

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 13, 2008

Duncan Hines: In the past 40 years, we have thought Duncan Hines, a name far removed, sold cake mixes and the like through the supermarkets. Whoever made these mixes did indeed use his name.

Duncan Hines was a Virginia ham salesman from Bowling Green, Kentucky, who, with his invalid wife, traveled all over the U.S., often in his '35 Ford. He liked to find nice places to stay and good places to eat, and there were few directories in the 1930s that helped travelers find such places. There was a hotel Redbook that had listings, usually in the big cities, but little to describe the hotels' facilities. The Hines' kept a diary and a private list of the places and owner/operators they liked, so they would be sure to stay there or eat there again.

In the mid-1930s the first paperback with dark blue cover called *Lodgings for a Night* was published by Duncan Hines. Soon it was followed by a similar book with red cover called *Adventures in Good Eating*. The word got around that these little books were quite helpful to travelers of like tastes, and Hines soon had to expand his operation to include several "men on the road" to cover all 48 states. The books were updated annually. Although it seemed like a lot of information, all 48 states were covered in one book for lodging and one book for places to eat. My parents started finding Duncan Hines's recommendations reliable and fun.

A place was described by name, address, rates, owner/operator, and a folksy description on why it was recommended. Everything from fancy city hotels and restaurants to little country tea rooms were included in his books. Many places hung out a sign saying, "Recommended by Duncan Hines." It was an excellent endorsement.

On the 11,500-mile trip around the West in our '37 Packard in 1941, we relied on the Duncan Hines books everywhere we went, and we were never disappointed. My cousin Meta Shallcross and I joked about "Duncan." When we passed through Carrollton, Missouri, we saw a sign on a large mill: "Marshall, Duncan and Rea." Since everything was covered except "Rea," I decided Meta was "Meta Rea," and I wrote to the Carrollton firm along those lines. Appreciating the coincidence, they wrote a nice letter back and hoped to meet the Marshalls and Miss Rea.

During World War II, there was not much need for the Duncan Hines travel books, and after that I'm not sure whether they were resumed. Many new hotels and restaurants were being built, and more elaborate travel guides were required. The AAA, Shell Oil Company, and Fodor's were some of the best known travel books of the post-war years, and Hines and his company developed cake mixes instead, probably a much more profitable venture. Although more modern travel books were quite good (I used the AAA books for many years), I missed the folksy information relayed by Duncan Hines. I wish I had one of his old books, but they were destroyed long ago.