



Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the Wild West

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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.

Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the Wild West Details

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From Reader Review Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the Wild West for online ebook

Ira says

A truly awesome story of an American family business that feels like the Forrest Gump of the 1850s-1940s. I had never heard of Fred Harvey, but the story of the business expansion across the Midwest and southwest, as well as its intersection with the railroads and the early days of aviation were fascinating. Given that I do not typically read "hard" history books, this book was nonetheless a great tale that was chock full of historical facts and impact of the expansion of America and what was going on to the west in the shadows of the "Captains of Industry" from the east coast. Great read.

Charles says

"Appetite For America" is that rare book that combines the best of a history book and a business book. It's 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.

Todd Stockslager says

Lost highways

Fried mines a fascinating piece of lost American history in this study of Fred Harvey and his company. Fred Harvey was born in England in 1835, but, like a character from a Dickens novel his father was legally declared a pauper, and came to America with his family in 1853 to escape London's dirty streets. Fred found his adopted home in Kansas a friendly place to grow, and its burgeoning railroad industry a great partner to grow with as he built a string of restaurants, lunch counters, newsstands, and hotels along the railroad lines of the Midwest and Southwest from Kansas to California.

Along the way, as Fried documents, Harvey accomplished more than personal financial success.

--He provided a model for delivering quality food service at affordable prices, and established patterns of standardization and franchising that enabled roadside service (Howard Johnson's) and fast food (McDonald's) to flourish in the next century.

--He raised culinary standards with fresh ingredients prepared in healthy and tasty recipes at a fair price.

--He raised social standards by setting and maintaining dress codes (even in the face of a notorious nuisance lawsuit that reached a state Supreme Court!) and hiring and training a corps of fresh-faced and morally upstanding female waitstaff known as Harvey Girls.

In summary, as Fried's subtitle says, Harvey's real achievement was civilizing the West--at a time when Custer was still battling (and losing to) the natives, and Jesse James and his imitators were stopping trains and stagecoaches. He set standards for indigenous touring and Native American ethnography that shaped and in some cases created the Southwest as a cultural force and academic field of study.

But the fascinating part and the core of Fried's story is the people. Fred Harvey was the patriarch of a growing family that he groomed to work for and eventually run his business. He was not just the face of the

business, he was the business, notorious for continuous tours of his far-flung sites and unannounced inspections of the lunch-room readiness for the 30-minute ballet of food service during the train stops.

He was also people smart. The company name he used was Fred Harvey (not The Fred Harvey Company or Fred Harvey Incorporated), so that the customer felt the personal touch of service by Fred Harvey--a personal touch that continued after his death when his will called for leadership to pass to his son Ford, but with no changes in company name or structure, and no financial payouts from his estate for ten years. This kept the family engaged in managing the business and their personal lives and finances wisely, avoiding the family-business collapse that often comes with the second and third generation.

Eventually, there would be family troubles, and financial struggles, but Fred Harvey soldiered on (literally, with its food-service contracts during both 20th-century World Wars) until eventually America went past it. With the death of longhaul rail passenger service and changing social and cultural mores in the post-war era, along with the privately-held fiscally-conservative approach to borrowing and new investments that opened the field for the new mega-service corporations growing up then, Fred Harvey slowly contracted to a quiet death.

Don't skip the appendices that document Fried's rail trip to visit extant Fred Harvey sites (including the famous Grand Canyon properties), and the master list of all Fred Harvey sites. This pre-publication review copy didn't have any photographs, but a few hours spent searching for Fred Harvey on the Internet will yield a trove of photographs both contemporary and current of the people and places of Fred Harvey. Its worth the tour.

Brian says

Appetite for America by Stephen Fried follows the Fred Harvey company and its founder and his family Fred Harvey as they civilize the American west one meal at a time. This book is chock full of fascinating facts about the American west and Americana as the Fred Harvey company became the gold standard of railway dining and hotel staying through its various hotels including the El Tovar, La Fonda and La Posada which can still be stayed at today. The development of the grand canyon and the collecting of Native American artifacts were passions of the company that helped to shape collections today including the bulk of the Heard Museum in Phoenix.

The company became a gold standard of consistent operations before Ray Kroc was even born. The company was the epitome of the American Dream as Harvey was an immigrant from Great Britain who always instead of jackets being worn in his hotel dining rooms and having his famous Harvey girls live in dorms and sign contracts about their behavior. He was the largest employer of women long before women in the workforce were common and used their presence to civilize the areas of the west with the assumption that desperados and cowboys would behave better if a woman was present. He served the military in both wars by ensuring that troops were fed as they crossed the rails and the La Fonda even became a central gathering place for the men and women of the Manhattan project. During the great depression his company gave away hundreds and thousands of meals to those moving to try and find work to make sure they were fed. The company remained privately held for most of its existence and thrived by never taking on debt. Its ties to the Santa Fe railroad were its catalyst for growth and simultaneously its undoing as Fred Harvey missed the Route 66 phenomenon and could not survive the demise of the railroads.

This book has a little something for everyone and is a great read that moves fast through a lot of American History with Fred Harvey at the center of it. If you have done any traveling throughout the southwest or lower Midwest you will appreciate the tidbits in this book and for anyone who has visited the Grand Canyon

or Santa Fe there is wonderful stories about how those areas developed.

Emily says

"Every time someone says 'this is not who we are' (meaning America writ large), I want to throw a history book at their head." I read a tweet to this effect recently and thought of it often while reading this book. I should have known the title's reference to "civilizing the wild west" was loaded and likely featured some bits less savory than the beefsteak and hot coffee that Fred Harvey so famously served up to railroad passengers. And sure enough, the story involves robber barons, a business built on the labor of women (called "girls" of course), and Native American tribes propped up as tourist attractions in the southwest. I often got hung up on the lack of critique the author brought to these aspects.

Beyond these troublesome parts (which less face it, are part and parcel of America's legacy), the book is full of interesting intersections. It is a glimpse back to a time (lasting longer than you'd think) when people traversed the country exclusively by railroads. Fred Harvey's story spanned government regulation (and takeover, which I knew nothing about) of the railroads, the start of the national parks, and aviation in WWI. There is an array of cameos from everyone from Will Rogers to Robert Oppenheimer to Walt Disney.

The story is also one of a family business struggling to stay intact into the third generation, which reminded me of one of my favorite books, Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba by Tom Gjelten. Ultimately, the reason you have likely never heard of Fred Harvey is because the business eventually fell by the wayside as the country moved away from railroad travel. The Fred Harvey story is also one of competition taking its course and of a business serving a need before it falls as a casualty once the public moves on to the latest and greatest offering. This story, however painful, is also quintessentially America.

Gloria says

An interesting concept about Fred Harvey but too detailed with dates, names and places. It made slow going and not very interesting in the long run. I scanned the last two thirds.

Joyce says

What a fascinating story of the guy who invented fast food, chain hotels and restaurants, and opened up the wonders of train travel and the Southwest. Great social, historical, and cultural details; engaging anecdotal style; wonderful family and business saga

Nightwitch says

Interesting read, but better skimmed than carefully read, and tries a little too hard to be all things to all readers - it's a family biography (but there are few, if any, direct quotes, and it's hard to get a real grip on anyone other than the original Fred Harvey), a corporate biography (but it has too many digressions), a

history of the "civilizing of the West" (a problematic term, and the framing device used is limiting, but there is some interesting stuff related to the Grand Canyon), and a general compilation of materials involving... well, everything even tangentially related to the Harveys. As a business biography, it suffers due to that customary Gilded Age issue: basically, through a combination of skill, cutthroat tactics, and luck, Fred Harvey was able to get a monopoly at a key point in history, and then the business essentially was his descendants' to despoil. Probably would have enjoyed it more if I felt any connection to the Harvey restaurants.

Dana Stabenow says

I was raving about this book in my knitting group and wondering aloud why I'd never heard of Fred Harvey and the Harvey Girls, when Jerri said, "Well, Dana, you were born in Alaska and Fred never made it this far north." Jerri, born in New Mexico, knew all about Fred Harvey.

I didn't and this book was a revelation. Fred Harvey, born in England, emigrated to the US at exactly the right time, when railroads were expanding all across the American West. He went into partnership with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, back when railroads had to make frequent stops to take on fuel for both engine and passengers. Wherever that was Harvey built restaurants, quality restaurants with quality service. Fred would travel anonymously up and down the high iron (main railroad lines) and walk unannounced into the restaurants before the rest of the train's passengers and if he saw so much as a smudge on a glass he'd jerk the tablecloth out from under the entire table's place settings and made the staff set it all over again from scratch.

When ex-Confederate soldiers made trouble for his African American staff, he replaced them with the Harvey Girls, what amounts to the first professional women's work force anywhere in the world and who in many lonely places in the West were the only women for miles. They had to sign contracts saying they wouldn't quit to get married for at least six months. At six months and one day many of them did, thereby helping populate the West. Fred Harvey also hired one of the first women architects, Mary Colter, who incorporated Native American arts and crafts into all of her designs and who with Herman Schweizer, another Harvey employee, was responsible for assembling the first great collection of Native American artifacts, admired by moguls, presidents and ordinary citizens alike.

You'll recognize names out of American history on every page--Teddy Roosevelt, Charles Lindbergh, at one point Fred hires Bat Masterson (!) to run security for one of his more out-of-the way restaurants that was being regularly robbed by bandits. All the robber barons are present and accounted for, Carnegie, Gould, Astor. Then Fred starts building luxury hotels, like La Posada in Winslow, Arizona (where I bought this book and dined in a manner Fred Harvey himself would envy), where all the Hollywood movie stars stopped between New York and Los Angeles, La Fonda in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where the scientists from Los Alamos celebrated when they built the bomb, and El Tovar, which is still going strong on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Which is a national park today largely due to the efforts of Fred Harvey, who wanted a lock on concessions, and got it, too.

Post-Civil War America was a land of infinite possibilities, a place where you could invent the skyscraper and build the Brooklyn Bridge and build railroads that would for the first time unite the states in a way they never had been before, and Fred Harvey had the ability and determination to take advantage of it. Fried has a lively, engaging style and is obviously a huge Harvey fan, and I defy you to let this book fall open to any page and not find an interesting tidbit thereon. There are also wonderful appendices, including a list of all the

Fred Harvey establishments which distinguishes between those open, closed and razed, and a bunch of Fred Harvey recipes. I'm definitely going to try that Butterscotch Pie Chantilly, and I am going to El Tovar as soon as I possibly can.

Highly recommended for students of American history and anyone who likes a good read.

Joyce says

An exhaustive biography of entrepreneur, restaurateur and hotelier Fred Harvey and his descendants, who developed a chain of reliable hosteries a generation or two before Howard Johnson fried his first clam. Like HoJo's, Fred Harvey restaurants became beloved because they offered predictable, comfortable dining experience to the traveler in the still-rudimentary southwestern United States.

This is a history of a business in symbiotic relationship with the expansion of railroads and the formation of new communities in the West. The company's success was a product of its customer focus, insistence on quality, and the loyalty of its employees. 'Fred Harvey girls,' like mill girls in Lowell, had independent, 'respectable' lives, which was saying something in the early 20th century.

The Harvey family and their employees were instrumental in bringing Hopi and Navajo art and architecture to the attention of the rest of the country, and in preserving some of the more important cultural sites around Santa Fe. Overall they seem to have been a force for good in a rough-shod time.

Andie says

I am old enough to remember the last gasp of Fred Harvey's hospitality empire in Chicago. Whenever we would pick up relatives at either the Dearborn or Union station, we would always go to the big Fred Harvey restaurants there before we went home. Later as the Interstate highway system began to criss-cross the state, the company ran the restaurants that were located in the oases that crossed the tollways. And in the 1950's I rode the Santa Fe Super Chief with my grandparents out to Los Angeles and got to spend three days eating sumptuous Fred Harvey meals in the dining car. But I really knew very little of the company or of Fred Harvey himself.

An immigrant from England in the 1850's, he worked in both the food service industry and then for the railroads, and also was a freelance salesman on the side. In his early forties, he decided to reinvent himself and started a business feeding train passengers in the American West, which in those days was still very wild, and in doing so became the father of what we know today as the American service industry. "Fred Harvey" was the first widely known and trusted brand in the country. He ran all the hotels and restaurants along the country's largest railroad, the Santa Fe, from Chicago to Los Angeles and later went on to serve the cross-country driving public along the fabled Route 66. His grandson took an interest in the early days of flying and was an original partner in TWA along with Charles Lindbergh and Henry Ford. He also provided countless women with employment opportunities as his famous Harvey Girls, championed the formation of the Grand Canyon National Park, and also created a national chain of newsstands and bookstores across the country.

He did all this while demanding the highest standards of service and quality of his product. At its peak Fred

Harvey had sixty-five restaurants and lunch counters, a dozen large hotels (including El Tovar and Angel Brite on the South rim of the Grand Canyon and La Fonda in Santa Fe), all the restaurants and retail shops in the country's largest train stations, and controlled so many newsstands and bookstores that his orders affected the best seller lists.

Lastly, he played a huge role in developing the American tourism industry as we know it. He was largely responsible for creating the Grand Canyon as the country's premier National Park, and was a driving force in developing appreciation for Native American arts and culture. His embrace of Native American/Spanish American imagery in his hotels and restaurants in the American Southwest gave birth to what we know today as the "Santa Fe style."

But then what happened? As is often the case, the third generation of the family, raised in luxury, dropped the ball. Fred Harvey's grandson, Freddy, was more interested in flying than in attending to the day-to-day concerns of the business, and when he and his wife were killed in a tragic plane crash in the 1930's, the company was taken over by Fred Harvey's younger son Byron and his children, who decided to hitch their fortunes to the railroad instead of the driving or flying public, and we all know how that turned out. In 1966 what was left of the company went public and then was sold to a Hawaiian based conglomerate and that was that.

This is a fascinating story of an American entrepreneur who built a hospitality empire with the highest standards only for it to fall to pieces due to disruptive technologies in the twentieth century.

Margaret Sankey says

Another book auditioning for the World of Food Syllabus: Entrepreneur Fred Harvey linked himself to the Santa Fe railway to launch America's first successful restaurant chain, in the process changing the demographics of the southwest by importing single waitresses, adopting cutting edge (for the 1880s) food safety policies, spreading regional and European cooking to the whole country, inventing gift shops, using the gift shops to launch Native American tourism and crafts, setting the script and egregious myths of southwest and Grand Canyon guides, hiring female architects, investing early in airlines, requiring men to wear jackets in dining rooms, having his own lobbyist in Washington D.C. (FOR the Pure Food and Drug Act, against more rail regulation) and holding out the continuing cruel hope that in the middle of nowhere, it is the American right to expect non-surly service and a clean bathroom.

Linda says

This is a great story, well worth the read, and for me, positive re-enforcement of my family's place in the history of the West. My dad worked for Santa Fe for 48 years. My mother's brother ended his worklife working for the Santa Fe. My cousins' uncle ran a Santa Fe section gang out of a converted Pullman off a sidetrack in Bernallio, New Mexico. My birthplace and hometown, both of my sisters birthplaces, my hometown, my father and my mother's birthplace and home town are in this book. My grandmother was a Harvey Girl so many of the more well-known people and places in this book were dinner table conversation at her house. There is southwest U.S. history galore here. There is history of the Grand Canyon and the sumptuous hotel there, El Tovar. Chateau's Island an obscure water-logged spit, in the Arkansas River where a standoff took place between French explorers and Native Indians near Lakin, Kansas, is mentioned.

Cooldige, Kansas which was featured in a Chevy Chase "vacation" film and where my grandfather always claimed a law was passed that women could not ride "naked, on horseback" takes a place. Las Animas, Colorado; Las Vegas, New Mexico; Lamy, New Mexico; Santa Fe's LA FONDA HOTEL; the list of places you have either been to or heard of goes on and on. Fred Harvey had a fine home in Kansas City and he and his family were active in civic and social events there. So, from Kansas City, west to California, through Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, into Oklahoma and then onto California, Fried has traced the history of the Harvey House eateries and hosteries. Fried and his wife also made their own trip and stayed at La Posada in Winslow, AZ.(this story in in the Appendices.)APPETITE FOR AMERICA is easy to read and quite compelling. Anyone who is interested in railway history or Western Expansion will eat this up. Appendices, a list of resources, Harvey House recipies and a complete index follow the text.

Nora says

I was first introduced to Fred Harvey and his army of spotless Harvey Girls through the MGM musical staring Judy Garland. This was many years ago and I hadn't heard anything else about them until I was vacationing in Wallace County, Kansas this past summer and ran across an account of them in the county museum. It piqued my interest and happily I found this book in the museum bookstore (travel begets reading and reading begets travel).

The book started out great and I found the story of Fred Harvey's life and struggle to start his company pretty interesting. The middle of the book sagged a bit for me as it was mostly about Fred's son Ford taking the reins and making heaps of cash after his father died, which is fine but not something I found super compelling. The book rallied toward the end for me when Fred's childless grandson Freddy (heir to the company) and his socialite wife die in a plane crash and the company falls into the hands of Freddy's sister Kitty (by far my favorite Harvey). Drama ensues as she and her uncle struggle over control of the company. Apparently Fred Harvey tradition was that no woman be involved in directing the company. Kitty appeared to be far more savvy than her uncle and so, having ousted her, one might say that the company ended up getting what was coming to it. It's really a sad story in the end. Fred Harvey isn't exactly a household name any more so I think we all know what happens in the end, but it's also the story of a family torn apart by carelessness, misogyny, greed and mismanagement.

The book has three appendices. The first is a travelogue of the author and his wife exploring the sites of old Harvey houses, the second provides Harvey house recipes and explanations and the third provides a listing of all Harvey locations. I definitely recommend reading the travelogue.

Molly says

I had this book on my list to read for a long time. My public library did not have it but my college work library did- and I am so glad they did. What a great read! After reading this book, I am surprised I had not heard of Fred Harvey. His influence spanned 50 years of American history as well as a large geographic area. It was entertaining to read about this time in history including the heyday of the railroad and Western expansion. I have also visited lots of places Harvey influenced including the Union Stations in Kansas City and St. Louis, the La Fonda in Santa Fe, and the train ride between Williams, AZ and the Grand Canyon and the buildings at the South Rim. Reading this book gave me a deeper perspective about those sites.

