

BOOK REVIEWS

The Good Provider: H. J. Heinz and His 57 Varieties. By ROBERT C. ALBERTS. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973. Pp. 297. Illustrations, notes, sources, bibliography, index. \$10.00.)

This tangy and easily digested book, the "first full-scale biography" of the founder of Pittsburgh's famous food-processing company, possibly gives clues as to why readers have never met Henry John Heinz full-scale before. And perhaps why businessmen as a class — despite their profound influence on everybody's lives — are so hard to "get at" as complete human beings for historical study.

This is not to say that H. J. Heinz (1844-1919) doesn't come through Bob Alberts's lively prose a man of flesh and blood. He does, but mainly in two, albeit rich, dimensions — that of self-portrait (he kept lively diaries) and the reports of relatives and employees (a surprising number of the latter still alive and reminiscing) whose memories are warm, loving, and humorous of a grandfatherly gent with muttonchop whiskers.

But did Heinz ever do anything really low-down? Did not one partner or competitor or job-seeker ever find him prejudiced, stupid, shift, or mean? If so, the memory entered no known diary and has by now died in the sentimental sunset surrounding the life and success of one of Pittsburgh's most remarkable men.

While gifted with the true promoter's knack for publicity (pickle pins by the millions, etc.), Heinz was not the public man that richer contemporaries were in the more brawling steel, rail, oil, and coal industries. He was never a trust that anybody had to bust.

Beside a Carnegie, a Harriman, or Frick, he was a modest tycoon (his estate at death was \$3.5 million). And never in the hot glare of a Homestead Steel Strike (indeed, no union ever organized a Heinz plant till long after the founder's death), his career escaped the journalistic muckraking which might have lit the other side of the man into sharper contrast for a tireless researcher like historian Alberts. But this cavil aside (and who knows: maybe there just wasn't another side to Henry Heinz?), much reading pleasure is in the tasty book Alberts has served up, especially for Pittsburgh appetites.

Here are glimpses of post-Civil War truck gardening and horseradish bottling in that agricultural village, Sharpsburg, where Heinz, the son of German immigrants, got his callous-handed start; the era of mansion building in Point Breeze where the neighbors were named Westinghouse and Mellon; the surge of crowds at old Exposition

Hall near the Point; the prosperity of the one-time city of Allegheny, where Heinz in 1888 began building his model complex for food manufacture.

Actually the brickmaker's son had started in business in 1869, with partners, but went bankrupt in a tight-money panic a few years later. Having repaid every old creditor the "debt of honor" he felt due from a three-eighths partner — that is, precisely three-eighths of the defaulted credit — he got on his business feet again, and from there on his path to fortune was as upward and onward as his devotion to the Sunday School movement.

Endlessly self-starting, he formulated "Important Ideas," two of which were to give the consumer utter confidence in the purity of food ingredients and processing techniques (he fought for rather than against pure food and drug regulation); and to give employees working conditions that would lead to personal health, "self-improvement," loyalty to H. J. Heinz — and no strikes.

The "Ideas" included inspirational mottoes on the walls ("To do a common thing uncommonly well brings success.") — and also employee picnics, a factory roof garden and swimming pool, decent locker and rest facilities, a weekly manicure for girls who handled food, and educational displays of the paintings and curios Heinz brought back from his energetic overseas travels — including an Egyptian mummy.

To a skeptical journalist in 1900 who couldn't believe a businessman felt "fully repaid when we see our employees enjoying themselves," Heinz conceded:

"Very well, then, if you don't like the sentiment that attaches to the plan, I want you to distinctly understand that it is good business as well. It 'pays,' it increases my output. But I don't want to put it merely on a dollar and cents basis."

The answer rings true.

So does the account of how Heinz around 1892 hit on a magical, marketing attention-getter. He had been riding in a New York elevated train and saw a car card advertising "21 styles" of shoes. "He applied the phrase to his own products. There were more than sixty of them at the time, but for occult reasons his mind kept returning to the number 57 and the phrase '57 Varieties.'"

"The idea gripped me at once," he said, "and I jumped off the train at the 28th Street station and began the work of laying out my advertising plans. Within a week, the sign of the green pickle with the

'57 Varieties' was appearing in newspapers, on billboards, signboards, and everywhere else I could find a place to stick it."

The firm he left behind now has more than 1,250 varieties, plants around the world, well over a billion annual sales — and pretty certainly nobody quite like the original H. J. Heinz.

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Hannah's Town. By HELEN C. SMITH and GEORGE SWETNAM.
(Cleveland: Dillon, Liederbach, Inc., 1973. Pp. 113. Illustrations.
\$3.95.)

Hannah's Town, by Helen C. Smith and George Swetnam, is a noteworthy addition to the list of books on Pennsylvania history for younger readers. Focusing on the life of one family in the old Hanna's Town settlement, it portrays what it was like to be a little girl in Pennsylvania in the pioneer days before the American Revolution.

While written primarily for readers from ten to twelve, the book contains much that will interest older persons as well. Through the story of Hannah West from Hanna's Town, her parents, her brother Jonathan, and her friend Jenny Bradford, the authors recreate one of the lesser-known chapters from early Western Pennsylvania history. In doing so they also present a vivid, interesting picture of everyday life in colonial days.

Some time before the story begins, Robert Hanna had built a house on the Forbes Road between Fort Pitt and Fort Ligonier. It became an inn and a popular stopping-place for travelers. Around it grew old Hanna's Town, a village of thirty houses with a fort, a jail, a pillory, a blacksmith shop, and several other inns. Here was held the first British court west of the Alleghenies and here were issued the Hanna's Town Resolves at the beginning of the Revolution. The town was burned by British and Indians in 1782, the settlers left, and the settlement was abandoned.

Against the background of old Hanna's Town is set the story of Hannah West and her family. The West family moved from Valley Forge to Hanna's Town in 1769 — a month-long journey through woods infested with wolves, panthers, and snakes.

The story does not purport to be an adventure story. Its most exciting moments occur when the heroine meets an Indian (a friendly