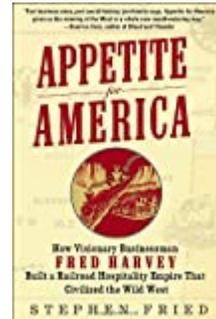




Stephen Fried. *Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the Wild West.* New York: Bantam Books, 2010. Illustrations. xix + 518 pp. \$27.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-553-80437-9.



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Published on H-NewMexico (June, 2010)

Commissioned by Tomas Jaehn (Special Collections/Center for Southwest Research)

How the West Was Civilized

The Fred Harvey Company represents a significant component of several aspects of American history. Through its founder and his heirs, the company was one of the very first restaurant and hotel chains in America. It was an enormously successful operation, which at its peak included sixty-five restaurants and lunchrooms, sixty dining car operations, and twelve hotels. Dedicated to providing the highest quality service, it was patronized by presidents, royalty, and corporate leaders. It was one of the first companies to hire a large number of women and in doing so, created the famous Harvey Girls. It also played a leading role in helping Americans understand and experience the glories of the American Southwest, especially the Grand Canyon.

Given these impressive accomplishments, it is surprising that no one has written about the business side of the Fred Harvey Company. Books of photographs, novels, and even a movie have explored the Harvey Girls, but the business operations of the company have been ignored until now. Stephen Fried's *Appetite for America* provides a comprehensible and readable account that

admirably fills that void. For Fried, a journalist, the research and writing were clearly a labor of love. The scope of his research is comprehensive and thorough. He became deeply involved in the story even to the point of providing recipes for the company's most famous dishes.

The central purpose of this book is to present a comprehensive history of the strategies and operations that made the company so successful and to detail the three generations of family history as well. Both of these stories are presented in the context of the developing trans-Mississippi West and America's rapidly developing business success. Fried is generally successful in these ambitious goals. Fred Harvey, an Englishman, immigrated to America and worked at a series of odd jobs until he settled with his family in Leavenworth, Kansas, where he began to sell advertising for newspapers and the railroads. He traveled constantly in his job and was appalled by the terrible and unsanitary condition of train stop restaurants and hotels. In 1876, he decided to start his own company that would provide a high quality, immaculate alternative. So, while maintaining his current jobs,

he launched the Fred Harvey Company. The first lunchroom located at Topeka, Kansas, so impressed the leaders of the new, growing railroad, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (AT&SF), that Harvey signed what would be a series of long-term contracts to build restaurants and hotels along the line that would eventually stretch from Chicago to California.

Harvey's ambitions succeeded famously. The dedication to quality service and excellent food attracted huge numbers of customers. One early major problem resulted from his use of African American waiters, which frequently led to dangerous situations for the servers. Based on a suggestion from one of his managers, the company switched to young, unmarried women—the famous Harvey Girls—who were highly trained and carefully controlled. As the company grew and his health declined, Fred gradually let his son Ford take over company operations. Ford proved to be an even better manager than his father and greatly expanded the company and its success. Ford's particular interest was the American Southwest centered on the Grand Canyon home of the company's El Tovar Hotel. In addition to establishing such magnificent hotels as the Alvarado in Albuquerque and La Fonda in Santa Fe, Ford helped to foster a greater awareness of this region; its native artists; and their arts, artifacts, and antiquities.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the company was at its peak. Ford's son Freddy, a pilot during World War I, took over management in 1928 after his father's sudden death. Freddy continued the operations in much the same manner. More flamboyant than

his father, however, he added an airline component to the company but it struggled and was ended after Freddy died in an airplane crash in 1936. With his death, control of the company passed to Ford's brother, Byron, who ran the dining car operations in Chicago. By this time, the combination of the Great Depression, the rise of the automobile and the airplane, and the beginning of a major decline in railroad travel began a steady erosion of company profits. The company would continue for several more years, but the end was inevitable.

Fried has accomplished an important addition to the history of business in America. It reads quickly and provides abundant detail. A set of problems, however, limit the book's effectiveness. The clearly racist attitudes of the company are not developed. Rather than deal with the African American staff problem, they were simply dismissed during the conversion to women. Harvey dining facilities always maintained separate eating facilities for African Americans. Despite its large numbers of establishments in the Southwest, women of color were not hired as Harvey Girls until very late in the company's history. Similarly, the workplace experience of the staff is glossed over. They had to work demanding split shifts and work at an even more demanding pace when trains arrived. He also limits the effectiveness of the book by providing far too much detail on the personal lives of family members. The second half of the book loses track of the main story as we learn about personal buying habits of individuals and their social activities. A very good book would have been much better with about one hundred fewer pages.

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Citation: David Myers. Review of Fried, Stephen, *Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the Wild West*. H-NewMexico, H-Net Reviews. June, 2010.

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