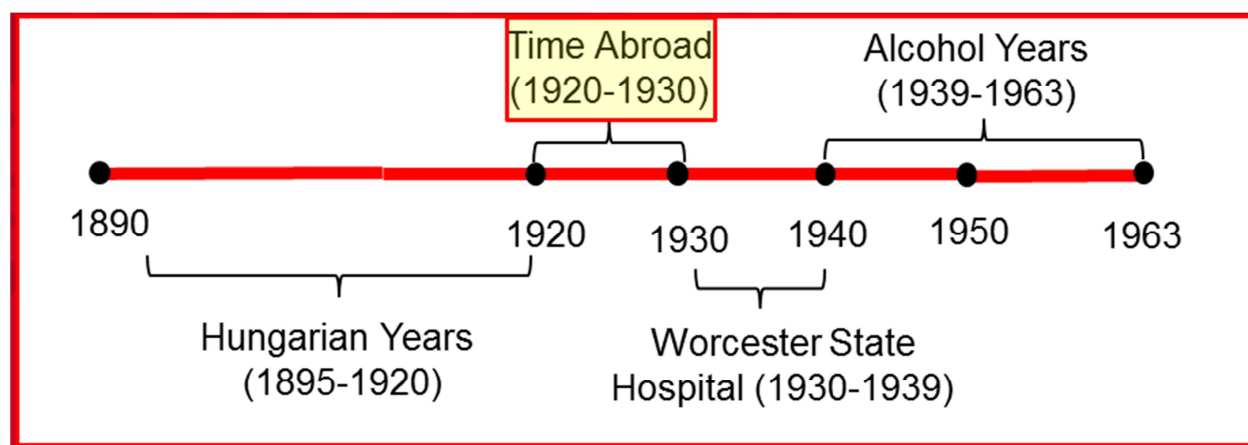


The “banana book” by E.M. Jellinek

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This is the fourth in a series of papers depicting the mostly undocumented life of E.M. Jellinek. This paper details another intriguing and even lesser known period of Jellinek’s life—the ten years that he allegedly spent abroad, after his disappearance from Hungary, between 1920 and 1930. A mysterious book on banana diseases serves as a lead to support the claim that A.N. Hartman, listed as the author, was Jellinek’s alias during this period. This paper describes how the quest for this book opened new avenues of research to fill in some of the gaps in Jellinek’s life during this period. The information in these papers was first presented at the 36th Annual Substance Abuse Librarians and Information Specialists (SALIS) Conference on May 1st, 2014, by seven presenters in a panel entitled “Mystery and speculations: Piecing together E.M. Jellinek’s redemption.”

The 1920s is the decade most shrouded in mystery when it comes to E. M. Jellinek’s life. We know virtually nothing about this period, and what we do know is highly speculative and more or less unverifiable. One source is

Jellinek’s biography from the 1947 *Current Biography* entry, that says

the subject of plant growth next was the young scientist’s chief interest: he worked as biometrician at Elder Dempster in Sierra

Leone, West Africa, for five years beginning in 1920; and as biometrician, and later director of research, for the United Fruit Company for five years beginning in 1925 (Jellinek, 1947, p.334).

Further information about this decade of his life is mentioned in the 1931 Worcester State Hospital Annual Report as follows:

E. Morton Jellinek, M.Ed. University of Leipzig, was appointed chief statistician May 1, 1931. Mr. Jellinek has been statistician to the Prime Minister of Hungary, biometrician for the research departments of the firms of R. Pariser and Elder Dempster and Co. (West Africa), assistant director of agricultural research, United Fruit Company (Central America). Various publications in ethnology and biometry. (Worcester State Hospital, 1931, p.18).

The Report of Research Service contained within the Annual Report introduces Jellinek as an asset around whom they organized a statistical service. The assistant superintendent, Francis H. Sleeper, M.D., claims that

we have been fortunate enough to obtain the services of Mr. E. Morton Jellinek as chief statistician. Mr. Jellinek brings to bear on the problem many years' experience in biometrical research and notable adaptability to the various needs of such a comprehensive research. (Worcester State Hospital, 1931, p.15).

He is listed as assistant director of research with United Fruit Company in Tela, Honduras, according to an unpublished biography prepared by J. George Strachan about

the history of the events and people leading up to and concerned with Dr. Jellinek's 'STAY IN CANADA' with the Alcoholism Foundation of Alberta (in Edmonton, Alberta), and with the Addiction Research

Foundation of Ontario (in Toronto, Ontario) between Sept. 1958 and January 1962 (Strachan, 1989).

Another source, Jellinek's daughter Ruth Surry's memo to R. Brinkley Smithers, supports the claim of his stay in West Africa. As she mentions,

He was in Sierra Leone working for the Elder Dempster Steamship Line under the name of Nikita Hartmann. He said that before he went to work for Elder Dempster he had traded with the natives—taking medicines to them in exchange for skins and shells and worked as a cook in a restaurant. (His exact job for Elder Dempster in vague (sic). He was either a plant biologist or an engineer.) (Surry, 1965, p.3).

Later on in the decade, however, the evidence of his whereabouts is slightly sturdier. All indicators point to the likelihood that between 1926 or 1927 and 1930, Jellinek – still as Nikita Hartmann – was living in Honduras, working for the United Fruit Company, first as an agronomist or in a similar research-oriented capacity, then as a director of research.

According to Jellinek's former wife Thelma Pierce Anderson, these are the approximate dates and positions that Jellinek occupied (Anderson to Keller, 1988):

11/01/26	Timekeeper, agriculture, Tela, Honduras
03/01/27	Agronomist, Tela, Honduras
03/01/29	Assistant, Research Department, Boston
06/17/30	Resignation requested

However, there is no way to verify this. Even more problematic, Jellinek reportedly told László Frank in 1930, that he was on a coffee farm.

"...I don't want to talk about my escape... the fact is that I spent a few days in Romania, then I fled to Yugoslavia, and

from the Dalmatian Shore, I traveled to Italy. Then to New York... then to South America"

"And you came from there to visit here in Berlin."

"From there. In Grunewald... you know, here in West Berlin... I bought a villa for my parents... They live here... I visited them—finally... now... since I can... but in a few days I'm traveling back to South America."

"And there... in South America... where do you live?... Or is this a secret?"

"Not anymore. But I still don't want anyone to know in Budapest"

"And... what do you do for a living?"

"I have a coffee farm. I'm an excellent farmer... but I also continue my studies in ethnology. I have recently published a book on Indian Folk Customs."

"Of course, under a different name... You have changed your name."

"You bet", laughed Jellinek.

(Frank, 1957, translated by Judit Hajnal Ward)

The source of this conversation is a 1957 propagandistic adventure novel published in Hungary, entitled "Conmen, vagabonds" (Frank, 1957, second edition Frank, 1966). While the events in the book may be based on facts, we cannot be certain of the extent to which the story was dramatized for the reader. That Jellinek spent some years in South or Central America is likely, especially given his later demonstrable knowledge of botany in some of his journal articles. But did he ever work for the United Fruit Company, or was that just a cover story?

There may be only one way to prove that someone named Nikita Hartmann genuinely worked there. If we were to find the company personnel files, we could probably track down a Nikita Hartmann during a particular period. We have not been able to obtain these documents. Even with the document in hand, however, there would still be the perhaps more challenging task of connecting Nikita Hartmann to E.M. Jellinek. As of now, all links are speculative based on family recollections.



The cover of the 1966 edition of László Frank's *Conmen, vagabonds*

Instead, what we have now are two mentions by members of Jellinek's family that he published a book about bananas during his time at the United Fruit Company. First, Ruth Surry writes,

While working for United Fruit he published a book on the diseases of bananas. To finish the book he went to Boston where United Fruit has its main office. He went to Boston as E. M. Jellinek, thus causing United Fruit great embarrassment and confusion (Surry, 1965).

Along similar lines, Anderson writes,

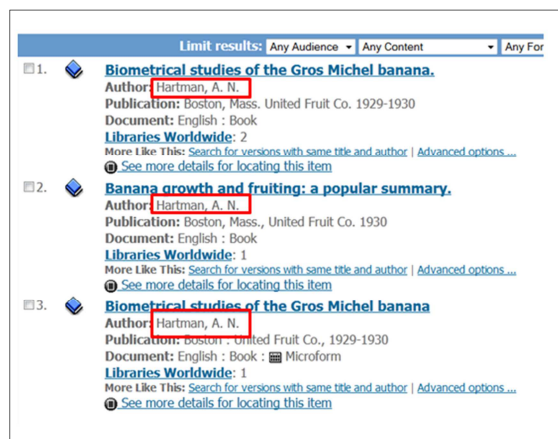
It may be well here to mention the 'banana book.' Probably the title is known to you; it is not to me. I have seen a copy — bound in dark green, hard cover; about 5"3~x8 in size, and approximately 3/4 inch thick. It is possible that a copy can be obtained from the United Fruit Company (Anderson to Keller, 1963).

To give a bit of historical background, the United Fruit Company, which was founded in 1899, had by the 1920s negotiated hundreds of thousands of acres for growing bananas in the West Indies, Central America, and South America. Along with Standard Fruit, it

dominated the banana market. The company maintained a laboratory in Tela, Honduras, for studying Panama disease (*Fusarium wilt*), a disease which infects the banana root.

We set out looking for Jellinek's alleged banana book, not realizing how many books were published about bananas. After extensive searching, we finally caught a break when we discovered, in an obscure footnote, a 1962 book that had a good bibliography of early twentieth-century banana research. That book led us to this reference:

Hartman, A. N., Kieffer, A. R., Gorman, C. F., and Harvey, F. W. (1928). Banana root studies: A preliminary report on investigations made at Tela, Honduras. United Fruit Company Research Bulletin, 1, 803–816.

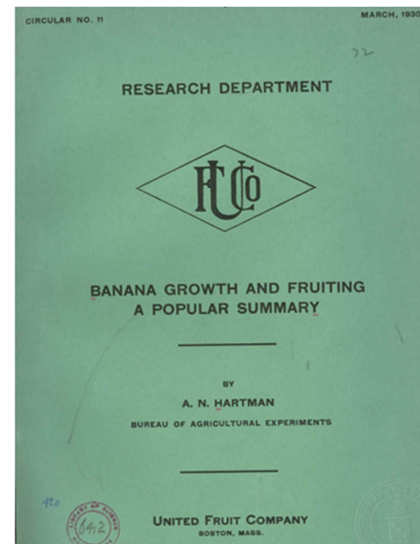


WorldCat records for A.N. Hartman's publications

In an email, Andre Lassoudiere, French banana expert, to Ron Roizen, gave us two citations with "Hartman, A.N." as the author, one the same as found in the footnote and another entitled "Biometrical Studies of the Gros Michel Banana" (Lassoudiere, A., personal communication, July 16, 2013). This lead introduced A.N. Hartman to us, who published in United Fruit Company journals in the second half of the 1920s. The only available copy of this title exists in microform. We requested and received this item via interlibrary loan, and had it digitized for posterity. Like this title, most of Hartman's

publications appeared in research bulletins, but at least one was listed in OCLC's WorldCat as a popular title.

We tried and failed to acquire a copy via the regular library channels, but based on the WorldCat holding, we contacted Harvard's Herbaria Botany Library. An extremely helpful librarian there scanned the cover and first few pages of the brittle book, *Banana Growth and Fruiting: A Popular Summary*.



Banana growth and fruiting: A popular summary by A.N. Hartman – Would this be the "Banana book"?

From the scans, it appears that it is a somewhat abridged and less technical version of the earlier publications. This fact intrigued us because it reminded us of the dichotomy between scholarly and popular publications that would later become a staple of the Yale Center of Alcohol Studies. An example of this is the Lay Supplement series which were published in order to educate the broadest audiences beyond the scholarly community.

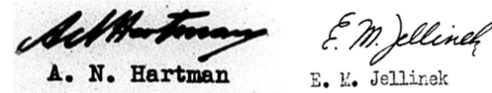
Banana Growth and Fruiting immediately became the prime candidate for the supposed banana book.

From the scan, we can determine that it is the correct dark green color that Anderson remembered, though not exactly the same dimensions. It was published in 1930, around Jellinek's transition from South America to Boston and thus consistent with Ruth Surry's recollection. Furthermore, the circumstantial

evidence is encouraging. It was published in the right country at the right time by a man with a similarly-abbreviated moniker as Jellinek (and possibly using an Americanization of the name “Hartmann”).

Further confirmation may come from using discourse analysis software to compare Hartman’s banana book with some of Jellinek’s early English language publications.

Although it is virtually impossible to prove or disprove authorship, at first glance, there is some reason to think that the two works were authored by the same person.



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