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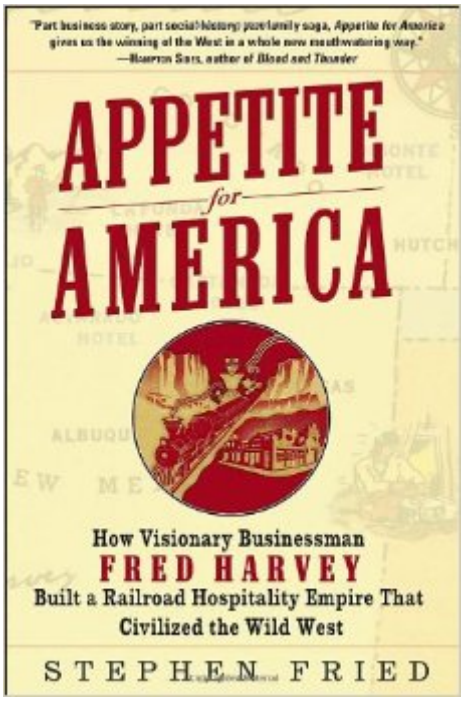
Appetite For America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built A Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized The Wild West



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Synopsis

Featured in the PBS documentaryÂ The Harvey Girls: Opportunity BoundThe legendary life and entrepreneurial vision of Fred Harvey helped shape American culture and history for three generationsâ ”from the 1880s all the way through World War IIâ ”and still influence our lives today in surprising and fascinating ways. Now award-winning journalist Stephen Fried re-creates the life of this unlikely American hero, the founding father of the nationâ ™s service industry, whose remarkable family business civilized the West and introduced America to Americans.Appetite for America is the incredible real-life story of Fred Harveyâ ”told in depth for the first time everâ ”as well as the story of this countryâ ™s expansion into the Wild West of Bat Masterson and Billy the Kid, of the great days of the railroad, of a time when a deal could still be made with a handshake and the United States was still uniting. As a young immigrant, Fred Harvey worked his way up from dishwasher to household name: He was Ray Kroc before McDonaldâ ™s, J. Willard Marriott before Marriott Hotels, Howard Schultz before Starbucks. His eating houses and hotels along the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad (including historic lodges still in use at the Grand Canyon) were patronized by princes, presidents, and countless ordinary travelers looking for the best cup of coffee in the country. Harveyâ ™s staff of carefully screened single young womenâ ”the celebrated Harvey Girlsâ ”were the countryâ ™s first female workforce and became genuine Americana, even inspiring an MGM musical starring Judy Garland.With the verve and passion of Fred Harvey himself, Stephen Fried tells the story of how this visionary built his business from a single lunch counter into a family empire whose marketing and innovations we still encounter in myriad ways. Inspiring, instructive, and hugely entertaining, Appetite for America is historical biography that is as richly rewarding as a slice of fresh apple pieâ ”and every bit as satisfying.*With two photo inserts featuring over 75 images, and an appendix with over fifty Fred Harvey recipes, most of them never-before-published.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The problem I face in writing this review is that I don't have all the time and space it would take to do this incredibly well done, truly magnificent history the justice it deserves. Stephen Fried has written at least three histories in this single volume. The nominal subject is a gentleman named Fred Harvey, a name that is little known among the general public today. But Fred Harvey was very influential in shaping the development of the American West, the railroad industry (or at least part of it), creating branding and merchandising as we now know it , creating the then new habit of restaurant eating, expanding employment opportunities for women, preserving Native American culture and still more. His son carried on long after Fred Harvey died, but the Harvey empire crumbled with the modern era. Which is really a pity. I grew up in the twilight of the Fred Harvey era. I still vaguely recall how special eating at the Fred Harvey restaurant at a local railroad terminal was and think I rode on one of the last trains where Fred Harvey's company provided the dining car service. "Appetite for America" covers Fred Harvey's history. His first big day was the opening of a "eating house" for the Santa Fe, Atchison and Topeka Rail Road in Topeka, Kansas. Eating out, so to speak, was not an experience to be sought after. Places offering food were suspect for many good reasons and the victuals offered were usually mediocre on the best of days. But Fred Harvey changed that: eating at one of Fred Harvey's eating houses was virtually guaranteed a pleasant experience with tasty and nourishing food at reasonable prices.

This book offers many different flavors to many different readers. It's a splendid business history of Fred Harvey - the firm of that name, not just the man who founded it, though his story is well-told here. The Fred Harvey hotel and restaurant chain, the reader will find, was the first such business model that Howard Johnson and other chains would follow - and Fred Harvey affected American cuisine as well, so readers interested in culinary history will also find this book of interest. There's more: Fred Harvey also affected American architecture and decor (e.g., the "Santa Fe" style), the growth and preservation of Grand Canyon, American attitudes on native American culture and people, and American popular culture in general. We learn how Fred Harvey would influence cinema and entertainment, from Walt Disney to the Judy Garland "Harvey Girls" film of 1945. We

even learn how Fred Harvey adapted from railroad hotels to the Route 66 phenomenon and early commercial aviation as the motorcar and the airliner first appeared.And, of course, the book has plenty for fans of railroad history. The Fred Harvey chain grew with, and helped grow, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. The railroad's expansion, and decline in mid-20th Century America, shaped the Fred Harvey story as well. Its challenges from natural disasters, two world wars, flu epidemics, the demands of military mobilization -- even the Manhattan Project puts in an appearance -- show how the firm, the railroad, and American life affected each other.The book is also a splendid family saga. The generations that followed Mr. Harvey would make for lively reading, both in Fred Harvey boardrooms and in their private lives.

Even though I grew up in the Southwest and had seen references to Fred Harvey since childhood, I never gave him or his company much thought until this book appeared on the "Vine" list here on . Since I love the Southwest and the title seemed inviting, I decided to give it a shot. Am I ever glad I did. Appetite For America is a dynamic and splendid history, one of those inspirational rags to riches stories that has spurred millions through the years to make the best of opportunities given them. And though Fred Harvey is somewhat obscure today, in his own time he was the toast of the nation.The book's storyline has already been recounted time and again in other reviews, so I will just make a few other comments. What's that old saying about the best laid plans of mice and men? Well, Fred Harvey was a very far-sighted and deliberate man and though he may have in his own mind set the groundwork for a hospitality empire that would serve Americans for the foreseeable future, eventually times changed and circumstances intervened. By the time the dashing but spoiled Freddy took the reins of the company, slacking ambition and internecine squabbles had blurred the single-minded vision with which Harvey and his son Ford had led the company to success after success. The Fred Harvey company faltered, rivals moved in, and Harvey empire's remnants were sold off with the company consigned to the dustbin of history. Harvey's business empire had lasted for just under a century, but what a ride it was! The reader may note that one of those rivals that came on strong during the Depression (Howard Johnson's) is now pretty much history itself.

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