



# Reviews Roundup



## HISTORY

### Last Train Home, an orphan train story

Renée Wendinger.

Legendary Publications.

\$15 trade paper (164 p), ISBN 978-0-9913603-0-7;

\$9.99 e-book; \$16.95 hardcover (192 p), ISBN  
978-0-9913603-1-4.

Theorphantrain.com; Amazon; BN.com

The story of two children, a boy and a girl, who rode the orphan trains west. Would they be adopted by kind and loving families, or would they face a childhood and adolescence of hard labor and servitude?

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This richly detailed historical fiction from Wendinger (*Extra! Extra! The Orphan Trains and Newsboys of New York*) draws upon the real-life stories of John Arsers and Sophia Kaminsky. Wendinger's subject is orphan trains, a popular child adoption method used in the US from the middle of the 19th century until well into the 20th. When five-year-old Italian boy Johnny Arsers mother dies, his father sells him into the *padrone* system, essentially making him a child slave, and he is shipped off to New York City in 1871. After a brief, precarious hand-to-mouth existence on the streets, Johnny is placed with the Children's Aid Society, which is run by philanthropist, Charles Loring Brace. Johnny's fortunes improve markedly when the kind Mildrum family offers him a home in Iowa, and he embarks on the orphan train traveling west through the heartland. The New York Foundling Society places young Sophia, the novel's other protagonist, with Anna Greim, a child-less middle aged German widow. The cold-hearted, dictatorial Anna, keeps Sophia "working at all times" and reinforces the girl's labor regimen with frequent beatings. Wendinger's intriguing narrative humanizes the thousand's of children who rode the orphan trains.

