

Orphans

June 21, 2019



Last evening as the final event my wife, Amy, had planned for my birthday she had purchased tickets for the musical, “*Newsies*” now being performed at the Grand Rapids Civic Theatre. Our sons, Aidan and Brian also joined us.

Newsies is based on the true story of the plight of orphans, abandoned, and homeless children left to fend for themselves on the streets of New York City.

Between the years from 1854 to 1929 there were an estimated 250,000 children sent all over the country to various locations, including 45 children on October 1, 1854 who came to Dowagiac, Michigan. They were sent by trains to homes where the children were adopted into families to hopefully get them off the streets of New York and into country homes with better lives.

As early as 1850, on the streets of New York alone, there were an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 young children and teens, some joining gangs for protection and others selling newspapers, matches, rags or stole on the streets to survive.

A young Methodist minister, Charles Loring Brace, so moved by the conditions the children were enduring, started what we know today as the first Foster Care, then known as the Children’s Aid Society.

Funded by donations from the rich like Augusta Gibbs, the wife of John Jacob Astor III, who financed as many as 1,113 orphan rides to different locations, the pastor’s ministry was very successful with approximately 85% of these kids became “decent members of society”.

Most of the orphans went to families that loved them and helped them grow into fine adults. Unfortunately, there were others who were abused, mistreated, left to roam the streets, were just given away, or treated like slaves. Children were often separated from their brothers or sisters by parents who only needed one child.

I have always been moved by the stories of the *Newsies* and orphans who rode those orphan trains. My own grandmother, Nanon (Tibbetts) Knapp, born in 1891 came from New York. She danced in vaudeville as a child. On my own *Ancestry* family tree, I have yet to find any information of the names of her families.

We have this promise from Jesus in the New Testament book of John, chapter 14, verses 15-18, *“If you love Me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells within you and will be with you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”*

How comforting to know we were not left to live on the streets alone as orphans. God, the Father, has adopted us into His family (*Romans 8:15; Romans 8:23; Romans 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5*).

Need to be adopted? Just ask and God will accept you into His family through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Notes from the orphans and orphan trains:

The Orphan Train Movement: a 19th century foster-home program that sent 200,00 homeless Children from the East Coast to the Midwest. -Jan. 5, 2018 Boban Docevski