an author Christine Baker Klein wrote a novel about the orphan trains and did a whole lot of research. She had a presentation in Kalamazoo a couple of years ago, which is worth a gander. If you're on YouTube, check it out. You'll learn a lot about this situation that has gone undetected in the mainstream of American history.

00:54:43 And once again, "Orphan Trains to Missouri," the book by Patrick and Trickel is a really good read, if you are interested in this subject. So Jill, tell the people where they can find us.

00:54:54 Well, check out our website, commonmystics.net. Find us on Instagram, Facebook, and our Twitter feed at Common Mystics podcast. Listen to us wherever you're listening to your

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