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Far from Home: West by Rail With the Harvey Girls Paper Dolls

Lesley Poling-Kempes

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Far from Home: West by Rail With the Harvey Girls Paper Dolls Lesley Poling-Kempes
In the early 1880s when conventional wisdom decreed that working women were socially inferior and morally suspect, an English gentleman brought the first of thousands of young women to the American West to work in restaurants along the Santa Fe Railroad line. Preferring the term Harvey Girl to waitress, Fred Harvey recruited single women between the ages of eighteen and thirty to work ten-hour days serving four-course meals in under thirty minutes at Harvey Houses from Kansas to California.Harvey Girls usually lived above the Harvey Houses and were chaperoned by a house mother. Their uniforms were modest, makeup and jewelry were forbidden, and each Harvey Girl signed a year-long contract. In exchange for these stringent rules, a Harvey Girl enjoyed room and board, railroad passes, and job security. In the seventy-year history of the Harvey Houses, more than one hundred thousand women proudly wore the black-and-white uniform of the Harvey Girls.Far from Home is the first of two volumes of paper dolls that feature the authentic uniforms and fashions of the day worn by the Harvey Girls. The text is presented as journal entries, and the historic fashions are based on the holdings of the Arizona State Capitol Museum.Step back in time with Mayetta and Christine as they leave their childhood homes and begin new adventures as Harvey Girls in the 1890s:July 1893: What a flurry of activity and excitement today! Fred Harvey himself came to Las Vegas. He climbed off the train and onto the platform and right into the lunchroom. Everyone knew who he was immediately and scurried to make our service extra good. He spoke with all the girls (even me!) and told us we were doing a fine job. The only complaint I heard was about the orange juice in the cooler. He poured it down the drain and told the cook it had to be freshly squeezed for every meal.For more in the paper doll history of the Harvey Girls, see The Golden Era: West by Rail with the Harvey Girls.

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