



## FRED HARVEY AND TOURISM IN THE WEST

Fred Harvey was born in London, England in 1835. He came to the United States in 1850 at the age of 15. Like many immigrants, he began working in menial jobs in cafes and food establishments where he learned the restaurant trade. He and his wife moved to Lawrence, Kansas in 1875 where he ran two restaurants for the Kansas and Pacific Railroad. At the time, restaurants that accommodated railroad passengers served horrible food. Mr. Harvey wanted to change that. He approached the Kansas and Pacific with his ideas, but they were not interested. He, then, pitched his plans to the Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe (AT&SF) Railroad. His idea was simple. He would provide good food and service to passengers in return for free transportation for his workers, and his supplies. He was very successful.

“Harvey House” restaurants along the railroad offered three choices for dining: an elegant sit-down dining room where everyone had to “dress-up” to eat; a lunch room that was similar to today’s “Diners”; and a takeout area where customers in a hurry could get coffee and sandwiches. These choices, combined with Mr. Harvey’s demand for excellence, made him very successful. Soon, he had restaurants and hotels that spanned the country from east to west.

Mr. Harvey introduced a new idea into the restaurant business. At a time when women did not travel alone and had few ways to earn a living, he hired young, single women to be servers in his establishments. He provided them with housing. He trained them to provide excellent service. He established a standard uniform and paid them an honest wage. This was the first opportunity in US history for single women to travel and earn a living at the same time. Young women responded enthusiastically. Over the 85 years that the company existed, it is estimated that 100,000 women became “Harvey Girls.” Very quickly, the “Harvey Girls” became the standard for excellence in the food service industry. “Harvey Houses” and “Harvey Girls” opened the West to tourism. The hotels provided safe, reliable, affordable housing for travelers, while the Harvey Girls added a graciousness and efficiency that had been lacking in the “Wild West” before the 1880s.

Mr. Harvey was an excellent entrepreneur and promoter. He believed that the more people knew about the Southwest, the more they would want to travel to see it. The Fred Harvey Company had its own publishing division, which produced books about the people and places of the Southwest. He formed an “Indian Department” to merchandise Native American arts and crafts to passengers along the AT&SF rail line. The Harvey Company was instrumental in transforming the image of Native Americans from a primitive backward people into a picturesque people with a culture worth knowing about and preserving.

Fred Harvey and the Harvey Houses opened the West to tourism. They promoted its history, scenery, and culture in order to attract people to visit. More people did come. The



Fred Harvey Company revived the economy of the Southwest and made tourism a solid component of that economy.

We know that tourism is a “double-edged sword.” While the Harvey Company did revive the Southwest economically, it did so through the commodification of culture. Each Harvey House in the Southwest hosted a souvenir shop that sold postcards of idyllic Southwest scenes and romanticized visions of Native Americans. Also on sale were Native American pottery, jewelry and textiles, but only those that buyers for the Harvey Houses thought would sell to tourists.

Change is a natural part of life. The Fred Harvey Company instigated extensive change in both the Euro-American and Native American societies. Whether that change brought positive or negative results is difficult to evaluate. The answer would largely depend upon where you were located, how you participated in that change, and whether or not you benefitted from it. Regardless, the Fred Harvey Company opened the West, gave women new power, and revived Native American cultural activities at a time when it was most needed. Perhaps, these are the achievements for which Fred Harvey and his company should be remembered.