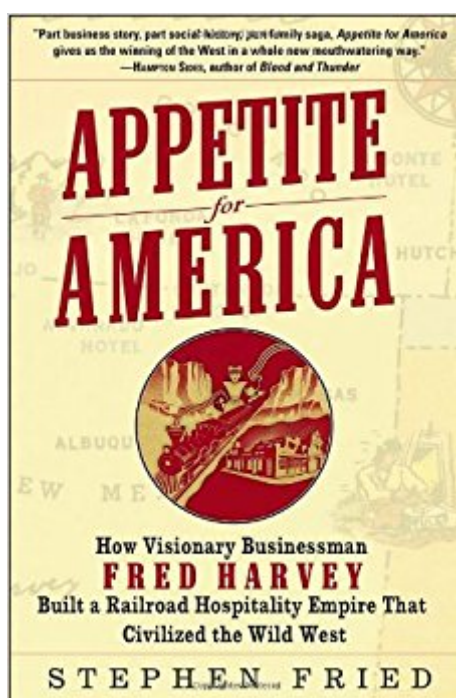


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# Appetite For America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built A Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized The Wild West



## Synopsis

Featured in the PBS documentary *The Harvey Girls: Opportunity Bound* The legendary life and entrepreneurial vision of Fred Harvey helped shape American culture and history for three generations—from the 1880s all the way through World War II—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 nation'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 Harvey told in depth for the first time ever—as well as the story of this country'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 McDonald'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. Harvey's staff of carefully screened single young women—the celebrated Harvey Girls—were the country'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 pie—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

A Note from Stephen Fried on *Appetite for America* I first encountered Fred Harvey seventeen years ago in the lobby of El Tovar, the historic hotel just a few steps from the edge of the Grand Canyon. His moody portrait was hanging there, his anxious eyes seemingly scrutinizing everything, and I wondered who the hell he was. A pamphlet in our room offered some insight, explaining that his company had been running the hotels, the restaurants, the gift shops at the canyon--even training the mules--since 1905. It also mentioned the amazing impact of his entrepreneurial vision. From the 1870s through the 1940s, Fred's revolutionary family business--which included restaurants, hotels, dining cars and stores from Chicago to Los Angeles along the Santa Fe railroad, and later along Rt. 66--had forever changed the way Americans ate, drank, cooked, traveled, and spent their leisure time. Hotel pamphlets don't often change my life, but I was immediately struck by what sounded like a great American saga that needed to be told in more depth, perhaps in a magazine article. So I started searching for information about Fred, picking up the few academic books that mentioned him, his company, and his legendary waitresses, the Harvey Girls. I learned that the Fred Harvey name had once been ubiquitous in America, as the company built the nation's first chain of restaurants, lunchrooms, hotels, bookstores--in fact, the first national chain of anything--and was heralded for its unusually high standards of customer service and employee loyalty. By the 1940s, Fred and the Harvey Girls were such a well-established part of Americana that they inspired both a best-selling novel and an Oscar-winning movie musical with Judy Garland. And they went on to inspire everything from the Howard Johnson's chain to McDonald's and Starbucks, and all the major national hotels (along with a robust community of Harvey memorabilia collectors.) As I continued my research, I found myself caught up in the little-known Harvey family drama. I realized that much of what was attributed to Fred himself had actually been done by his equally brilliant but unsung son, Ford--who memorialized his father by turning him into a brand-name. I am a sucker for stories about father-son family businesses, having grown up in one myself (furniture). Somehow I never got around to writing that article. But ten years later, I was having lunch with my editor at Bantam, and we started talking about the new breed of history

books--like *Seabiscuit* and *Devil in the White City*--being written by contemporary journalists. I suddenly found myself regaling her with my fascination with Fred Harvey, insisting that the saga of his multigenerational family business had all the excitement, intrigue and narrative richness of this new genre of "history buffed" books. Writing it would also give me a window into an entire 75-year stretch of American history. By the end of the lunch, we agreed I write a book on Fred. It was the best decision I ever made in my career; this has been the most challenging and rewarding book I've ever written. The more I've learned about Fred, his family, his Harvey Girls, his business and his world, the more I understand about America. And, by reliving through them two Depressions and several major recessions, two world wars, two flu pandemics, the rise of trains, autos and planes, electric lights, telephones, radio and television, I am constantly reminded of this nation's courage and resiliency. The very first person (besides my editors) to read the manuscript of this book told me Fred's story made him feel better about America. And I know exactly what he means. May Fred be with you.

The British-born Fred Harvey and his name stood for American hospitality for many years. In an impressive, comprehensively researched tome, Fried tells the intertwined stories of the man, his family, his company, and America. After Harvey's mid-19th-century immigration, he tried various jobs in the Midwest before business instincts and ambitions merged with the Santa Fe Railroad's founding. As the railroad's growth aided rapid westward expansion, Harvey established the first chain restaurants, called Harvey House. Through Gilded Age economic bust and recovery and into the new century, his company's fortunes attached to such novel American developments as the automobile and national parks, especially the Grand Canyon. Meanwhile, through innovations such as progressive employment practices, merchandising, and marketing, the company stayed strong beyond its founder's death. His family ensured that it remained private and profitable through the railroad's decline and into the Depression. From the battle of the Little Bighorn to the Manhattan Project, Fried makes such lively use of the many remarkable intersections between major American and company history that this volume, though hefty, meticulously detailed, and slightly hagiographic, has unusually broad potential. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“Appetite For America” is that rare book that combines the best of a history book and a business book. It tells the story of Fred Harvey, a sickly but iron-willed Englishman who built the first retail empire in America, and the story of the company he

founded, also called Fred Harvey (not Fred Harvey, Inc. — just plain Fred Harvey). It's all fascinating, and offers the reader many accurate business insights as well (although they are not billed as business insights — this is not a navel-gazing self-help "business book"). Fred Harvey arrived in New York in 1853, seeking his fortune, starting as a dishwasher at a New York restaurant. He quickly moved to St. Louis, in many ways then the epicenter of development in the country, running a restaurant with a partner, but the Civil War (and a lazy and thieving partner, the bane of many a businessman) killed his business. He then worked in postal sorting, in the new method of sorting on moving rail cars, then became a ticket agent for a Missouri railroad. And then the railroad asked him to move to Leavenworth, the end of the line — and the jumping-off place for future rail expansion, after the end of the Civil War. Many men sought their fortune and took opportunistic jobs in the growing America of the mid-19th Century. But Fred Harvey was a man who got things done, more than the usual person. Not only did he successfully sell tickets, in a town that initially lacked a railroad, he aggressively expanded his employer's business. And he expanded into his own side business of selling newspaper ads while he sold tickets. He worked constantly, he improved himself constantly by reading, and he accomplished what he set out to do, unlike most people. All this took a toll on his health, which was not good to begin with. But in those days, even aside from Fred Harvey's personality, the country was organized around the salutary principle — "he who does not work, neither shall he eat." So he persevered, from necessity, and from his own drive to succeed. He worked his way up, becoming a major freight agent for a larger railroad, based in Chicago. And then, when he was already forty, he saw his opportunity — improving restaurants dedicated to rail passengers, who before dining cars had either had no food, or atrocious food at railroad-run "eating establishments spaced roughly every 100 miles. Fred Harvey kept his day job, but started a management company with a partner, agreeing with the Kansas Pacific, and then the Santa Fe, railroads to manage food service at their restaurants. What he didn't do was merely run the same awful restaurants. Instead, from the ground up, he re-invented not just railroad food, but American restaurant food, at a time when chain restaurants did not exist and eating out was never done except when necessity demanded it. He made restaurant food attractive and enviable. Fred Harvey provided the freshest, highest-quality food (particularly coffee, beef, and cigars, delivered by special rail cars). He offered impeccable service, even with the extra complication of intermittent demand as trains came, disgorged hundreds of hungry passengers simultaneously, and went. He was an organizational

genius — not because he managed people well, although he did, but because he was a detail man, like the vast majority of successful businesspeople. Fred Harvey demanded perfection from each individual restaurant manager, and he would frequently show up unexpectedly at one of his many restaurants to review performance—and if dissatisfied, he would tear the place settings from a table. Through the 1870s and 1880s he expanded as the Santa Fe expanded, through the entire Southwest, particularly New Mexico and Arizona. His company became very large for the time, and very profitable, and very well known. Gradually, Fred Harvey's health declined, and he spent much time recuperating in Europe. Daily operation of his business became the task of his son Ford and his chief lieutenant, David Benjamin. Fred Harvey died in 1901, and his son and Benjamin decided to run the business as if Fred Harvey were still alive and at the helm. (That Fred Harvey had set up his will effectively requiring this for ten years probably had something to do with it.) Ford Harvey expanded the company into hotels in the Southwest, including the first hotels around (and in) the Grand Canyon, such as El Tovar. Most of these hotels are still extant today (under the management of the large management company Xanterra). They also got into publishing, selling books and magazines at railroad stations where they had restaurants, and into collecting and displaying large amounts of American Indian art. The family became quite rich, and prominent nationwide (but especially in Kansas City and Chicago). Ford Harvey and David Benjamin faced innumerable obstacles and struggles, which they overcame, from railroad bankruptcies to giant hotel failures to financial panics and depressions to Prohibition. All of these are detailed in "Appetite For America." Ford, who maintained Fred Harvey's attention to detail and aggressive competence, kept the family business on track. Ford's brother, Byron, lived in Chicago and ran the family's interests there, not particularly well and without charisma or drive. And then Ford died of flu in 1928; Benjamin died in 1933 but had effectively retired years before. Ford's son Freddy really began the deterioration of the family, prior to Ford's death, as Freddy became more involved in the business as the heir apparent. No detail man, he preferred womanizing and flying airplanes, and spending the family's money. Then the Depression, combined with a move to dining cars instead of dining houses, made the Fred Harvey company shutter many restaurant locations. The company struggled further with a lack of leadership after Ford's death, between Freddy and Byron, and then Freddy managed to kill himself in 1936, by the unwise choice of flying a cutting-edge plane through an ice storm. The family descended into intra-family lawsuits, and Byron presided as caretaker over a declining business. And then, of course, the highways began to eat into

the passenger rail business. Howard Johnson was the new restaurant hero of the hungry traveler. World War II gave a bump to the business but at the fatal cost of ending the quality that had always epitomized the Fred Harvey company. By 1945, the old Fred Harvey was effectively defunct, running a few restaurants in larger train stations, and the Grand Canyon hotels, under the guidance of the Byron Harvey family. Byron Harvey died in 1954, and in 1966 the business was totally divested from the family, with all remnants left becoming effectively unrecognizable. Sic transit. This book isn't for everyone. It is very detailed and largely based on original historical research. If you want a quick or very light read, or a "business book" with some aphorisms and dubious advice for succeeding in today's America, this isn't it. But it is a book that DOES tell you how to succeed in today's America. Yes, you couldn't do exactly what Fred Harvey did, even if railroads were still a going concern for passenger traffic. But what Fred Harvey did is what every successful businessperson does. He got things done - endless things, all of them done, and all of them on time. It sounds simple, but most people can't do it. He was a perfectionist. And he solved endless problems. Then he got up and did it all again. Of course, to succeed in business, you have to have some luck. But success in business requires mostly getting things done, detail work, and solving problems. They seem easy, but they're not. The other interesting take-away from "Appetite For America" is that it shows what is commonly known and simultaneously always forgotten: the inevitable cycle of every business. Everybody thought railroads would dominate forever, and therefore Fred Harvey would dominate chain restaurants forever. Before Fred Harvey and after Fred Harvey, from steamboat operators to Google and Facebook, every business has seemed mighty and everlasting, until it is not. In the end, they all fall. They fall because times change, they fall because people change, they fall because families change. But in the end, they all fall.

Thoroughly enjoyed this book. Know the southwest pretty well - travelled there and visit a sister who lives in Santa Fe - so Fred Harvey territory is familiar to me, but I never realized the role he and his company played in the "discovery" of the Southwest. Well-written and exhaustively researched, it's filled with history large and small and helps us to understand the contemporary hospitality business. The ending seems quite abrupt after all of the details of the rise of the Fred Harvey empire, but then it does seem that the company just fell apart as passenger rail service died in what seemed like only a decade. Perhaps the interesting bit is the course of a family business, going from

Fred Harvey's passion for the details and his commitment to good food and good service to the increasing bickering of the second and third generations - Fred Harvey lived for his business while his children and grandchildren got caught up in the business of living. The succession of a family business depends on how carefully the older generation plans. Fred Harvey was, in his own quirky way, a bit of a genius when it came to passing along his company. Not so for the next generation. Overall, this is a terrific book that provides a clear and compelling sense of how we got from "there" to "here" - everything from good coffee to Southwest or Santa Fe style. Also, the book is about 3/4 as long as it appears to be with pages and pages of acknowledgments (no one goes unthanked) and most enjoyably, pages of recipes from the Harvey House chefs.

This one was right in my sweet spot. It was extremely long and detailed, and arguably some of the details weren't as important as others. But there are few things that entrance me more than trains, travel, the American West, entrepreneurship, restaurants, and food. And as a veteran of un-air-conditioned car travel in the West, especially I-40, the settings and challenges of the Harvey House eateries all along that venerable travel route resonated the more. I so much appreciate the idea of cold pats of butter in a dish resting on a clean white tablecloth after a long day of dusty, hot mountain-hopping in a less-than-perfect conveyance. And is there anything better than having recipes at the end of a book? The saga of the Harvey family was less compelling, especially concerning the fate of the offspring, but for context's sake it made sense that the whole story be told. I will have the fried chicken and mashed potatoes with gravy, please. And pie for dessert. Surprise me.

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