

# Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

## Who Was Fred Harvey?

Who the hell was Fred Harvey? So asks Stephen Fried in the prologue of his wonderful new book, *Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the Wild West*.

Fred Harvey, an Englishman who came to the United States as a youngster in the 1850s, started a revolutionary business in the 1870s feeding train passengers along the nation's largest railroad, the Santa Fe, between Chicago and Los Angeles. Harvey created the first restaurant chain in the US. His family-owned business (named simply Fred Harvey) was amazingly successful due to the entrepreneur's innovations and marketing skills. The business survived his death in 1901, extending through three generations of Harveys, until well into the 1960s, when railroad passenger business dropped off sharply.

As Mr. Fried notes in his book, "At its peak [in the late 1920s], Fred Harvey had over sixty-five restaurants and lunch counters, sixty dining cars, a dozen large hotels, all the restaurants and retail shops in five of the nation's largest railroad stations, and so many newsstands and bookshops that its publication orders regularly affected national best-seller lists."

The eating establishments and hotels became known as Harvey Houses and operated in dozens of towns, averaging one every 100 miles of railroad track.

Fred Harvey set incredibly high standards for food services in the early days of the "wild west." He offered an elaborate and fancy menu, a variety of fresh food items that (if required) were transported down the line in ice-box train cars. He provided sumptuous meals of high quality, hired the best chefs, and served meals on fine china with Irish linens and first class silverware with "Fred Harvey" imprinted on each piece.

Harvey was a fastidious innkeeper, a stickler for cleanliness, and personally inspected his establishments as often as possible. His services were efficient also; he had to feed a whole trainload of passengers in just thirty minutes!

Dining efficiency and civility were greatly enhanced with Fred Harvey's famous female waitresses, known as "Harvey Girls." Harvey sought out single, well-mannered, educated, attractive ladies, eighteen to thirty years of age, of good character. He signed them up for six-month, renewable contracts and provided room and board, and transportation.

Fred Harvey and its Santa Fe Railroad partners promoted tourism. They encouraged travelers to visit national parks and scenic byways close to the main railroad line by

offering special side-trip “detours,” for example to Arizona’s spectacular Meteor Crater, from the Winslow station.

Starting in 1904 Fred Harvey partnered with the Detroit Publishing Company to publish and distribute picture postcards, colorfully depicting the wonderfully scenic and historic sites of the American southwest.

Fred Harvey was also “the most important driving force in the early appreciation, and preservation of” Native American arts and culture. The Company hired Indians to demonstrate their crafts at New Mexico and Arizona railroad stops and hotels, and provided “Indian Detours” by auto to Santa Fe and Indian villages. Fred Harvey obsessively collected the best Indian art; “most of the Indian art and crafts now on display in the world’s major museums were originally owned by Fred Harvey.”

In reading Mr. Fried’s book, and in doing subsequent research for this column, I came to better appreciate Fred Harvey’s particular influence in Arizona. The railroad track ran across northern Arizona. (Today you can follow the still active track along I-40 and remnants of the famous Route 66 automobile highway.)

By 1901 Fred Harvey provided “hospitality” services at five railroad stops along the main railroad line in Arizona: Williams (1887), Winslow (1887), Ash Fork (1895), Seligman (1895), and Kingman (1901). Establishments at all five stops served lunch and dinner, and had newsstands. Several locations had hotels: the Escalante in Ash Fork, the Havasu in Seligman, and the Fray Marcos in Williams (which is still there).

In Winslow, the famous La Posada hotel was built in 1930, closed in 1957, and restored and reopened in 1997 - remaining today as one of finest hotels and restaurants in Arizona, as I can personally attest.

For a brief period (1947 to 1949), a sixth Fred Harvey eating establishment along the Arizona main line operated at the Painted Desert Inn, which reopened in 1963 as Painted Desert Oasis, restored in 2000, adding a museum.

Fred Harvey also operated two dairy farms in Arizona - Peach Springs (1884) and Del Rio (1898) – to provide fresh milk for railroad passengers.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, increasing passenger demand caused the Santa Fe Railroad to build two spur lines off the main transcontinental track in Arizona, one to Phoenix and the other to the Grand Canyon. Fred Harvey only provided a newsstand at the Phoenix terminal (1896), but the company had bigger plans for the Grand Canyon.

In 1905 Fred Harvey opened the El Tovar Hotel at the south rim of the Grand Canyon. The company followed up with Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the Canyon (1925) and Bright Angel Lodge, also on the south rim (1935). By 1936 this hospitality complex would become Fred Harvey’s biggest moneymaker, out-earning everything else in the Fred Harvey empire put together. These facilities remain open today, under the

management of a company named Xanterra (which manages food and lodging for many western national parks), with El Tovar continuing to be a world-class hotel and restaurant, in my humble opinion.

Fred Harvey was heavily into the design and decoration of its many hotels. Starting in 1902, the (now-well-known and appreciated) architect Mary Colter worked for Fred Harvey for more than 40 years. Colter “incorporated local materials and Indian motifs” into her buildings. She was responsible for the design and decorating of such famous Arizona icons as the Grand Canyon’s El Tovar Hotel (decorating only), Hopi House, Hermit’s Rest, Observatory Lookout Studio, Phantom Ranch, Desert View Watchtower, and Bright Angel Lodge; and Winslow’s La Posada Hotel.

Besides the fabulous hotels at Grand Canyon and Winslow, Fred Harvey left Arizona a fantastic legacy of art works. When the company dissolved in the late 1960s, over four thousand pieces of Native American art – “the very best of textiles, pottery, and silver” – were donated by the Harvey family trust to the Heard Museum in Phoenix. Fred Harvey’s granddaughter, Kitty, donated most of her incredible personal western art collection, along with some personal photos, to the Museum of Northern Arizona.

Other Fred Harvey memorabilia are located in Arizona museums. Photographs, correspondence, and miscellaneous records – including dining car menus - are preserved at the University of Arizona, Special Collections. The Arizona Railway Museum in Chandler includes in its displays, a Harvey Girl uniform. The Arizona State Railroad Museum - a \$25 Million, 106,500 square-foot facility, currently under construction in Williams – will open in 2012 to display all sorts of Arizona railroad history, including Fred Harvey.

Next Time: More on the Harvey Girls



*The El Tovar Hotel is situated just 20 ft from the south rim of the Grand Canyon. The hotel opened in 1905 as one of a chain of hotels and restaurants owned and operated by Fred Harvey. Pat and I stayed at El Tovar for a night in January 2008 – on a “Romance-to-the Rim” train trip from Williams, Arizona. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)*



*The La Posada Hotel in Winslow Arizona was the last of the great Fred Harvey/Santa Fe Railroad hotels. The hotel was designed by famed southwestern architect, Mary Colter, and opened for the first time in 1930. Pat and I last visited La Posada in May 2009, staying in the “Albert Einstein” room and eating in the fabulous Turquoise Room restaurant. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)*