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Book Review: Duncan Hines: How a Traveling Salesman Became the Most Trusted Name in Food

Karen J. Cook

State Library of Louisiana

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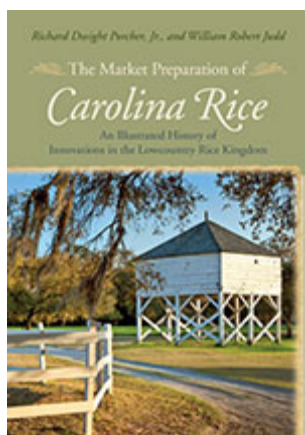
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and hope is what drives activists—hope for a better future, hope that a better future can be possible, hope that injustices can be changed. A river is a good metaphor because it is long and continuous—the black freedom struggle has been long but one of hope. And a river is alive—as I say in my conclusion African Americans today still are not in an equal social position compared to whites, the struggle like the river continues. A river metaphor is also especially pertinent to Memphis given its sits on the banks of the Mississippi River.” (email 8/10/14)

I recommend you add this book to your reference library. It contains political events and personal histories of individuals that made significant impacts in the struggle for civil rights in Memphis, There are excellent end notes, a bibliography, an index (pgs. 327-355) and a selection of photographs (p.136-) of prominent black citizens who were highlighted in the text.

*Dr. Carol Walker Jordan
College of Library and Information Studies
University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

The Market Preparation of Carolina Rice: An Illustrated History of Innovation in the Lowcountry Rice Kingdom. Richard Dwight Porcher, Jr., and William Robert Judd. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014 ISBN 978-1-61117-351-2. 408 p. \$49.95.



As I open and turn the pages of this 379 page historical scholarly tome, I am constantly surprised with the documentary writing, the black and white machine and equipment drawings, the beautiful color plates, and pages of charts, lists and data.

The title of this research, “The Market Preparation of Carolina Rice: An illustrated History of Innovations in the Lowcountry Rice Kingdom”, appealed to me on a very personal level: I love rice! I love South Carolina’s restored rice plantations.

My travels to rice plantations located along the South Carolina coast on summer and winter travels and on visits

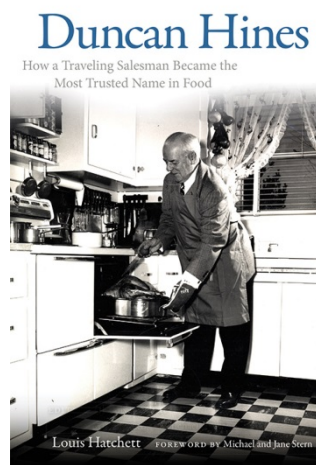
to family and friends did not prepare me for the depth and dedication that Richard Dwight Porcher, Jr., and William Robert Judd poured into this priceless work. I expected to see some steaming bowls of rice or some beautifully laden southern dinner tables as that is how I glorify rice. I did not expect to see machinery, storage bins, steam engines and water wheels, threshing barns and rolling screens. Nor did I expect to read of the socio-economic and political scars of the Civil War upon the rice culture and the rise and demise of labor and poverty among the people involved in the industry that comprised the rice culture.

Through words, ideas, visual representations and emotional descriptions, I gained a new impression of my favorite food. I also gained a sense of the importance of the rice culture in our South Carolina Lowcountry history. My husband tells me that his Mother’s family home in Pamplico, S.C., served rice with every meal and to him, now 75 years old, rice is a distinct staple in our house. To me, It is a joyful gift brought to us over the years by the people who worked to develop and where possible sustain the rice culture in our Lowcountry rice kingdom.

Anyone interested in pursuing research into the economic, cultural and historical development of the lowcountry of Carolina rice must consider this a required research tome.

*Dr. Carol Walker Jordan
College of Library and Information Studies
University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Duncan Hines: How a Traveling Salesman Became the Most Trusted Name in Food. Hatchett, Louis. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8131-4459-7 (pbk.: alk. paper); ISBN 978-0-8131-4484-9 (pdf); ISBN 978-0-8131-4483-2 (epub). 325 p. \$19.95.



This entertaining book recounts the life and remarkable career of Duncan Hines, a native of Bowling Green, KY. Unlike Betty Crocker, a fictional identity crafted by General Mills to symbolize the company’s “helpfulness, trustworthiness, and quality,” (“General Mills History of Innovation: the History of Betty Crocker,”

http://generalmills.com/~media/Files/history/hist_betty.ashx - accessed 9/9/2014). Duncan Hines was a real person who established his own brand for integrity and high standards before he became associated with an eponymous line of packaged foods. In fact, Hines would likely be astonished to learn that today “Duncan Hines” is associated with cake mixes and not with his highly popular travel and dining guides or the “Recommended by Duncan Hines” seals of approval proudly displayed by restaurants, hotels, and food companies.

Hines’ associations with the food and travel industries arose incidentally from his own experiences as a consumer. He frequently suffered from eating poor quality restaurant food and sleeping in uncomfortable, unsanitary lodgings while crisscrossing the county on business. Hines began keeping careful notes about places to avoid as well as places worth driving another few miles to visit again.

As word of his expertise and demanding standards spread he was barraged with inquiries from travelers seeking advice on places to eat and stay. In an effort to save himself aggravation of responding to individual questions, Hines prepared an annotated list of his favorite restaurants and sent it out to several hundred business contacts along with the usual Christmas cards---thereby unwittingly launching his publishing business. The casual lists which began as a personal diary grew into frequently revised and ever-expanding travel guides to restaurants (*Adventures in Good Eating*), hotels (*Lodging for a Night*), and vacation destinations (*Duncan Hines Vacation Guide*).

Hines made little money on these publications; in fact, for several years he lost money on them. He kept at the time- and resource-consuming task as a public service. Hines refused to accept payment of any kind in return for his endorsements. To keep the ever-lengthening lists up-to-date, Hines enlisted the support of volunteer “detectives” who sent in detailed notes about restaurants and hotels they patronized. Hines was painstaking about dropping entries for establishments which failed to maintain his high standards for cleanliness, comfort, and service.

Over time, as Hines’ reputation for scrupulous integrity and reliability as a travel expert grew he added a small but successful side business renting “Recommended by Duncan Hines” signs to establishments that had earned his seal of approval. These were “uniform in design so they would be instantly recognizable” and “color-coordinated” with the corresponding guidebooks’ bindings (*i.e.*, red for restaurant signs, blue for lodgings). The signs were subject to immediate removal if subsequent inspections found that standards had slipped.

For all his evident genius for branding and marketing, he was not a great businessman. For instance, the bindings on his directories were too good—they didn’t wear out in a year, so people did not rush out to buy the new editions as they were published. This was not only bad for the immediate bottom line, but also for the credibility of the directories themselves—people were relying on outdated information.

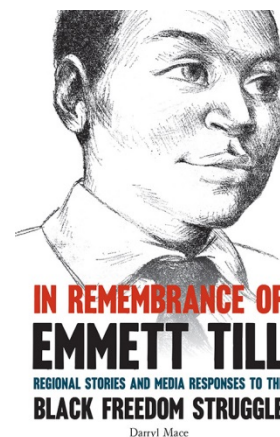
During his lifetime, Hines’ name became better known among Americans than that of the Vice President of the United States. The fact that Duncan Hines’ name is a household word more than a half century after his death in 1959 is due to an advertising man named Roy Park. Unlike many before him, Park was able to persuade Hines to give his name to a line of top-quality foods as a way to influence and upgrade American eating habits. This led to the establishment of Hines-Park Foods, Inc. in 1948. The wildly successful company merged with Proctor & Gamble in 1956.

At times the author’s admiration of Hines borders on hero worship or idealization. Originally an 840 page manuscript, this enthusiastic history began as the rough draft of a master’s thesis in history at Western Kentucky University at Bowling Green. The final book would not have suffered from further editing. The biography contains superfluous minutia (*e.g.*, recitations of every dish eaten by Hines at every restaurant visited during multiple road trips, when descriptions of a single day’s meals would have been sufficient to convey Hines’ tasting methods) and extraneous side stories (*e.g.*, details about Hines’ siblings’ lives) that impede rather than advance the narrative of Hines’ life and work.

Despite its lack of polish, this well-documented work is useful as well as a pleasant read. This book is recommended for public libraries and for academic libraries supporting culinary, business and/or marketing, and popular history programs.

Karen J. Cook
State Library of Louisiana

In Remembrance of Emmett Till. Regional Stories and Media Responses to the Black Freedom Struggle. Mace, Darryl. Lexington, Kentucky. The University Press of Kentucky, 2014, ISBN: 978-0-8131-4536-5 (Hardcover). 212 p.. \$40.



Pennsylvania-based history professor Darryl Mace takes a look at media coverage of the 1955 lynching of a black youth in Mississippi in his 2014 book, *In Remembrance of*