

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Event: Riders on the Orphan Train

Place:

Time:

Contact:

FREE and Open to the Public – for General Audiences of all ages

Few people today know much about the largest child migration in history. Between 1854 and 1929 over 250,000 orphans and unwanted children were taken out of New York City and given away at train stations across America. Children were sent to every state in the continental United States; the last train went to Sulphur Springs, Texas in 1929. This “placing out” system was originally organized by Methodist minister Charles Loring Brace and the Children’s Aid Society of New York. His mission was to rid the streets and overcrowded orphanages of homeless children and provide them with an opportunity to find new homes. Many of the children were not orphans but “surrendered” by parents too impoverished to keep them. The New York Foundling Hospital, a Catholic organization, also sent out children to be placed in Catholic homes. This seventy-six year experiment in child relocation is filled with the entire spectrum of human emotion and reveals a great deal about the successes and failures of the American Dream.

The one-hour multi- media program combines live music by Phillip Lancaster and Alison Moore, video montage with archival photographs and interviews of survivors, and a dramatic reading of the 2012 novel “Riders on the Orphan Train” by award-winning author Alison Moore. Although the program is about children, it is designed to engage audiences of all ages and to inform, inspire and raise awareness about this little-known part of history.

*Local relatives and acquaintances of Orphan Train Riders are especially invited to attend and share their stories with the audience.*

#### Alison Moore, Author/Humanities Scholar

Alison Moore, MFA, is a former Assistant Professor of English/Creative Writing in the MFA Creative Writing Program at the University of Arizona and a current Humanities Scholar. She lives in Austin and has been touring nationally since 1998 with the multi-media program “Riders on the Orphan Train” that is currently the official outreach program for the National Orphan Train Complex Museum and Research Center. She has also developed public outreach programs for the Orphan Train Heritage Society of America, Inc. and for ArtsReach, a Native American literacy project in Southern Arizona. She is the author of four books, the historical novel “Riders on the Orphan Train” from Roadworthy Press in 2012, a collection of short fiction, *The Middle of Elsewhere* from Phoenix International, University of Arkansas Press in 2006, a novel, *Synonym for Love* (Penguin/Plume 1996), and a collection of short stories entitled *Small Spaces between Emergencies* (Mercury House, 1992) one of the Notable Books of 1993 chosen by The American Library Association. She received two National Endowment for the Arts Fiction Fellowships in 1993 and 2010 and the Katherine Ann Porter Prize for Fiction in 2004. In 2007/08 she received the J. Frank Dobie Paisano fellowship from the University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Institute of Letters.

In 2012 she received the Charles Loring Brace Award for helping to preserve the stories of the Orphan Trains.

### **Phil Lancaster, Presenter/Musician**

Phil Lancaster was born in Texarkana, Arkansas and studied art and music at L'Ecole De Beaux Arts in Angers, France. He became a member of a bluegrass band that traveled and played throughout France and produced an album entitled "Bluegrass Oldies Ltd./Traveling Show." He also worked as a stage theatre technician for La Coursive Theatre Nationale in La Rochelle, France. After returning to the U.S. he met three Arkansas musicians and the acoustic quartet "Still on the Hill" was formed in Fayetteville. They released their first CD in 1997, the second in 2000. The group performed at national and international folk festivals. Currently, he tours France with musician Philippe Charlot in the acoustic duo "Transatlantique." Phil is a co-producer of the documentary film *Gospel, Biscuits & Gravy* for the Arkansas Heritage Foundation. He has been touring nationally since 1998 with the multi-media program "Riders on the Orphan Train" which is currently the official outreach program for the National Orphan Train Complex Museum. He received a 2007 Arkansas Arts Council Fellowship in Music Composition. In 2012 he received the Charles Loring Brace Award for helping to preserve the stories of the Orphan Trains.

*"...the program far exceeded any expectations I may have had, as did the community's response...this was by far the most well-attended program the library has ever offered....everyone who attended was moved, educated and entertained...your program truly made an impact on our community."*

--Cecilia Hurt Barham, Decatur Public Library, Decatur, TX