McLean County was, in one way, the center of the New York Juvenile Asylum’s operations in Illinois. Ebenezer Wright, the Western Agent for the Asylum lived in Normal for over 18 years, running the Western Agency out of his home on Willow Street. No photos of that home remain, but the Pantagraph contained a few stories of the children. Adoption records for the years 1840 to 1900 are freely available in McLean County as part of the IRAD archives at Illinois State University. A review of those records revealed that not a single child received through the New York Orphan trains was ever legally adopted during that period. What follows are just a few of the stories of orphan riders who came to McLean County.

**Katie Stanson**

Katie Stanson was a young girl who came to Bloomington from New York. Which organization had handled her was unknown, but her overwhelming problem that that she didn’t know who her parents were. This had caused Katie a great deal of distress, so much so that she had been committed to the Jacksonville Insane Asylum. While at Jacksonville, Katie attempted suicide a few times, once by swallowing needles. In 1902 Katie was released from the asylum and given a job—at the asylum in Bartonville, Illinois. If a more inappropriate job could be given to a young, emotionally fragile girl, I am not sure what it would be. Katie left this job and moved between a series of jobs in hotels and the Bloomington jail. Her final stop was at the Butler Hotel. She was given a job and a room and used her first afternoon in the city to shop downtown for hosiery. When she returned to her room, another maid heard suspicious noises and called Mrs. Butler, the owner’s wife. Katie had taken a fatal dose of carbolic acid, finally ending her life, alone and friendless.

A handful of orphans in McLean County were remembered in 1988 when the genealogical society gathered stories from residents. Alexander Lemon was remembered by one resident of Leroy. He had come to Illinois in 1857 at the age of eight. He worked on the same farm near Leroy for the rest of his life, no matter who lived on the farm. He was a quiet man, and very susceptible to praise. It was said that if he received the least amount of praise he would do his work shocking corn with amazing precision. Some children were frightened of him, but others were known to play card games with him. He died in Leroy in 1929, at roughly 80 years old.

**Otto and Agnes Harriett**

A brother and sister came to Bloomington through one or other of the indenturing agencies. They were lucky enough to be placed together, with a kind family, the Kinsellas. Otto and Agnes Harriett grew up and married in McLean County. Agnes was the mother of one of Bloomington’s mayors, Robert McGraw. He never knew about his mother’s history as an orphan until he was an adult. She never talked about being an orphan. Otto was a farmer for 20 years and then worked at the Chicago & Alton Railroad.
**Lizzie Pierson**

The children were accepted into homes as servants. Indenture agreements tied them to the families until they reached the age of majority. Only at the end of their indenture would they be paid -- girls $50 and boys $150 - 200. Boys served three years longer than girls, until they were 21.

In 1871, at least one girl sent to McLean County, Lizzie Pierson, had to sue her guardians to receive her $50. She had come to McLean County in 1866 and was placed with James Lucas. She argued in court that she had served for two years and then he chose to turn her over to “Capt. Shannon,” who was a representative of the New York Juvenile Asylum (NYJA) in Bloomington in the 1860s, merely to avoid paying the $50 at the end of the contract. Lucas claimed that Lizzie wanted to leave and that he was merely accommodating her. Lizzie was probably emboldened by the fact that she was married and the NYJA was assisting her in her suit, which she did win. The indenture agreements were very serious business contracts. In 1875 an indenture was challenged in Macon County and the judge upheld the contract, denying a mother custody of her child. The report did state that the judge consulted with the child before making his decision, but we do not know the rationale for his decision. The Pantagraph’s main concern with the decision seemed to be whether these important legal agreements would be upheld by the courts.

**The Albrechts**

Five children of the Albrecht family were sent to Illinois over a period of ten years. John Albrecht and his brother Fred were placed in Sterling, Illinois in 1888 according to a report in the local newspaper. John Albrecht had apparently not stayed in Sterling because he wrote to the asylum in 1898 that he had only stayed with his hosts for three years because he was badly treated and then went out to work for wages. He had purchased eighty acres of land in Iowa and hoped to work that land for himself in two or three years. He had been to visit his sisters who had been sent to McLean County in 1896 and thought that they had all found good families. This family tie was maintained by him in spite of the fact that at least one of his sisters was born after he left New York and was completely unknown to him except through correspondence with his parents. Because he had left the asylum system, he had not received the annual reports, though he asked for them so that he might stay in touch with the asylum. Like Albrecht, children often maintained correspondence with family in New York, or siblings living in other parts of Illinois. Bertha Albrecht lived in Gilman, Illinois in 1904 with the Bunns and was proud to give an account of her education in facts and figures. She accounted for the clothes and hats that had been given to her—two shirts, a blue suit and a hat—and was already anticipating the $50 she would receive when she was 18 in two years time. Initially all three sisters were placed in Cooksville, but as the families moved from the county, the sisters were separated by more distance.
Freda and Frank Reichardt

Freda Reichardt lived with the Gillespies, along with her brother, Frank, after coming to Illinois in 1889. As an adult she remembered how she came to be in Illinois. “When my father took me to the Asylum seven years ago my heart was full of resentment toward him, but I now thank my Heavenly father that he placed me there. I came to Illinois five years ago and after staying with my guardian two years I married their son, an only child, and we live very happily together.” She had twin boys and her brother was still living with the Gillespies in Chenoa. Park Gillespie, her husband, was a butcher in Chenoa, and they went on to have four more children. Freda died in 1941 and her obituary noted her birth in New York as well as the names of her birth parents. No mention was made regarding her reason for being in McLean County. Her brother Frank volunteered in the army during the Spanish American War, married in Chenoa, and moved on to Pontiac, where he was eventually an insurance salesman.

Even more interesting is the fact that Freda’s husband was not the natural child of the Gillespies. He was adopted as an infant from an unwed mother in McLean County and made the legal heir of the Gillespies.