

History

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St. Paul in celebration, 1924. This photo from the Gibson-Wright collection shows St. Paul during the years of labor turmoil that followed World War I. The 1880s city hall-county courthouse is on the left, with the St. Paul Athletic Club beyond it in this view looking east down Fourth Street. See W. Thomas White's account, beginning on page 4, of the 1922 Shopmen's Strike in the Northwest.

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CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 The 1922 Shopmen's Strike in St. Paul and the Northwest
W. Thomas White
- 14 Fifty Years Later—A Survivor's Memories of the Bataan Death March
Philip S. Brain, Jr.
- 18 Growing Up in St. Paul
Willard L. (Sandy) Boyd
- 21 Rediscovering St. Paul's Fish Hatchery
Robert J. Stumm
- 23 The Earl of Selkirk and His Utopian Dream
Ronald M. Hubbs
- 26 A Matter of Time
- 29 Books, Etc.
- 31 What's Historic About This Site?
St. Anthony Park's Branch Library

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A Message from the Editorial Board

The Spring issue of our magazine inaugurates a new feature that focuses on the personal experiences of individuals growing up in St. Paul or Ramsey County. Willard (Sandy) Boyd, who grew up in St. Anthony Park as the son of Dr. Willard Boyd, director of the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus, has written the first memoir that begins this new feature.

A graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School, Sandy Boyd was president of the University of Iowa from 1969 to 1981. He is now president of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

Boyd writes about his youth in Ramsey County during the Great Depression. We learn first hand, for example, what the great droughts of 1934 and 1936 meant to him and his friends. Editorial Board members hope that others will share their experiences with our readers.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

Books, Etc.

James J. Hill And The Opening Of The Northwest

Albro Martin

With A New Introduction by
W. Thomas White

Paperback reprint (Borealis Books
edition)

Minnesota Historical Society Press,
1991

Before Minnesotans like Hubert Humphrey and Charles Lindbergh went on to achieve national and international fame, there was James J. Hill. Hill was the man who attracted attention to this area by virtue of the fact that the control of his international transportation network, his nation-wide array of farms, timber and mining lands, his philanthropic activities, and his comments on everything from the need to conserve our resources to the proper role of women, emanated from St. Paul. Today Hill continues to be a subject of interest for the scholar and the literate citizen, and the Minnesota Historical Society has helped to address that interest by reprinting Albro Martin's biography.

In 1976, Oxford University Press, a publishing house whose representatives claim has been turning out books since the early days of the Gutenberg Bible, released Albro Martin's biography on James J. Hill. Martin's work was not only extensive, well-written, and sympathetic, it was also filled with fascinating vignettes and considerable wit. It filled a void in the literature on Hill and demonstrated that biographies of businessmen can be very interesting. Hill died in 1916, and before the year was out Joseph Gilpin Pyle had completed the first volume of the family authorized biography. Pyle had been on payroll earlier as a speech writer and as editor of Hill's *St. Paul*



James J. Hill's mansion on Summit Avenue. Martin's biography shows him to be more than a Gilded Age businessman.

Globe. In 1917, Pyle's work was completed, and he went on to head the James J. Hill Reference Library. Hill wasn't the subject of another biography until an author of popular histories, Stewart Holbrook, wrote one for Knopf's "Great Lives in Brief" series. However, Holbrook relied primarily on secondary sources.

The third, and only major biography of Hill, is that by Albro Martin. Martin, had been in business and, like a select group of academics who can write for an audience beyond academia, had experience in journalism. With a doctorate in history from Columbia University and a teaching position at the Harvard Business School, he had academic credentials. He established his credentials as a railroad scholar with the publication of *Enterprise Denied*, a volume which detailed the role of the Interstate Commerce Commission in the decline of the

American railroad system.

When the Hill papers were opened up for a scholarly biography of Hill, Martin was selected. He spent more than a year in St. Paul, was given access to the extensive Hill collection, made use of some of the Great Northern Railway and Northern Pacific Railroad records, which are best measured in acre-feet, and interviewed members of the Hill family who had first-hand knowledge of the "empire builder." In addition, Martin sought out the papers of Hill's business associates, found them far less meticulous in maintaining their correspondence than Hill, and consulted relevant official records. The result was a very detailed biography, supportive of the railroads and Hill's role as an entrepreneur who developed a major portion of the continent. Beyond that, it revealed much about Hill's family life and outside interests. It showed him to be much more than the stereotypical

businessman of America's Gilded Age.

Augmenting the paperback edition of Martin's biography is an introductory essay by W. Thomas White, current curator of the Hill papers. White, a native of Montana and a railroad labor scholar, notes in his essay several related works that have appeared since the publication of the first edition. However, most intriguing in White's essay is the material he presents on Hill's relationship with Grover Cleveland over the railroad right of way across Montana, and Hill's relationship with organized and immigrant labor from the 1890s up to 1908. Some interesting research topics will suggest themselves to practitioners of the school of "new social history," whether they set out to fill important gaps, or rewrite history so it has maximum relevance to present-day dilemmas.

The reprint edition makes this biography available at an affordable price for the teacher, student, history buff and general reader. It has not excluded anything from the original edition, but could have been strengthened had Oxford provided a more complete index, and used the same cartographic artist they employed to produce the maps in Martin's new volume, *Railroads Triumphant—The Growth, Rejection & Rebirth of a Vital American Force*.

—Thomas C. Buckley

Watchdog of Loyalty: The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety During World War I

Carl Chrislock
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical
Society Press, 1991.

In the first book to look at the famous Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Carl Chrislock attempts to separate the reality of the actions of the commission from the propaganda it published about itself and from the myths that have grown up about it since the M.C.P.S. was disbanded at the end of World War I.

Formed out of the paranoia and patriotism of the opening days of the first World War, the commission, a commit-

tee consisting of merely seven men, was given near dictatorial powers by the legislature in order to deal with what was perceived to be threats to the state's and nation's security. The commission is infamous for its moves against one of these supposed threats, foreign born Minnesotans.

Chrislock makes the convincing argument, however, that the M.C.P.S. moved just as vigorously, although not as publicly, against Minnesota's fast growing labor movement, particularly the Non-Partisan League, which was becoming an important force in Minnesota politics before and during World War I.

Chrislock documents what exactly the powers of the M.C.P.S. were and examines how these powers were used. He shows how the commission's actions ranged from the legal and constitutional, such as requiring witnesses to give sworn testimony, to the questionably legal and possibly unconstitutional, such as requiring all non-native Minnesotans to register and employing secret agents to spy on suspected disloyal persons.

In some cases, he even shows that the commission acted unethically and illegally by doing nothing (although it was within their power and mission to do so) to prevent mob actions from intimidating suspected disloyal people as well as tarring and feathering and beating of these same people. In some cases, individual members even encouraged such action.

While the commission's greatest infamy resulted from its use of these powers against the foreign born population in Minnesota, the majority of its time, energy and resources were devoted to stopping the growing labor movement in Minnesota. The commissioners, most of whom had ties to big business, interpreted any threat to the status quo in labor-management relations as a threat to the nation in its struggle in Europe. The result was that the commission went after labor organizations and individual organizers with as much zeal as it did the perceived foreign threat.

A book like *Watchdog* . . . perhaps can bring us to terms with this shameful period in our history and stop us from repeating the mistakes of our ancestors.

—Alan Kaiser

A Matter of Time, from page 28

375 Italians, seven Japanese and sixty of other nationalities.

► On the lighter side of the news, water-color paintings depicting scenes from early Minnesota history were on display in the Round Tower at Fort Snelling. "The Man Who Came to Dinner," starring Bette Davis, was playing in the major movie houses throughout the Twin Cities. And the Edyth Bush Little Theater opened with its new comedy, "George Washington Slept Here."

► Despite the war, the University Club scheduled its annual spring party for June, with buffet, orchestra and outdoor dance floor. This was the first of many activities planned to help the war effort by saving rubber and gasoline. Just how much this might help was not explained.

1967 25 Years Ago

► The United Arab Republic called for a meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the conflict that could arise from Egyptian-Israeli clashes over shipping rights in the Gulf of Aqaba.

► As United States bombers attacked a North Vietnamese storage base, power plant and ammunition depot near Hanoi and Haiphong, President Lyndon Johnson planned to fly to Guam for a war conference with senior advisors.

► Boy Scouts held an exposition at the Minnesota state fairgrounds, based on the theme of "Scouting 'Round the World" and featuring 226 booths, along with demonstrations of cooking and log rolling.

► Contact lenses cost \$45 in 1967; color television sets \$449 and a snowmobile \$98.

► The St. Paul Civic Opera Company's production of the Leonard Bernstein musical, "West Side Story," opened March 6 for a week's run in the city auditorium theater. Anna Maria Alberghetti and Lester James starred in the production.

Adapted from research compiled by James Egan, Kevin Herras, Robb Larsen, John Young, Dean Severn, Nancy Farrell, James Lehtola, Theresa Beskar and Angela Williams, history students of Professor Thomas C. Buckley at the University of Minnesota.



The Hudson's Bay Company Fort at Pembina, now in North Dakota, from the Canadian Illustrated News, 1871. See the article on the Selkirk Colony, beginning on page 23.

R.C.H.S.
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