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Standout Attractions

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Standout Attractions

A wise man once said: "After your death, you'll be remembered more for your passion than for your personality." Duncan Hines had a passion for food and its preparation. He demanded use of choice, fresh ingredients in cooking, and he believed that food should be prepared with the best utensils and under clean, sanitary conditions. The food critic also preached that an artistic presentation abetted the food's appeal. Today's supermarket shoppers know nothing about Duncan Hines's personality, but they associate his name with his passion--good food. In the pantheon of packaged food mascots Aunt Jemima, Betty Crocker, and Mrs. Butterworth are all fictional characters, but Duncan Hines was very real. His name made his fortune, though he always regarded his success as a serendipitous gift. Today Hines's name is associated strictly with a line of superior baking mixes, but his rise to fame is marked by other stellar achievements.

Hines was the youngest of six children born to Edward Ludlow and Cornelia (Duncan) Hines on 26 March 1880 in Bowling Green, Kentucky. When Duncan was only four, his mother died of pneumonia. Edward sent Duncan and his older brother, Porter, to live with their maternal grandparents--Joseph D. and Jane C. Duncan--on a bucolic Warren County farm about 10 miles southwest of Bowling Green. From his Grandmother Duncan, the young Hines learned to appreciate good cooking. Eschewing cookbooks, her hands and eyes intuitively knew the amount of ingredients necessary to concoct delectable culinary creations. Before his arrival at his grandparents' home, Hines noted: "Food was just something to fill the hollow space under my ribs. Not until after I came to live with Grandma Duncan did I realize just how wonderful good cookery could be."

Hines insisted that the judicious use of fresh eggs and butter heightened the flavor of his grandmother's cooking, particularly her baking.

Hines attended the St. Columba School, a parochial school run by the Sisters of Charity in Bowling Green. Upon graduating, he matriculated at the Bowling Green Business University (BU), where he spent two years preparing for a commercial career. In 1898, before finishing the BU's academic requirements for graduation, Hines visited the family physician to determine why he had developed "a slight wheeze." His doctor diagnosed the condition as asthma and recommended that the young man move to a dry, mountainous area.

Before leaving his hometown, Hines secured employment with the Wells-Fargo Express Company, whose president also hailed from Bowling Green. He worked for Wells-Fargo in New Mexico and in Wyoming, where in 1900 he met a winsome young lass named Florence Chaffin whom he married in 1905. The couple moved to Chicago, where Duncan worked successfully as a salesman for several different printing companies over the next thirty-three years. Most of his customer calls were made by train, but in 1919, at the age of 39, Hines bought his first automobile. He enjoyed the freedom and mobility that this mode of transportation offered. During the 1920s, Hines spent most weekdays traveling to manufacturing plants throughout the Midwest and along the eastern seaboard. Like many traveling salesmen, Hines often endured hours of down time between client calls; he spent these interludes acquainting himself with local eateries in the towns he visited and dutifully recording information about them in a small notebook.

Being a traveling salesman, Hines spent weekdays separated from his wife; consequently he desired to spend his free moments with her. Instead of becoming a couch potato in his spare time, Hines enjoyed weekends with Florence traveling America's highways in their new car. Hines noted in one of his early books: "My interest in wayside inns is not the expression of a gourmand's greedy appetite for fine foods but the result of a recreational impulse to do something different to play a new game that would intrigue my wife and give me her companionship in my hours of relaxation from a strenuous and exacting business." From the early 1920s through the late 1930s, the couple averaged between 40,000 and 60,000 miles on the road annually. Everywhere they stopped, they jotted notes in Duncan's little notebook about eating spots that he said "offered standout attractions in the culinary department."

Hines's immense knowledge of roadside eateries soon marked him as an expert on the subject. In a slow but growing crescendo, hundreds of businessmen whom he met in his travels, and their friends, asked Hines for advice on not only the best places to eat on the road but also where to spend the night. By 1930 the number of good restaurants in Hines's notebook had expanded to approximately 200. His reputation widened when a Chicago newspaper, in 1934, published an article about Hines's growing repute as an eatery expert. The article's publication generated hundreds of phone calls, and Hines admitted that he felt as if he was becoming "the Dear Abby" of the culinary world. Concurrently Hines theorized that if he published a list of his restaurant recommendations he might eliminate most of the intrusive inquiries. In November 1935, Hines and Florence compiled a list, which included the names of what they defined as the 167 best restaurants in 30 states, and ordered 1000 copies of it printed on a heavy stock of blue

paper. The couple included these lists with their Christmas cards that year. Hines dubbed the card: "Adventures in Good Eating."

The list was condensed from his memorandum book, which by 1935 consisted of 700 outstanding restaurants. Within a few weeks into the new year, Hines was overcome with requests from people asking for copies. When he could no longer afford to absorb the cost of printing the list, he began charging \$1 for each copy. People paid willingly in order to get good advice about restaurants that served satisfying and tasty fare in an attractive, clean atmosphere. Prior to 1950, eating out was not always a pleasure and was occasionally a trial. Getting a lunch which consisted of "leaden biscuits accurately called sinkers and antelope steak so tough you couldn't get your fork in the gravy" served in a smoky, grimy room was not uncommon, therefore it is no surprise that Hines's list was popular. In later years he remembered:

It made me realize that we had done something that had never before been tried in this country—because there were no authoritative and unbiased guides to good eating. I felt that I could perform a real service to the public by giving them an appreciation of fine food and telling them where they could get a decent meal

The favorable public reaction to his Christmas card enclosure led Hines to deduce that he possessed the material for a marketable book.

In June 1936 Hines produced the first edition of *Adventures in Good Eating for the Discriminating Motorist*. The title indicates that the featured restaurants were a notch above other eateries and hinted at snobbery. A persistent complaint about the early editions was that a working man and a "discriminating motorist" probably were not financial equivalents, thus the average laborer could not afford meals at Mr. Hines's

recommended locales. Five thousand copies of the 96-page book were printed, which Hines sold for \$1 a piece. The book's first edition lost \$1500, a considerable sum during the Depression. Hines was not distraught, because like any good salesman, he believed in his product. After the first few editions, the guide found a market and began to turn a handsome profit for Hines.

What readers found in Hines's guide pleasantly surprised them. Entries were arranged alphabetically by state and then by city. Under each restaurant Hines noted the eatery's address, an average price for meals, some information about the establishment's history or décor, and particular attention was direct to the restaurant's special entrees. Of his favorite Kentucky eatery, the Beaumont Inn in Harrodsburg, Hines wrote:

A white-pillared mansion built in 1847 and for many years the home of the beloved Daughter's College. For the past 20 years it has become known throughout America as the delightful and satisfying Beaumont Inn. Here you will find true Southern hospitality at its best. Their food specialties are fried yellow-legged chicken, two-year-old, genuine country-cured, hickory-smoked ham, delicious beaten biscuits, an ample variety of fresh vegetables and their desserts are very, very good.

Besides the book's informational value, readers enjoyed Hines's folksy character. He was a natural storyteller and this translated well in his books; he didn't write for his readers so much as he "talked" to them. He peppered his books with random thoughts and homey observations such as: "Then I filled up with coffee and apple pie, and while I think I could make a better pie myself, it was really quite satisfying." He balanced this with practical information about restaurants such as: "Not only do their menus provide an

almost endless variety of the kind of food women like but there is ample choice of the 'he man' variety for hungry males and special menus provided for children."

Hines's guides were not pretentious. He, like most other traveling Americans, simply wanted a good meal away from home. What Hines earned with each book sale was more than one dollar; he reaped something of far greater long-term value—he earned the reader's trust. Keep in mind that Hines did not invent the restaurant guidebook. Others were available at the time of his publishing venture, but he gave his guide characteristics the others lacked: respectability and integrity. Hines also invited his readers along for the "Adventure." Each book contained three postcards through which purchasers could inform Hines about eating places that offered "an unusually pleasant and satisfactory experience" and whose "standards of food and service entitle them to honorable mention in the next edition of *Adventures in Good Eating*." Hines traveled 50,000 miles annually to inspect recommended restaurants. He also employed a group of "dinner detectives," a close cadre of epicurean adventurers who Hines personally recruited, to assist him in his quest to find America's best eating establishments.

Eventually *Adventures in Good Eating* and later spin-off publications—*Lodging for a Night*, *Adventures in Good Cooking* (a recipe book), and a dessert recipe book—paid handsomely. These publications were filled with the same folksy quips as his restaurant guide. In *Lodging for a Night's* introduction, he wrote: "What do I care if George Washington slept there? Do they have a nice clean bathroom and do the beds have box springs—that's what I want to know." This was the same information that the traveling public desired, and Hines provided it in engaging prose.

Hines's successful publishing career was predicated on trust. To foster that illusive quality, the food expert used a Puritanical code of ethics in preparing his guides and in his business dealings. Recommended restaurants that failed to live up to his exacting standards were dropped from the next book. Hines also tried to maintain a low profile, arriving at eateries unannounced and maintaining his anonymity until he had paid for the meal. In addition, he used a 20-year old photograph of himself in his books, which helped mask his identity to the public. Since a recommendation from Hines often meant the difference between poverty and prosperity, it became more difficult to elude restaurant staffs and managers. If he was discovered, Hines received preferential treatment, which prevented him from making an unbiased report.

To enhance his trustworthiness, Hines would not accept even simple gifts from listed eateries. One New York restaurateur sold homemade candy as a sideline, but the only way Hines would accept any was as a Christmas gift. When a Missouri entrepreneur sent him a 35-pound turkey “to prove Missouri produces the finest turkeys,” Hines retaliated by shipping a like-sized Kentucky ham back “to keep things even.” Hines also refused endorsement schemes surmising: “Once I succumb, I’ve lost my most valuable asset—my independence.”

Besides his upstanding ethics, the American traveling public saw Hines as a crusader earnestly battling for better food preparation and presentation. He felt strongly that good food and good health were inevitably linked, and that cleanliness in food preparation was paramount. He often said that no paying customer should be timid about asking for a kitchen tour. In a magazine article he once stated:

It calls for some nerve to ask to see the kitchen of public eating places, but after you have seen one littered with filth, food and garbage exposed to flies, and sloppy cooks dropping cigarette ashes into whatever they are cooking, you find it easy to screw up your courage. I am nearing my second million miles of wayside eating and I still have my appetite and health, but it is only because I have been a fussy busybody and have walked out on thousands of places whose kitchens were dirty or emitted rancid odors.

Of one café he said, "If you get anything after the cockroaches are finished, you're lucky." His first stop in any restaurant was the bathroom to make sure it was clean. "Sanitation," Hines noted, "of the whole place is the most important thing." He would inevitably ask for a table near the kitchen, where he could observe the intermingling of the staff and could scope out the restaurant's ambience. Of the food, he said "it must smell good, have eye appeal and taste good."

Unfortunately Hines's partner did not live to see his success; Florence succumbed to cancer in September 1938. Hines was devastated, but continued his work and was fortunate in December 1938 to have a flattering article published about his work in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Hines's biographer noted that this laudatory article "transformed" Hines "from an ordinary small-time bookseller into America's most authoritative voice for the best places to eat." Shortly after the *Post* article was published, Hines visited his sister, Annie, in Bowling Green for the holiday season. She asked him to consider moving back to his hometown, where he could pursue his business and where she could look after his personal needs. He took her entreaty seriously and in March of 1939 moved his fledgling business to Bowling Green.

After occupying several temporary locations in Bowling Green, Hines purchased four acres on the Dixie Highway (Highway 31-W) in 1940 and built an attractive house-office to accommodate his business. The house's façade was a diminutive replica of Mount Vernon's back porch which overlooked the Potomac River. Adjacent to a busy thoroughfare, the new structure welcomed a steady flow of friends and tourists. Besides visitors, Hines received up to 150 to 600 letters a day from fans. Occasionally the culinary expert received complaints about his recommendations, and Hines claimed that he, or someone from his band of "dinner detectives," investigated all grievances. Most of the letters, however, were favorable or requested information about honeymoon spots, special places to hold receptions and events, or included recipes or recommendations for new eateries and hotels to include in his books. Like any celebrity, Hines also received correspondence with quirky requests such as: "What should we name our baby?"

During World War II, Hines's business--and for that matter, all travel related concerns--was seriously curtailed, but the economic boom after the war and the ubiquitous automobile assured his financial success. Although his business was booming, his personal life took some jolts during this period. He had a short marriage to one of his secretaries Emelie Tolman, who had moved to Bowling Green with him from Chicago and was sixteen years his junior. Their marriage lasted from 1939 to 1945. Shortly after the divorce was finalized, Hines married a family friend, Clara Wright Nahm, who lived in Bowling Green and enjoyed travel.

With his business and personal life on track, Hines might have been happy to spend the rest of his life in relative security as the connoisseur of the American dining experience, but a momentous day changed that fate. Roy H. Park arranged a meeting with

Hines in November 1948 to discuss the potential of the culinary expert endorsing some food products. Park operated an advertising agency, and one his chief clients--the Grange League Federation Exchange (GLF)--wanted to begin competing in the rapidly developing packaged food industry. To do so successfully they realized the need to create a logo or brand name that grocery shoppers, chiefly women, would link with superior quality. After extensive surveying, analysts found that the name most housewives associated with good, quality food was that of Duncan Hines. Interestingly, Hines's name was better recognized nationally than fellow Kentuckian and then vice-president of the United States, Alben Barkley.

Upon meeting Park in November 1948, Hines acidly quipped, "So, you're going to make me a millionaire." Park was keenly aware that Hines was more interested in protecting his reputation and independence than in becoming a packaged food mogul. Artfully massaging the culinary chieftain's pride and sense of honor, Park suggested that he actually wanted to initiate a line of high quality food products in Hines's honor. "By making your name more meaningful in the home," Park said, "you can upgrade American eating habits." This magnanimous appeal impressed Hines, and it led quickly to the formation of Hines-Park Food Incorporated in 1949.

Ice cream was the first product marketed under the Duncan Hines name. Advertised as a "company dessert that is elegant but easy to serve", the ice cream was an instant success. Across the country scores of dairies produced the frozen confection using a prescribed recipe. This created a uniform product which was a paramount priority in the packaged food industry. The ice cream's success led to the marketing of numerous food products brandishing the Hines name, including coffee, condiments, ice cream toppings,

pickles and relishes, sliced bread, mushrooms, cooking and seafood sauces, and salad dressings. At its peak the Duncan Hines brand name adorned at least 157 different foodstuffs. Eventually his name was added to a line of kitchen utensils and appliances, pots and pans, and china. When grilling became the rage in the 1950s, the food expert's name was emblazoned on grills, utensils, and special barbecue seasonings and sauces. Despite the plethora of products bearing the Duncan Hines name, Hines-Park Foods was not an instant financial success. It was not until Duncan Hines became actively involved in marketing the products that the company began to realize a profit. To help the company Hines returned to his favorite activity: traveling. From mom and pop store openings to national sales meetings, Hines proved again that he was still a great salesman. Everyone involved in the process agreed that Hines's grassroots involvement abetted the company's success.

Perhaps the best known spin-off from this phenomenal marketing strategy was a variety of cake and baking mixes introduced in 1951. Only three years after their introduction, Duncan Hines white, yellow, and devils food cake mixes captured 10% of the national market, and this market share grew steadily. One reason for the popularity of the mixes was the fact that they called for the addition of fresh eggs rather than using the dehydrated eggs that other mixes employed. New types of baking mixes, including those for cookies, brownies, pancakes, pizza dough, and muffins were eventually added to the Duncan Hines food line. The success of these mixes assured that Duncan Hines's name would enjoy recognition by future generations of shoppers.

With his public relations work mounting and his energy waning, Hines realized in the summer of 1953, at the age of 73, that he no longer possessed the physical stamina

necessary to run Adventures in Good Eating, Inc., the publishing arm of his empire. He handed the reins of the concern over to Roy Park, who changed the company's name to the Duncan Hines Institute and moved its operations to Ithaca, New York, where it joined Hines-Park Foods. With Hines effectively out of the decision making process and Park's communications empire consuming more of his time, the fate of Hines-Park Foods seemed tenuous; it merged in 1956 with Proctor and Gamble which continued to produce the perennially favorite cake mixes.

In January 1958 Hines became ill while visiting friends in Florida and shortly afterward was diagnosed with lung cancer. Despite poor health he continued to visit with friends, relatives, and fans that stopped at his home. That Hines should meet his demise as the result of lung cancer was not a total surprise. One of his secretaries commented, "I almost never saw him without a cigarette in his hand." On 15 March 1959 Hines died in his Bowling Green home and was buried in that city's Fairview Cemetery.

After Hines's death, Proctor & Gamble continued to publish the guidebooks for several years, but in November 1962, the company issued a statement saying the books were no longer necessary. This ended Hines's 26-year publishing venture. Since 1936 Hines had sold millions of his guides, which assured him a lasting legacy. Of far greater importance to Hines was the trust he had garnered from those who purchased his books; this consumer confidence led to a marketable name that is still stocked on grocery shelves today. Mr. Hines has a special niche in the history of the food and hospitality industries. One chef noted: "Hines did more to lift the level of American cuisine than all the cooks had done in the previous 40." We can be reminded of his legacy each time we enter a restaurant with little worry of inspecting the kitchen or eating below standard food and

each time we're in the supermarket and reach for what many cooks claim, the best cake mix in the country: Duncan Hines.

SIDEBAR featuring photo of Parks and Hines holding a tin of his coffee.

Although Duncan Hines had relished many of the world's epicurean delights, his comfort foods consisted of simple fare such as country ham, fried eggs, cornbread, apple pie and coffee. When Hines-Park Foods authorized a line of coffee to be issued under the Duncan Hines brand, the culinary expert penned his own directions for preparing the ebony elixir. On the back of each coffee tin, Duncan Hines, described carefully and passionately the brewing process: "Coffee must be properly made in an immaculately clean coffee maker, and then it should not stand more than 30 minutes before being served. Be sure always to use fresh cold water, because hot water from the tap has lost its original sweetness and is blah. For glass coffee makers, allow water to heat and rise to the upper bowl. When this occurs, stir once and let brew 21 seconds. Remove from fire. For drip method, let water come to the bubbling stage but not boiling hard. By using more coffee and brewing a shorter length of time, you avoid the acrid oils and get full, rich flavor to your coffee. I usually add a pinch of salt and a very small dot of butter to the coffee before the water touches it, if you measure your coffee and your water accurately, you will always have a uniform flavor."

Recipes:

Knowing America's penchant for low-fat foods today, this recipe may seem tongue-in-cheek. Keep in mind that in 1954 when this small cookbook--*Duncan Hines Favorite Recipes*--was published, eggs and fat were a common part of the wholesome American diet.

Fried Eggs

This is the way I cook eggs.

Take a sauce pan and into it put butter or bacon drippings so that when melted there will be about a quarter of an inch of fat in the bottom. Have fat warm, but not hot. Break into the sauce pan as many eggs as it will hold, two, four, six, or whatever your requirements will be. When the eggs are in the pan, baste the yellows constantly with the warm fat until a film forms over them. The reason for the low heat is so that the whites will not become frizzled and tough before the yolks are done. When they are done, they look like poached eggs, and are they good! If you want to dress them up a bit, sprinkle a little paprika over them.

If you are fortunate enough to have real country ham steaks to fry, cook the pieces so that the fat will brown the bottom of the frying pan. If you want to, you can even put in extra bits of fat and let them frizzle to a crisp. This will aid in making your fat brown. Now, break your eggs into the skillet but be sure, that it is not too hot. Cook for a few minutes until whites solidify underneath. And then turn them over with a spatula and let cook a few more minutes. Here, too, the fat should not be so hot as to frizzle the whites before the yolks are done. The result will be beautifully brown eggs, with a flavor that you will never forget.

Of course, if you do not have butter, bacon drippings, or fired ham fat, then you will have to make do with just any kind of fat, but they just won't be the same, I warn you.

Another favorite of Mr. Hines was apple pie. Although he doesn't provide his pastry shell recipe here, we do know that he often added chicken fat to the crust ingredients for added crispness and flavor.

Ingredients:

1 cup of sugar

2 tablespoons flour

½ grated nutmeg

½ cup orange juice

3 tablespoons white syrup

1/3 cup melted butter

Winesap apples cut into thin slices (enough to fill a pie pan)

Mix all but the apples together, then add the fruit and thoroughly mix together. Butter a pie pan heavily before putting in the pastry, then fill with the apple mixture and make strips for the top. Preheat oven. Bake at 400 degrees F. for 15 minutes, then reduce oven to 25 degrees F. and bake for 35 to 40 minutes.