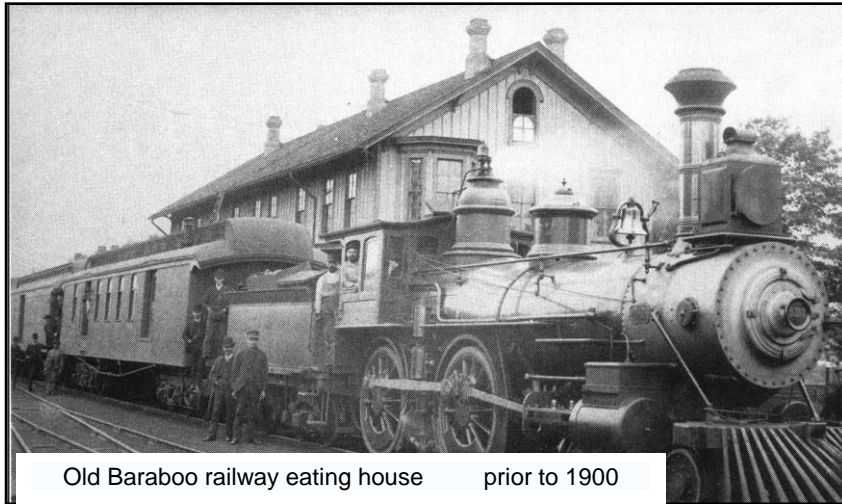


About the Iron Horse & Orphan Trains



Old Baraboo railway eating house prior to 1900

The railroad played a huge part in the building of Baraboo and related industries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and continued through the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, it didn't happen easily.

There had been quite a struggle in order to secure the construction of a road to Baraboo. In 1850 or 1851, more than 20 years prior to the road actually coming, the leading citizens of the county obtained a charter for a road to be built thru the valley which was to be known as the Fort Winnebago, Baraboo Valley & St. Paul Railway Company (some records indicate the name to have been the Fort Winnebago, Baraboo Valley & Minnesota Railway Company.) That proved to be only a dream and in 1852 a bill was introduced into congress for the Chicago, St. Paul & Fond du Lac people to build a line but the act was killed on its third reading on account of too much opposition from the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Company, which disappointed the entire county by building a road away from Baraboo some years later. Then in the fall of 1862, the Chicago & North Western (Northwestern) made a preliminary survey but failed to begin work.

In early 1864, a crew was busy working on the cuts south of Devil's Lake. Rumor had it that a large crew would soon be

employed on the task at hand with completion be contemplated as soon as possible. However, in August all work ceased with the promise that the crew would be back in the spring of "65."

The Chicago and North Western Railway was chartered on June 7, 1859. It had purchased the assets of the bankrupt Chicago, St. Paul and Fond du Lac Railroad five days earlier. On February 15, 1865 it officially merged with the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad which had been chartered on January 16, 1836. Since the Galena & Chicago Union started operating in December, 1848, and the Fond du Lac railroad started in March, 1855, the Galena and Chicago Union

railroad is considered to be the origin of the North Western Railroad system.

The same ground was gone over again the next year and in 1865 a bill was introduced into the legislature to incorporate the Portage City & Baraboo Road. To this enterprise the good people of Greenfield said they would produce \$15,000 to aid the enterprise and Baraboo made it an even \$100,000. Like all others the scheme vanished into the air and not until the 19th. of November, 1869 was there a meeting held which set the ball rolling that brought the iron horse to Baraboo by the then present company.

The President, Col. Stephen V. R. Ableman, took the Chair. The Secretary, Mr. Lang, read the published notification of the election, and stated that the full amount of stock necessary to a permanent organization had been subscribed.

The election of the directors of the Baraboo Air-Line Rail Road Company was attended by stockholders from about every town on the line of the road from Lodi to Wonewoc, and 421 votes of the 500 shares of stock were represented in the votes cast.

Mr. Mackey moved that the stockholders proceed to effect a permanent organization, and that a committee be appointed to designate the names of nine gentlemen to be chosen as directors. The motion being carried, the chair appointed Messrs. Young, Hill and Kirk to such a committee, who, after consideration presented the following nominations: For directors, Baraboo – T. Thomas, T. D. Lang, and R. M. Strong; Excelsior – Col. S. V. R. Ableman;

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Reedsburg – Jos. Mackey, Moses Young; Ironton – J. F. Smith; La Valle – S. P. Barney; Lodi – James Narracong.

Election of Officers: President, T. Thomas; Vice-President, J. Mackey; Secretary, T. D. Lang and Treasurer, R. M. Strong.

Then, in accordance with the terms of agreement entered into with the North Western Company, a re-organization of the Baraboo Air-Line Railroad Company was effected on Saturday, July 16, 1870. Messrs. Ableman, Young, Narracong, Smith and Barney, directors of the latter company, tendered their resignations, which were accepted, and the vacancies thus created filled by the appointment of Messrs. Dublap, Howe, Porter and Turner of the Northwestern Company and Mr. James L. Hill of Madison, the latter gentleman being nominated by the Baraboo Company and accepted by the Northwestern Company.

The Board then stood as follows: T. Thomas, President; J. Mackey, Vice-President; T. D. Lang, Secretary; R. M. Strong, Treasurer; James L. Hill, Geo. L. Dunlap (general manager of the Northwestern Railroad,) J. H. Howe (Northwestern Railroad's solicitor,) Henry W. Porter, and J. B. Turner.

The Baraboo Air-Line Rail Road Company never constructed or operated a railroad but through the efforts of the great Sauk County organizer, Col. Stephen V. R. Ableman, stock had been sold to partly finance the railroad. From this small but brilliant beginning emerged one of the most costly railroad construction projects of the 19th. century.

Mr. T. Thompson reported that his brother wrote him in October of 1870 telling of a new locomotive, named the "Baraboo," being constructed at the Norris Locomotive Works in Philadelphia. Efforts to find out more about this locomotive have been fruitless.

By November 23 of 1870, the *Baraboo Republic* announced that they were at last able to report that work had commenced on the Air-Line railroad this side of the Wisconsin River. A correspondent of the *Wisconsin* stated: "The Northwestern Company had 18 surveyors in La Crosse last week, exploring the line from Baraboo to La Crosse. It will come down the Leon Valley, west of Sparta, and continue down the La Crosse Valley. The Tomah Road is to be



extended southward till it intersects the line between Baraboo and La Crosse."

The Charter was amended on February 2, 1871 and the Baraboo Air-Line Railroad Company was absorbed into the Northwestern Company as prescribed by the provisions of the contract on March 10, 1871 by Act of February 17, 1871.

The North Western paid an enormous expense, through Baraboo and beyond, using the title, Baraboo Air-Line Rail Road. During construction of the Madison-Baraboo track way, over two million yards of excavated material was moved. It was greater than the total of the Chicago-Green Bay route. In addition to the heavy cost of track-laying, was the cost of structures, including signal, telephone and telegraph circuits. The cost per mile plus engineering difficulties exceeded anything that Northwestern had yet attempted. Between Madison and Baraboo it was cut and fill most of the way and towering walls of quartzite had to be penetrated.

In June of 1870, an article in the *Winona (Minn.) Republican* stated "We are informed upon high reliable authority, that the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Company will, at a very early

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Baraboo Round House circa 1871

date, build the road from Madison to Winona, or to the end of the Eastern Connection Railroad, now nearly finished for a distance of twenty-eight miles southward from the city. Surveys and estimates have already been made for the proposed route, which will complete the Air Line from Chicago to Winona, and hence to St. Paul to connect with the Great Northern Pacific Railroad.”

Mr. Terrill Thomas purchased of P. Pratt, 40 acres bordering the south side of the river in June of 1871, exactly opposite the heart of town. A fourth of the tract was overflowed by the mill-pond. Cost \$6,000. Reason, to obtain in an amicable way the right of way for the railroad through the tract.

It is interesting to note that Lyman Clark, who constructed the Baraboo House at the northwest corner of the intersection of Lynn and Walnut Streets in 1847, also owned the forty acres that later took in the railway machine shop and depots. He sold this property to the railroad for \$200.

By July of 1871, the railroad had reached Lodi and a celebration was being planned in that town on July 25 with free excursion rides into Madison. As the laying of the rails advanced towards Baraboo, so did the telegraph poles.

August 8, found the completion of the Merrimack Bridge, as the draw was swung on its turntable, working satisfactorily. The bridge was said to have cost \$65,000.

There was a goodly attendance on August 21 at a bee to clear Camp’s Grove for the celebration.

The “Iron Horse” was expected to stand in front of the Mini-Wauken house at Devil’s Lake on Sunday Afternoon, September 8.

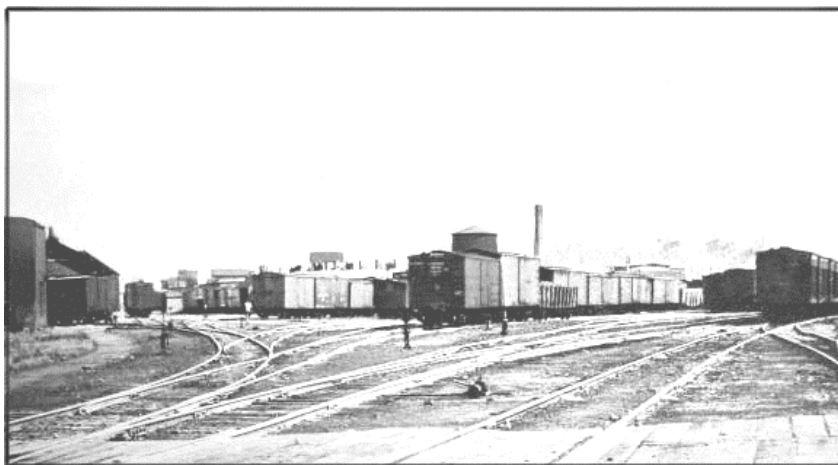
At Camp’s Grove stood the speaker’s circular platform, draped in red, white and blue with wreathes and festoons and pendants of flowers, mosses and evergreens. Seats had been hastily provided for spectators and songs quickly improvised by Joseph Hawes.

On Tuesday, September 12, 1871, the first train to enter Baraboo arrived. The road to Baraboo had been completed, so far as track laying was concerned, on Friday morning, September 8 and on that day the citizens of Baraboo set about briskly to get ready for the momentous event. A “magnificent archway was thrown across the track at the entrance to the grounds” – the Camp Grove, just north of the old Maxwell home, “over the river.” Nearly the whole region from the lake road to the east Sauk road, was popularly known as Brown’s pasture, and a bit further to the west lay Dutch Hollow, full of butternuts, while not far away was the Ellis orchard.

The first train arrived at 11:30 in the forenoon and stopped at the former site of the Crawford Bridge. The reception committee then boarded it. At the same time a dozen or more maidens dressed in white, decorated the engine with flags, evergreens, vines, flowers, scarlet berries, bouquets, streamers, garlands and mottoes.

The booming of a cannon signaled the arrival of the train. As it came creeping along, fair girls beside the track freely tossed bouquets to the passengers. The cannon continued to boom and the engine bell continued to ring until the “St. Lawrence” rested beneath the track way arch.

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Baraboo Railway Yards circa 1908

The pillars that supported the arch were made of hop poles and were wreathed in hop vines and the arch was decorated with corn shocks, sheaves of wheat, pumpkins and strings of apples. At the center was a flagpole with the banners flying.

Two and one-half hours of speeches followed. The special train, which had departed Madison at 8:30 in the morning, departed Baraboo at 5:00 in the afternoon, arriving in Madison at 7:30 the same evening. The train carried an excursion of Baraboo people on flat cars at no charge to Madison. It is not known how the people returned.

The first regular train arrived in Baraboo Saturday evening, September 16 and departed on the following Monday. Between 30 and 40 passengers were aboard with one car freighted with "chair stuff" from the Baraboo Manufacturing Company.

T. D. Lang was the first station agent, Hamer Sutcliff, baggage master and J. A. Struthers, express agent.

In building the 38 miles from Madison to Baraboo two million yards of earth were excavated, more than were handled on the entire 242-mile section between Chicago and Green Bay; while the

cost per mile and engineering difficulties exceeded anything the Northwestern had ever attempted.

Col. Ableman was behind a movement at once to push the track way to Reedsburg. During the Northwestern's fiscal year of June 1, 1873 to May 31, 1874, the Baraboo Air-Line Rail Road was finished and connected to the LaCrosse, Trempeleau & Prescott Railroad and opened for traffic in September 1873, through to Winona, Minnesota.

The road was at once pushed on towards Reedsburg and T. C. Thomas, brother of Terrill had a contract to deliver 5000 ties over the line within two miles west of Baraboo and Henry Wadell 10,000 "on the next succeeding portion of the road" while Ableman and Watson were to furnish 5000 for the Ableman region and Thomas to provide 10,000 to be delivered between Ableman and Reedsburg. It was said that as soon as the road was graded between Baraboo and Reedsburg, a force of 1400 men would start work on the roadway between Reedsburg and Wonewoc.

Shortly after the line was complete to Reedsburg, it was noted that the train blew right past Bloom's Depot in the upper part of Freedom treating the "Freedomites" as though they were not there. It was thought at the time that the negative stand the Freedom residents took on the railroad bond issue may have created this condition.

By March of 1872, the trains were making regular stops at Bloom, later known as North Freedom, and at Ableman. The question of the railroad aid was finally settled satisfactorily to the town of Freedom and the railroad company by voting the issue of bonds in the amount of \$7,500. The fare from Bloom to Baraboo at that time was \$0.25 cents. At this early date, it was said that the village of Bloom, besides its depot, consisted of a saw mill, a general store that carried a fair stock of general merchandise, a post office, a saloon and a blacksmith shop. The postmaster in 1872 was Mr. J. Quimby Haines. By the 1940's the fare was much lower, in the vicinity of \$0.07 cents to Baraboo.

Col. Ableman, the power behind the railroad being constructed, was born in 1809. As a boy of 16 years, he served as a

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drummer in the New York National Guard, Ninth Rifle Regiment. After serving seven years in minor capacities, he was promoted to Captain of the company. Governor W. D. Marcy commissioned him in July, 1833, and five years later was promoted to Colonel of the 249th. Regiment, New York State Militia. Ableman also served as U. S. Marshall for the State of Wisconsin. Out of respect the station and the village of Excelsior became Ableman, changing to Rock Springs in 1947.

It is interesting to note that while personally and unofficially surveying the route of a valley railroad prior to it being surveyed by the Northwestern Company, the Colonel determined that the railroad could not miss the area known geographically as the narrows and therefore purchased land in that area. He was right, and in 1871 he realized one of his ambitions in life, sitting on the porch of his large old-fashion home and watching the trains go by. The Colonel died at his pleasant home in Ableman on July 16, 1880.

Baraboo Depot Site Changed

At first it was decided that the Baraboo depot should be located east of the Sauk Road (Walnut Street) but, work having been started on the building west of the road, it was concluded to complete the structure, and that is where the depot remained. The original one was eventually supplanted by a new brick structure.

By April of 1872, orders had been issued for the commencement of the new railroad machine shops to start in May. At the same time the expansion of the roundhouse was to begin. The intention was to ultimately have room for twenty-four locomotives although only eight stalls would be added to the already eight completed during the prior year. At the same time, the C&NW timetable was set for Baraboo as follows:

On and after Monday, March 4 and until further notice, trains will arrive and leave Baraboo daily (Sundays excepted) as follows:

Arrive

Passenger from the south6:45 PM
Freight and Ac'n. from the south.....12.23 PM
Passenger and freight from the north.....8:55 AM

Depart

Passenger going south.....10:50 AM
Freight and Ac'n going south..... 9:25 AM
Passenger & freight going north.....6:50 PM

In August of 1872, a switch was installed opposite Benders Hotel to provide railroad access for Sauk City's Christian Obrecht's promised Baraboo Lumberyard. By the first of October Obrecht had 500,000 feet of pine lumber ready to be shipped here as soon as the rails were in. He also had about 500,000 feet coming down the Wisconsin. Some was destined for Merrimack and the rest for Sauk City. By the end of 1872, Obrecht's had an office erected at the Baraboo Lumber yard. By 1877, Norman Stewart was busy managing Obrecht's Lumber yard. This yard was located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Walnut and Lynn Streets.

The railroad yard had carpenters busy erecting a coal shed near the stockyards in September. The dimensions were to finish at 200 feet long and 32 feet wide with posts 12 feet high to the eaves. It was said that it would hold 2,000 tons of coal. This did not bode well for the sale of wood during the coming winter months.

On the 10th. of January, 1873, the Pullman car "Baraboo" named after this village was damaged near Evansville when it was thrown from the track and dragged over a rail fence, the stakes of which penetrated the side of the car and were pushed up through the roof. The car was taken to Chicago for repairs.

The engine arrived for the machine shop in February of 1873 as well as some belting and shafts. The shop was expected to be up and running very soon.

Of the 18 locomotives running over this line in February of 1873, only 3 or 4 were wood burners.

A shock was sent through the community in December of 1873 when it was learned that the men's waiting room at the depot was closed and sub-divided into offices. The men then would have to share the lady's waiting room, which was then termed as an inconvenience, and there was hope that it was temporary.

Most of the damaged rail repair had been accomplished at a shop in the vicinity of Chicago up until October of 1874. It was then the railway constructed a new shop in Baraboo, just east of the roundhouse, for that particular chore in the yard. In November two large forges were

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completed with the air supplied by a fan in the rear of the roundhouse, which was driven by steam. A main duct was provided from the fan to the shop, once there it branched off to the forges or fireplaces. By this time, 45 mechanics were employed in the roundhouse.

It was decided, in March of 1878, by the C&NW Railway to proceed with an eating house near the depot. By the last week in March, the excavation was nearly complete. The building was to be two stories in height, 32 X 80 with a 28 X 36 wing. The wing would extend back toward the street on the north side of the tracks and would have a good basement under it. The Hoadley house, north of the structure had been rented by Captain Cowles of the Cliff House and would be used as a temporary eating house.

By April 10, of 1878, a foundation was complete for the new depot, which was about the length of the depot to the west. The freight depot was also going to be moved north closer to the street so that the teams would no longer have to cross any tracks which it was necessary to lay north of the building as it then stood. This was accomplished by April of 1879.

Also under consideration was a considerable enlargement of the roundhouse and a possible new machine shop. A pipe had been laid to the river for carrying sewage (to the river, not from.) A fence had been constructed on the backside and on the east next to the road, finished with a dressed stone sustaining wall.

The first meal served in the new Eating House happened on May 20 to passengers of the evening express north. Cowles was busy fitting the house with the rooms being carpeted and furnished.

By June of 1879, masons were at work on the extension of the roundhouse. The plan called for the addition of 17 stalls at the west end of the original eight roundhouse proper; and three more at the east end which later would be in the machine shop for the use of repairing engines.

As the flurry of activity continued around the railroad grounds, the company was also busy north of the railway putting in a large well at the margin of the river and a steam driven force pump to supply water to the grounds.

In December of 1881, a large lathe weighing ten tons was installed at the railroad machine shop. The lathe was to be used in the turning of tires for drive wheels of locomotives.

The railroad yards had a new 20 by 30 building next to the roundhouse by June of 1883. It was a 1-1/2 story structure and was occupied by the carpenters who were brought in to work on locomotives.

Prior to 1883, local mean time was used throughout North America. Time was set by a sun dial which resulted in an inordinate number of local times. This caused convoluted regional and national train schedules. Sanford Flemming, a Canadian, proposed Standard Time at a meeting of the Royal Canadian Institute on February 8, 1879. On October 11, 1883, the heads of the major railroads met in Chicago at the former Grand Pacific Hotel to adopt the Standard Time System.

On Sunday, November 18, 1883, railroads throughout the United States adopted "Standard Time". Thereafter, people of Baraboo went to the railroad station to get the right time when the signal came over the telegraph wire. The first train of Green Bay and Western arrived at Iola's sparkling new station on time in 1896 thanks to the railroads. The new system was adopted by most states almost immediately after railroads did so and finally officially adopted by the U.S. government in 1918.

A standardized time system was first used by British railways on December 11, 1847, when they switched from local mean time to GMT. It was also given the name Railway Time reflecting the important role the railway companies played in bringing it about. The vast majority of Great Britain's public clocks were being synchronized using GMT by 1855.

In August of 1884, over 1000 head of cattle were fed and watered at the Baraboo stockyards.

Mr. E. C. Watson, for a long time a popular landlord of the Warren House, purchased all the furniture of the railway-eating house in September of 1884. The eating house was being thoroughly renovated and the plan was to put it in first class condition to reopen as an eating house.

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The first part of May 1890, found the construction of a new carpenter shop underway. The old shop was destroyed by fire a week earlier. In August of 1890, it was said that the depot was in such disrepair that any passenger departing the train here would not be able to tell which building was the depot.

The Ringling Brothers had about completed the erection of a large car shed adjacent to the railway yard in January of 1893. The building was put up by Chas. Isenberg. This would permit a great deal of the fancy lettering and painting to be done during the cold and rainy days. It was said that the weather during the prior year had greatly retarded the work. Their Palace sleeping cars were being completely overhauled and put in prime condition. M. Meyers was in charge of the finer parts of the wood decorating.

By August of 1893, a foundation for the new coal sheds in the Northwestern yards was nearing completion. The old coal sheds were to be used for housing sand.

The firm of Johnson & Son, proprietors of the Manchester Mills, broke ground for their new warehouse and grain elevator near the general office building at the railroad yards in September of 1893. The warehouse would be 40 X 80, two stories high.

In July of 1894 it was learned that plans were underway by the railway to lay a second track between Madison and Elroy during the 1895 season. It was thought that the stone work would begin in January of 1896. It was estimated by the Corps of Civil Engineers, who were working on the project, that the cost of the second track between Madison and Baraboo would cost \$1,000,000.

September of 1895 brought a new turntable. It was larger than the old one and was ready for business about September 20.

The first part of December of 1896 saw the second track from Baraboo to Madison finished. (A lot more on this in the December 2, 1896 issue of the Baraboo News)

It was in August and September 1903 that the Northwestern constructed the first 16,000 feet of its spur at North Freedom. An additional 10,000 feet were added in 1909-1910. The Harbison-Walker section was added in 1917. The rail was all originally 65-pound, probably most of it is still that weight.

March 2, 1912 was the last day the roundhouse operated. The four employees were offered jobs on the new road at Wyeville

In 1931, the then empty roundhouse housed the Baraboo Iron Foundry, owned and conducted by Joseph Hummel.

The Northwestern icehouse, located in the railroad yards, was discontinued in January of 1932. The ice business was shifted to Madison. The building was sold and removed. August Platt and Son had theretofore filled the icehouse for the railroad company. 1933 found the division headquarters being moved to Madison.

In July of 1942, A. L. Brown, of Virginia, Minnesota, erected a building on the site of the old roundhouse for his new company, which would manufacture cement blocks and reinforced concrete culverts, the Baraboo Concrete Company. Mr. Brown had eleven years of experience in this business. (Check *Baraboo Trivia Volume II* for more information on Baraboo Concrete.)

Zachary Onikul purchased the railroad yard including the roundhouse and the engine house in 1956. In December of 1963, the roundhouse was destroyed by fire, which was the main storage and garage area for the Zachary Onikul Salvage Yard. The loss, partially covered by insurance, was estimated at \$30,000 to \$40,000. (Check *Baraboo Trivia Volume II* for more information on Zachary Onikul Scrap Iron and Metals.)

Note: An article in the Feb. 22, 1934 edition of the *Baraboo Weekly News* states "that an old map shows the railroad's general office as being where the "flag station on the east side of Walnut" now stands. The railroad eating house was on the other side of Walnut Street, about where the depot stands as of this writing."

1890 Train Wreck Baraboo Republic, 11/26/1890 (See opposite page)

"Saturday night last, the Chicago and Northwestern railway company suffered a severe loss by the wrecking of a freight train at the railway bridge spanning the Baraboo River a short distance west of the Island Woolen Mills of this city. The freight train, due at this station at 11 o'clock p. m., met a most disastrous fate. It is said that there were fifty-one cars in the train. It is reported that engineer H. Hale, when his engine was about to roll upon the bridge, saw a hot box on the right side of the train and near the middle of it, and

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whistled for brakes, but before the call could be effectively complied with, his engine had crossed the bridge. The crash then came, and the middle span of the bridge and twenty-four cars plunged into the river, one upon another, mashed and broken into kindling wood. Two cars remained upon the east span and one upon the west span of the bridge in a somewhat dilapidated condition. The car that caused the wreck did not go down. The report of the disaster soon spread, and it was not long before the division officials were on hand with men and wrecking implements clearing the track, so that traffic should be delayed no longer than it was possible to avoid.

The spectacle that presented itself as daylight appeared Sunday morning was a sorry one. It looked about as forlorn as Fort Moultrie did after her magazine was exploded by the Union iron clad gun boat during the war---there was nothing right side up.

Early Sunday morning the people of the city began to assemble upon the east bank of the river Baraboo to view the wreck and to watch the workmen in their difficult task of clearing the way for the driving of the piles upon which to support a temporary bridge. This work was indeed slow, made so by the compactness of the mass at the bottom of the river, and also by a carload or two of stone, which had been among the first to go down.

About noon Sunday a steam derrick arrived from Milwaukee, when more rapid progress in clearing the way was made. Work did not cease for 48 hours, until trains were again running over the bridge. The workers, when meals were not brought to them, were allowed to go in such numbers so as not to retard the progress of the work.

It is said by those who are familiar with wrecks that this one was the worst "mash-up" they ever saw.

It is fortunate that no one was injured in the wreck. This is due to the fact that only the center of the train went down, the engine going over the bridge and the caboose remaining on the track the other side of the bridge. It is also reported that one of the brakemen on the train was on the car next to the last one that went down to the bottom of the pond. He got a pretty lively shaking up. The wrecked cars were loaded with wheat, flax, seed, flour, barley, bran and stone.

The loss to the company is large, and very difficult to estimate. The loss of 25 cars, freight, bridge, the detention of traffic, the cost of sending the Northwestern passenger trains on the St. Paul road by way of Madison, Portage and Camp Douglas must reach quite an immense sum. We should judge that it would foot up to \$80,000 or more.

The passenger trains that came over the Madison Division Saturday night during the break, made it lively for the liveries of Baraboo in transferring passengers and baggage. They got there with alacrity.

We have not learned that conductor Pierce or any of the train men were in fault.

A considerable amount of freight was saved from the wreck.

General Superintendent Sanborn was at the scene of the disaster Monday.

While this wreck is severe enough, its destructiveness is greatly lessened by the fact that no one was maimed for life or killed. It is said that it was not as destructive to property as the one at Union Center last summer. A large amount of valuable goods such as merchandise was destroyed in the Union Center collision. This one is bad enough.

Some of the division officials here worked with untiring energy, without sleep, from the time the wreck occurred till trains were running again--49 hours." (Baraboo Republic, 11/26/1890)

More can be found on this in the 11/27/1890 issue of the Sauk

County Democrat."

One can only imagine being back in the days around 1900 when telephones and automobiles were scarce and "call boys", youngsters usually on bicycles, made their rounds, day and night, calling out train crews who would then walk to their job site.

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The Orphan Train

The **Orphan Train** was a social experiment that transported children from crowded coastal cities of the United States to the country's Midwest for adoption. The orphan trains ran between 1854 and 1929, relocating an estimated 200,000 orphaned, abandoned, or homeless children. At the time the orphan train movement began, it was estimated that 3,000 vagrant children were living on the streets of New York City.

The Children's Aid Society (established by Charles Loring Brace) determined to help these children. This institution developed a program that placed homeless city children into homes throughout the country. The children were transported to their new homes on trains which were eventually labeled "orphan trains." This period of mass relocation of children in the United States is widely recognized as the beginning of documented foster care in America.

In 1853, a young minister, Charles Loring Brace, became obsessed by the plight of these children, who because of their wanderings, were known as "street Arabs". A member of a prominent Connecticut family, Brace had come to New York to complete his seminary training. Horrified by the conditions he saw on the street, Brace was persuaded there was only one way to help these "children of unhappy fortune".

"The great duty", he wrote, "is to get utterly out of their surroundings and to send them away to kind Christian homes in the country".

In 1853, Brace founded the Children's Aid Society to arrange the trips, raise the money, and obtain the legal permissions needed for relocation. Between 1854 and 1929, more than 100,000 children were sent, via orphan trains, to new homes in rural America. Recognizing the need for labor in the expanding farm country, Brace believed that farmers would

welcome homeless children, take them into their homes and treat them as their own. His program would turn out to be a forerunner of modern foster care.

Brace believed that institutional care stunted and destroyed children. In his view, only work, education and a strong family life could help them develop into self-reliant citizens. Brace knew that American pioneers could use help settling the American West, so he arranged to send the orphaned children to pioneer families. "In every American community, especially in a western one, there are many spare places at the table of life," Brace wrote. "They have enough for themselves and the stranger too."

The children were encouraged to break completely with their past. They would typically arrive in a town where local community leaders had assembled interested townspeople. The townspeople would inspect the children and after brief interviews with the ones they wanted, take them home. After a trial period, some children became indentured servants to their host families, while most were adopted, formally or informally, as family members.

Between 1854 and 1929, more than 200,000 children rode the "Orphan Train" to new lives. The Orphan Train Heritage Society maintains an archive of riders' stories. The National Orphan Train Museum in Concordia, Kansas maintains records and also houses a research facility.

Two famous former orphan train riders are the former governors, John Green Brady of Alaska and Governor Andrew Burke of North Dakota.

The program was controversial. In its early days some abolitionists viewed it as a form of slavery, while some pro-slavery advocates saw it as part of the abolitionist movement, since the labor provided by the children helped to make slaves unnecessary.

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The National Orphan Train Museum and Research Center is located in Concordia, Kansas. The Museum and Research Center is dedicated to the preservation of the stories and artifacts of those who were part of the Orphan Train Movement from 1854-1929. The research center is located at the restored Union Pacific Railroad Depot in Concordia and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Is it possible that one or more of our early citizens was a result of this movement?

Orphan Train's Affect on Genealogy Searches

"They put us all on a big platform in some big building while people came from all around the countryside to pick out those of us they wished to take home. I was four years old, and my sister was only two . . ."

This is how one woman remembered her 1914 orphan train experience, one that she shared with at least 200,000 others from 1853 to 1929. The orphan trains also carried, teenagers, and some adults (mostly women) out of eastern cities to rural communities. They were removed from poverty and want, incarceration and institutionalization. Some went to Connecticut, Vermont, Illinois, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Virginia, and Texas. By the time the relocation program ended, youngsters were scattered across the breadth of America.

When it began, the program was called "placing out". Today it is known as the "orphan trains". Although the practice began with the New York Children's Aid Society, it was eventually taken up by other charities – the Children's Mission to the Children of the Destitute (Boston), the New York Juvenile Asylum, the New England Home for Little Wanderers (Boston), and the New York Foundling Hospital. By the late 1800s, charities in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois also adopted the program, sending children to states farther west. Each agency had its own placement policies; the New England Home for Little Wanderers, for

example, strongly encouraged legal adoption, but New York Juvenile Asylum placements were by legal indenture only. Agencies, however, varied little in procedure.

As a rule groups of children were gathered together and put under the charge of agents employed by the placing charity. The groups traveled to pre-planned destinations where local citizens had been told to expect the children. Upon arrival, the children were taken to "some big building" – an opera house, a church, or courthouse – where they were displayed before the curious citizenry who had turned out for the orphan train. Local families or "employers" chose who they wanted to take home, and the agents were supposed to ensure that the homes were suitable. Some youngsters found themselves in homes where they were treated as members of the families; some discovered that they were to be a new farmhand or housekeeper. Obviously, there were good experiences and bad. Some children and teenagers ran away from their new homes – especially when agents did not remove them from abusive environments.

In the scheme of great national events in American history, the relocation program made barely a visible ripple. Yet it affects family genealogies today, presenting a special challenge to researchers.

Perhaps the first thing that researchers should understand is the misleading label of "orphan train". The majority of those placed out were not true orphans. Most had at least one living parent. Parents gave up their children because of destitution, spousal desertion, widowhood, or birth out of wedlock. Courts also removed children from violent homes or when young people showed signs of turning to crime and delinquency. (States' laws so broadly defined delinquency that it could mean anything from smoking a cigarette to keeping bad company.) There were, of course, delinquent children who were true orphans, who were homeless in the streets, or who had no extended family upon which they could rely. However, children with living parents, as

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well as brothers and sisters, were the norm, not the exception, in placing out.

Some of these children were immediately turned over to placing-out charities, but most lived in other institutions before they were chosen for relocation. The New York Children's Aid Society, for example, drew its pool of children from the United Helpers orphanage in St. Lawrence County, New York; Salvation Army Brooklyn Nursery and Infants Hospital; and New York's Five Points House of Industry (to name just a few). Of course, for researchers the task of locating institutional records can be formidable, particularly because many of the smaller charities and orphanages closed their doors long ago.

Other problems are name and ethnic identity. By the late 1800s, one complaint against placing out agencies was the loss of identity and family contact. Certainly, agencies discouraged children from maintaining contact with any family left behind. Agencies, however, did not change children's names. When names were changed – and they were – it was done by families taking children. Adoption changed names, but sometimes families capriciously renamed children: "You remember Mary S---. Her name is now Jennie P.. Often, ethnicity was also revised. Children taken by the New York Foundling Hospital were baptized in the Catholic Church and placed in Catholic homes. Said a woman who was given up as an infant by her unwed mother: "I went in (to the Foundling Hospital) Jewish, but I came out Catholic." On the other hand, Protestant charities usually placed Catholic and Jewish children in Protestant homes.

When the orphan trains began, planners and participants paid scant attention to the ways that the practice altered families. Today, researchers who retrace the journeys of family members often find the trip filled with obstacles and frustrations. There are however, happy endings. There are successes, and family histories are richer for including their orphan train roots.

According to *The Ochsner Story*, written by Erhart Mueller and printed in 1988, Henry Ochsner was very successful in placing city boys on farms in the Honey Creek area during the early years of the twentieth century. The movement was organized by a neighbor, Miss Bessie Buckley, assistant to Superintendent Bert Hall of the Milwaukee Public Schools' truancy department. It was in 1905 that the first boy was sent out to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Pollinske in Honey Creek. The lad did very well which attracted the attention of Mr. Ochsner, who helped get other boys out of the cities into the clean country air.

Over the years over twenty boys were placed on Sauk County farms, with former neighbors of the Buckley's and Ochsner's. One of the boys, Andrew Feigl, worked on the Rosenbaum farm and remained in the area, becoming a respected citizen and farmer.

For more information contact:

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Chestnut Hill, MA 02167

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New York, NY 10021

New York Juvenile Asylum Alumni Affairs
Children's Village
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10007

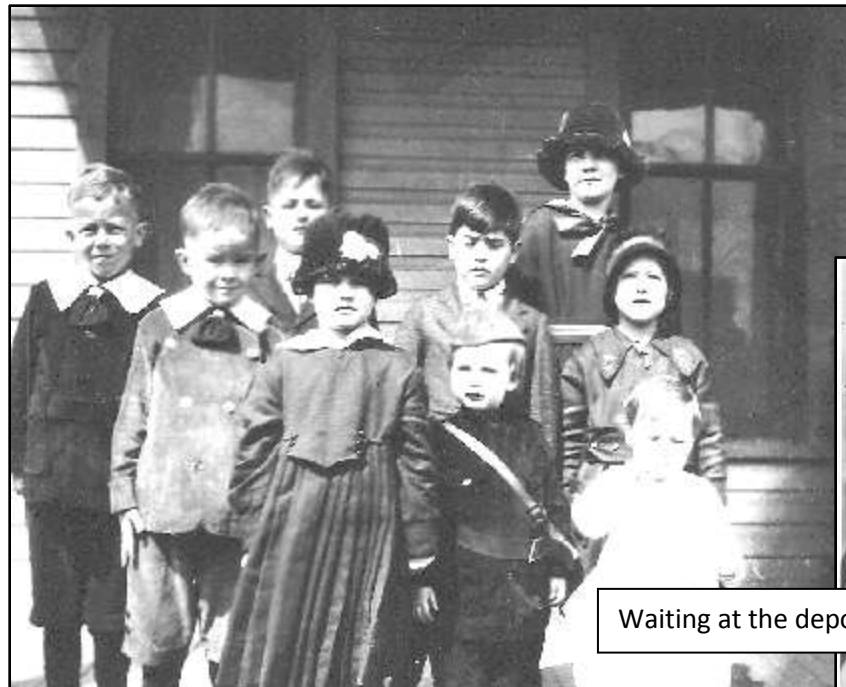
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In route to a new home in the West, a trainload of children pause to stretch their legs and pose for the photographer.

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Typical photos of orphans heading west on an orphan train



Waiting at the depot



The trains, and their destinations, were a mystery to the orphans on board.



About the Iron Horse



1890 Train wreck as viewed from an area later known as Haskin's Park

About the Iron Horse



Train and bridge wreckage, circa 1890, West Baraboo, then known as Lyons