

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

**Summer, 1991**  
Volume 26, Number 2



*Education was a serious matter in 1911 when these boys and girls attended the Stoen School on the western prairie of Minnesota. It has been preserved and restored as the one-room country school at the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum in Falcon Heights. See the articles beginning on Page 4.*

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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**On the Cover:** School children pose with their teacher, Andrew Peterson, the man in the hat. Ernie Kittleson, who gave this photograph to the museum, is the little boy second from the left in the front row. See articles beginning on page 4.

**Acknowledgements:** Photographs with the articles on pages 4-13 are from former Stoen school students and teachers. Those of Walter Hill on page 18; Walter Sanborn and his family on pages 22-27, and Kittsondale on page 29 are from the Minnesota Historical Society's audio-visual library. Other Hill family photographs are from the James J. Hill Papers at the James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, and are used with the library's permission. The photograph on page 31 is from the Ramsey County Historical Society's historic sites survey file.

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

**W**hile this issue of *Ramsey County History* focuses on the school house at the Gibbs Farm Museum, the peregrinating family of James J. Hill and the career of Judge Walter Sanborn, the Editorial Board already is looking ahead to the fall issue. On November 1, the city of St. Paul will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the naming of the city. *Ramsey County History* will share in this celebration with an article on "the real" Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant, a look back at the early days of St. Paul and a fascinating account of the experiences of one of the city's first settlers—the Perry family. We at *Ramsey County History* look forward to this landmark event next fall and hope you will, too.

We also remain interested in your comments on articles in past issues of this magazine. We're inviting you to bring a bag lunch and participate in the second in our new discussion series based on these articles. Please join us from 12-1 p.m. Thursday, July 18, in Courtroom 408, Landmark Center, St. Paul.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

# Dog Sled to Private Car: The Peregrinating Hills

*Thomas C. Buckley*

*Editor's Note: The Ramsey County Historical Society was the recipient in 1968, of several carriages belonging to the Hill family. The Society currently has four of those carriages on display at the Landmark Center. As an extension of the exhibit, Ramsey County History is publishing this article on the traveling Hill family.*

On April 17, 1910, the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* reported that it was the fortieth anniversary of James J. Hill's departure from St. Paul by stagecoach for Fort Garry, near present-day Winnipeg. The paper recorded that snow drifts forced him to switch to a dog sled to complete his journey. It was a perilous journey, during which he pushed on without his guide, swam across the Red River and continued on toward the fort through snow storms. Through his freight commission business, Hill had been transporting goods to fur traders in Manitoba for several years. However, on this occasion he had gone to Manitoba to report on political unrest in that area for the Canadian government.

In 1870, Hill left behind in St. Paul his wife Mary, ill with bronchitis, and two small children. By the fortieth anniversary of the trip, Hill's mode of travel in the area had switched from dog sleds and stagecoaches to autos and a private railroad car. His commercial interests in the area were connected to his grain and stock farms, as well as his railroad property. However, by 1910 they extended far beyond Minnesota and Manitoba. They ranged from western New York to the west coast and included farms, ranches, timber, coal, land and iron ore companies, as well as banks and ocean shipping firms.

James J. Hill was a businessman who kept on top of the most minute details of his railway and associated businesses. For him it was all a great adventure, particular-



*Maud Van Cortlandt Hill with, left to right, Maud, Jerome, Louis, Jr., and Cortlandt on the Hill railroad car A-22 in 1909.*

ly the building of the last of America's great trans-continental railroads. In becoming one of that exclusive group of American railroad millionaires, Hill was able to go where he wanted, when he wanted, along the routes of both American and Canadian railroads. Unlike many of the other railroad men of his era he wasn't content to spend most of his time at company headquarters and make an occasional trip along the route. He could delegate management to competent subordinates along the line, but he went to the west coast many times a year suggesting ways improve the efficiency of railroad operations. Furthermore, since he saw the northwest

as a region with great potential for economic development, Hill constantly sought out new opportunities for profitable investment.

St. Paul was not a major center of national or international finance. Bigger banks and investment companies were located in Chicago, New York, Montreal and London. Thus Hill found it necessary to make frequent trips to the east to arrange loans and maintain contacts with eastern financiers. And, he went east to seek the most cost effective means to move the products of the northwest to the markets of the northeast. Since he taught his employees and trainees as he traveled, and

since he was constantly instructing and investigating, his journeys could be categorized as peripatetic and perambulating.

As Hill's business interests expanded geographically so did the extent and frequency of his travels, and the size of his family. As the children grew older it became more common for them, and Mary Hill, to either accompany him on his travels or for him to join them briefly at some vacation spot. By 1910, the Hill family had expanded to include nine widely traveled adult children and several grandchildren. Of all his family, the travels of his second son, Louis, since 1907 the president of the Great Northern Railway, were most like those of James J. Hill, but more perambulating than peripatetic. Mary Hill still suffered from spells of bronchitis, but she no longer remained at home in St. Paul. She regularly spent the winter months at Jekyll Island on the South Carolina coast, spring and fall in New York City, and summer cruising the Great Lakes and/or the New England coasts. On those trips she was usually accompanied by one or more of her daughters. When at home in St. Paul, Mary and the family regularly visited their farm at North Oaks, some ten miles north of the Hill mansion on Summit Avenue.

The eldest son, James Norman Hill, suffered from bouts of rheumatism, and aside from his education and early business travels, did not appear to travel as much as the others. He eventually moved to New York. When he, his sisters, and his younger brother, Walter Hill, traveled it was usually for pleasure. So peregrinating, rather than peripatetic or perambulating, is a better term to describe most of the traveling Hill family.

### **Nine Months in 1899**

The most consistent account of the traveling Hill family is to be found in the diaries of Mary Hill. Her record of their arrivals and departures to and from St. Paul in the winter, spring and summer of 1899 illustrated a pattern that remained characteristic of the family at least as long as her husband remained alive. On the third day of the year, with the Christmas holidays at an end, Rachel and Gertrude, the youngest daughters, set off for New York to return to Miss Spence's School. In attending a

finishing school, the daughters continued a tradition which had been established by their mother and older sisters. Two days later, her husband took the train to New York City and Washington, D.C. A few days after that, the youngest of the Hill children, fourteen-year-old Walter, came to town for the night and the next day drove back to North Oaks, where he had been living. A week later, the eldest son, James Norman Hill, an executive with his father's Eastern Railway of Minnesota, came south from his residence in Duluth for a two-day visit. By March 1, Mary was in New York City to bid farewell to her eldest daughter, Mamie, and her husband, Samuel, who were off on a European vacation.\*

By March 3, Mary was back in St. Paul with Mamie's two children in tow. "Papa," as James J. Hill was known by his wife, was by then on the Pacific Coast, and their second son, Louis, was in New York. In 1893, Louis Hill graduated from the three-year curriculum at Yale's Sheffield Scientific School, the same year that his older brother, James Norman Hill, completed his four-year degree, and their father completed the Great Northern tracks to the Pacific coast. Both sons began working their way into the railroad business at rather modest salaries. At the end of the century, Louis was only paid around \$150 per month by his father, but the fringe benefits included extensive opportunities for business travel. Louis showed greater interest in the railroad business than either of his brothers, and he became his father's right-hand man. However, all the brothers and sisters liked to travel.

Through the course of the winter months, Walter made periodic visits to St. Paul. He had gone east to school at Newburgh, New York, at a young age, but showed little interest in further formal education. He continued his studies through tutors, but would cease that activity at age sixteen. At the end of the century, he was

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*\*Mamie's proper name was Mary Frances Hill. In 1888 she married Samuel Hill, a young lawyer who had become a business associate of her father. With the marriage she became Mary Francis Hill Hill. Her nickname of "Mamie," also helped to distinguish her from her daughter who was named Mary Mendenhall Hill.*

living at the North Oaks farm. After he married in 1908, he and his wife moved to extreme northwest Minnesota to live at his father's farm at Northcote, ten miles from the Canadian border. In the winter of 1899, he complained of the trip back to North Oaks. Although he was driving a team against the cold north wind, it didn't stop him from making the journey. Years later when living at Northcote, he came to St. Paul quite frequently, but by train.

In mid-March Mary set off again for New York with daughters Charlotte and Ruth. The reason for the trip was to take Charlotte to Roosevelt Hospital for the removal of a swollen neck gland, as well as her tonsils. All went well and at the end of the month James J. and James Norman Hill arrived in New York, saw Charlotte, and then departed for St. Paul and Baltimore, respectively. Before Mary returned to St. Paul, her husband and son, James, again came to New York, along with daughter, Clara. The men were off to England on business, and Mary gave her permission for Clara to go along.

By the end of April, Mary was back in St. Paul. Walter stayed close to the North Oaks farm because of his need to study and because of the poor road conditions. In mid-May James J. and James Norman Hill had returned from England, but not Clara. She chose to remain and tour about with her eldest sister, Mamie. Meanwhile, Louis was off to Mason City, Iowa, where the family had railroad and coal mining interests. By the end of the month, Louis had returned via New York with his youngest sisters, Rachel and Gertrude, who were returning from Miss Spence's School.

On May 30, James and Mary took the train to St. Cloud where Hill delivered a commencement address on "Commerce In the Orient." In the twentieth century, as Hill spoke out with increased emphasis on the need for commercial and educational improvement, he appeared with increasing frequency at colleges and conventions. The new century saw him range widely about the country promoting water borne transportation, from North American inland waterways to trans-Pacific shipping.

In the middle of June, 1899, "Papa" went off to Spokane and returned. After a week in town, he headed for New York, but by July 3, he was back home. On July

9, he and Louis went off for the day to a "farmer's meeting" at Devil's Lake, North Dakota, but were back the next day. James J. Hill had a long standing interest in improved crop and livestock production. It meant more business for a railroad operator in the agricultural heartland. However, the Devil's Lake region was receiving increased attention from both the Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railroads in the last years of the nineteenth century, and undoubtedly he and Louis were talking about more than wheat and beef.

At the end of the month, Hill went off to North Dakota again, this time in the company of John Stevens. Stevens, who had laid out the route for the Great Northern across the Rocky Mountains, came to the Hill mansion for dinner and an evening of discussion in early June. On July 27, he and Hill embarked on a 200-mile wagon ride across the North Dakota countryside. Three days later Hill was back and, ". . . looking pretty tired after riding nearly 200 miles in a waggon (*sic*) in Dakota."

Summer is the traditional time for vacation travel, and while James J. traveled principally for business, that was not the case with the other members of his peregrinating family. Louis was an accomplished angler, and in early June he left for a fishing vacation at Alexandria, Minnesota. In the middle of the month, he was back tinkering with a naphtha powered motor launch on the lake at North Oaks. A month later, Walter went off on a camping trip to Yellowstone National Park, continued on to Victoria, British Columbia, and didn't return until August 18. According to his mother, he looked, ". . . well, taller and not so stout." Evidently Walter had put on a few extra pounds up at North Oaks during the winter months.

The day after Walter's return, his mother, Rachel and Gertrude, along with Mamie's children, Mary and James, went to Duluth to board the luxury steamship, *North Land*. The object was a vacation cruise through the Great Lakes to Buffalo. There they met Mamie and Clara who had finally returned from Europe and Great Britain. After a one night stay in Buffalo, the entire party, along with their friends, the Hinchmans from Detroit, re-boarded the ship and set off up the lakes. The ship,



*The launching of the S.S. Minnesota, April 16, 1903. Mary Mendenhall Hill, left; Clara Hill, who christened the ship; James J. Hill's wife, Mary, and James N. Hill.*

### **Snow Drifts Forced Him To Switch to a Dog Sled**

along with its sister ship, the *North West*, was very popular and crowded, particularly during the hot days of August. However, they had no trouble securing accommodations. The *North Land* was part of the fleet of the Northern Steamship Company which James J. Hill had established in the 1880s. They all returned home on August 27, and Mary noted in her diary that it was the first time the entire family had been together in nearly two years.

After a get-together of two days, Louis and his brother, James, set out for Duluth. There Louis was initiated as a vice president of his father's Eastern Railway of Minnesota. And in mid-September, Mamie, who never seemed to tire of traveling that year, went with Ruth on a short trip to Chicago. At the end of the month, Mary accompanied Rachel and Gertrude back to New York to start her youngest daughters off on another academic year at Miss Spence's School.

### **Accidents and Near Accidents**

The Hills, like most American long distance travelers, moved principally by rail in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since the 1870s, Lorenzo Coffin, an Iowa farmer and eventual state railroad commissioner, had been lobbying for the installation of air brakes and automatic couplers on American railroads. By the mid-1890s, the Congress had legislated such safety improvements and railroad passenger deaths were dramatically reduced. Improvements in railroad safety didn't come soon enough that decade to prevent tragedy from striking close to the Hill family. Henry D. Minot, an efficient and ambitious young railroad organizer with vision, had moved up fast in the Hill organization and had an eye on taking charge of the completion of the Great Northern to the Pacific coast. Like any top railroad executive who worked with Hill, he spent much of his time on the road. On November 13, 1890, he was returning from Washington, and occupied the last berth in the last car of the Pennsylvania Railroad's New York to Chicago Limited. The wooden car, at least sixty feet long, was hit from behind and crushed to twelve feet. Minot and all the other passengers were killed. James and Mary Hill were shaken by the tragedy. By the end of the decade, air brakes and electric signals were more extensively in use by the railroads and the Hill family was traveling in greater safety. However, the Hills traveled far more than the average family and their journeys in 1899 were marked by several accidents.

In early March, 1899, when James J. Hill was on one of his Pacific Coast trips, his train was involved in two accidents. In the first, a boulder fell on the track. In the second, another train collided with his, and plowed into the railroad car of F. E. Ward, general superintendent of the Great Northern Railway. Mary reported that no one was hurt, and a week later, back in St. Paul, her husband and daughter, Clara, were shoveling snow off the terrace of their Summit Avenue home for exercise.

A month later, Mary and two of her daughters had a more serious brush with death on their return from New York. On April 20, Mary, Charlotte and Ruth left



James J. Hill, right, behind carriage, and Mary Hill, right, under umbrella, at driving of silver spike, Benton, Montana, September 30, 1887. This marked the completion of the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad from Minot, North Dakota, to Great Falls, Montana.

Chicago at eight in the morning on the last leg of their journey to St. Paul. About twelve miles west of Aurora, Illinois, the Burlington and Northern train on which they were riding derailed just after crossing a railroad trestle. Several of the train crew were killed. The train lay on its side and the dining car, which was next to the car in which the Hills were riding, caught on fire. With the assistance of the Pullman car conductor, the Hill women escaped through the upper side windows of the wrecked car. They managed to retrieve their wraps and hand baggage, and after a three-and-a-half hour wait a relief train came along and took them to Aurora. The injured were taken to the hospital, and the Hills managed to catch the last train heading from Chicago for St. Paul. Mary's side bothered her in later years, and she attributed it to the accident.

When they reached St. Paul, only Louis and Mamie's children were there to greet them. Yet a month later Louis, Rachel and Gertrude were riding on a Milwaukee train that was returning to St. Paul when the engine derailed. Fortunately, no one was injured, but their return was delayed.

Travel on the roads around the Twin Cities proved less destructive but nevertheless elicited some concern. In spite of winter snow drifts and cold northern winds, Walter appears to have suffered no mishaps on the road to North Oaks. However, in early June bad road condi-

tions reportedly kept him from coming to town and attending Sunday mass. Six days later, Mary noted that it was necessary to return to St. Paul from North Oaks by way of Dale Street since the Rice Street road was being macadamized. Three days later on June 12, Mary was nearly caught in a torrential downpour. She had driven to Minneapolis and left for St. Paul at 4:15 just ahead of an approaching storm. At 5:50 p.m. she reached home "... just as a fearful wind came, such rain as one seldom sees, gutters failed, so did pipes—basement was flooded." The area was hit by a storm system that swept away New Richmond, Wisconsin, and broke the telephone connection to North Oaks. The storm damage spread beyond Minnesota and Wisconsin into Iowa and Nebraska.

### Ship Travel

At the turn of the century and in the new century, more members of the Hill family augmented their railroad and carriage junkets with journeys by steamship. In the spring of 1900, James, Mary, and daughters Clara, Charlotte, Ruth, Rachel and Gertrude were all in Europe. The women were there to tour and visit the Paris Exposition. "Papa" spent a few days touring, but went on ahead to England to deal with financial matters. He left for America several weeks ahead of the women to attend to business and go fishing for Atlantic salmon. Later in the summer, James Nor-

man Hill made the trip to the continent to tour Europe and visit the Exposition.

In the late spring of 1900, James J. Hill acquired a large yacht that was originally built for William Slater, heir to the Slater textile fortune.\* The 240-foot craft was renamed the *Wacouta*, and after 1901 was principally used to transport James and Louis Hill and their guests to fish for salmon in the Riviere Ste. Jean in Quebec. In 1900, however, most members of the

### The Men Were Off to England on Business And Clara Went Along

Hill family cruised the Great Lakes on the yacht. When Louis Hill married Maud Van Cortlandt in 1901, they spent part of their honeymoon on the vessel before departing for Europe. For a few years thereafter, several of the Hill children, in-laws, friends, and grandchildren had an opportunity to cruise the New England coast in the yacht during the summer months. But, for James J. Hill, a two-week fishing expedition to Quebec in late June and early July was the only vacation in which he regularly indulged from 1900 to 1915. The yacht was always kept at New London, Connecticut, but from 1901 into 1904 the Hills made several additional visits to that port. The purpose was to keep abreast of the construction of two large steamships which represented the expansion of the Hill transportation system into the western Pacific and east Asian market.

In 1903, James J. Hill launched two extremely large and identical steamships, the *S.S. Minnesota* and the *S. S. Dakota*. For the first two decades of this century, they would be the longest ocean-going vessels built in America, exceeding the biggest battleships in the United States Navy.

\*For a detailed account of Hill and the operations of the yacht, see the author's articles "James J. Hill, Railroader As Yachtsman," in the Spring, 1990, issue of Ramsey County History, and "The Great Lakes Cruise of the Steam Yacht *Wacouta*" in the May-June and July-August 1990, issues of *The Nor'Easter, Journal of the Lake Superior Marine Museum Association*.

James and Mary Hill went to Groton, Connecticut, for the launching of the *Minnesota*, as did Louis, Rachel, Ruth and her husband, Anson Beard, as well as Mamie and her family. Daughter Clara was also present to christen the ship. Upon completion in late 1904, it sailed around South America to enter commercial service between Seattle and the Orient. In January, 1905, James J. Hill gave permission for nineteen-year old Walter to sail to Japan aboard the *Minnesota*. Twenty-two months later, Gertrude and her husband of less than a year, Michael Gavin, crossed the Pacific from Seattle to Yokohama aboard the *Dakota*. They returned the following February, aboard the same ship. Fortunately for the Gavins, they completed their trip aboard the *Dakota* just a month before that accident-plagued vessel met its end. In early March, 1907, the captain sent it onto a reef while approaching Yokohama.

### Automobiles

Short journeys were made by carriage well into the twentieth century. Eventually the Hill family would take to the automobile, as did numerous other Americans, but they were not pioneers. Mary was not charmed by her experiences with early automobiles and in 1904 she wrote that: "Automobiles are new instruments of torture on railroad trips."

Automobile manufacturing came into the state in the early 1900s with such cars as the *Whaley-Henriette* made in St. Paul and the *Luverene*, made in Luverne, Minnesota, but the Hills didn't buy either of those makes. They didn't buy their first car until 1906. And as with his plunge into yachting, Hill chose to purchase a proven vehicle. Their first car was a second-hand, 1905 *Great Arrow*, built by the George N. Pierce Company of Buffalo, New York. The Hill carriage house at 260 Maiden Lane, an alley in the block across Summit Avenue from the Hill mansion, was given over to an increasing number of autos. The horses, presumably, were retired to the North Oaks farm.

After the purchase of the *Great Arrow*, Mary Hill's local outings were made by car rather than carriage, and they were made in somewhat greater frequency. However, she didn't personally drive the vehicles.



Walter Hill on his tricycle at the Hill House. This was a slower form of transportation than he preferred later on.

Cranking a car to start the engine was too strenuous, and in polite circles driving an auto was considered no more appropriate for ladies than smoking cigarets or frequenting saloons. Not very many women drove until after adoption of the electric self-starter by Cadillac in 1912. Mary Hill's jaunts in the auto were made sitting behind chauffeur Joe Sikorski. He was Mary's driver in St. Paul for years, and after she died he went to work for her daughter, Charlotte Slade.

Mary's afternoon drives took her out into the country, which wasn't as far from Summit Avenue as it is today. On numerous spring and summer days she reported driving out to Fort Snelling and Minnehaha Falls, or out to see the Indian Mounds. Such drives were made with her daughters and guests, but James J. Hill was seldom along. With other members of the family, she also made numerous trips to North Oaks. Occasionally Walter brought her to and from the North Oaks farm. However,

for trips to more distant places such as Lake Minnetonka, Mary took the train.

In the early years of this century, there were few miles of paved roads beyond the Twin Cities. By 1926, a decade after the death of James J. Hill, the *Rand McNally Road Atlas* showed paved roads reaching as far north as Little Falls and Forest Lake and as far south as Owatonna. However, the pavement still didn't extend out of St. Paul, either east or southeast. Nor did it extend west out of Minneapolis; people would take the train or the streetcar if going in those directions.

James J. Hill was often photographed in cars, but was never seen behind the wheel, and almost never in the front seat. He was reported to have rejected auto travel when on business errands in downtown St. Paul. For nearly a half century he had walked about the downtown area and he saw no reason to change. He regularly walked to the Minnesota Club at Fourth and Cedar Streets for lunch. This tradition was ap-

plied to other cities he knew. In 1909, he arrived at the depot in Chicago, but scorned the use of a cab to get to his hotel. On that walk he was reported to have slipped in a puddle, but recovered and continued to examine the window displays and tall buildings all the way to his hotel. What amused him most were the numerous passers-by who told him he looked just like James J. Hill.

### Louis and Walter Hill Liked Their Cars Fast and Powerful

James and Mary Hill did take a drive through the New York countryside in the summer of 1913, which nearly resulted in an accident. They had been cruising Long Island Sound in the *Wacouta* and decided to motor up to Millbank, New York, to visit Samuel Thorne, a longtime business associate and fishing companion of Hill's. The Hills kept a car and chauffeur at their town house in New York City, and that was most probably the vehicle they used. On the return trip, Mary described the road as, "swimming in oil and water," as they approached Yonkers. Their auto skidded, nearly turned about twice, but it did not turn over and no one was injured. The following year she did note in her diary that a man near the Hill farm at Northcote in the Red River Valley, had turned over in a ditch in "a Ford car." This was the period when the Ford Model T was moving to



*James J. Hill speaking at the fairgrounds in Havre, Montana, in 1913. Cortlandt Hill is seated behind his grandfather at right.*

dominate the American auto market. However, Mary was partial to the heavier cars like the Pierce or the Packard.

The family did business with the C. P. Joy Automobile Company on Pleasant Street. It was conveniently located on the west edge of downtown St. Paul, just below their Summit Avenue mansion. Their first car was purchased from Joy, and in 1910 Hill ordered a new Packard. The car was equipped with special paint, top, clock, speedometer and monogrammed

seat covers, and cost a total of \$4,691.65. In the fall Hill paid an additional \$1,830 for cab sides and doors to enclose the car during cold weather.

### Speeding on Summit

Louis and Walter Hill were attracted to cars before their parents. In 1905, Louis bought five of them. It was Louis Hill who loaned Walter \$1,400 for his first car, a Franklin. Walter's second car was a Packard, purchased for him by his father. Walter, like other young men about town, favored fast driving and it eventually led to tragedy. On June 18, 1907, he and a friend, Fred Schroeder, a livery stable keeper in downtown St. Paul, went for a drive in Walter's high-powered Packard. Walter rode and showed horses at the State Fair, among other places, and had taken Schroeder with him to Minneapolis to look at some animals.

According to the St. Paul newspapers, Schroeder was partially paralyzed in the left leg as the result of a stroke he had suffered earlier. He and Walter came back from Minneapolis in the early evening. They were speeding down Summit Avenue as some boys were playing baseball on the boulevard between Hamline and Syndicate that separates the east and west-bound lanes. A candy store owner and a



*Louis Hill, second from right, with a touring car at Glacier National Park.*



resident on Summit reported that they had never seen a car move down the avenue at such speed, and raise such clouds of dust. An elderly gentleman driving a carriage west on Summit reported that Walter almost ran into him as he approached Syndicate. Near the intersection of Summit and Syndicate the accident occurred. At the point where the median strip ends and the two lanes of Summit join to cross the bridge over the Milwaukee Road tracks, Walter's passenger was thrown out of the car and fatally injured. It was speculated that Schroeder suffered another stroke at the fatal moment, further reducing his ability to hold on in the open car. However, the exact cause of death couldn't be determined.

Walter later denied he was driving between seventy and ninety miles per hour, as he said some witnesses claimed. He asserted he was going slowly enough to stop before reaching the bridge, and that he turned around to assist Schroeder. On finding he was dead, he removed the body from the roadway and went off to call a doctor and the police ambulance. He was sufficiently upset to forget to retrieve his hat, and walked off bareheaded to Grand Avenue. According to the *Pioneer Press*, Walter took a streetcar downtown and turned himself in to Police Chief John J. O'Connor. But according to Walter's account in the *Dispatch*, he went home, left the car on Summit Avenue and assumed that Joy, the Packard dealer, had picked it up. According to Mary Hill, Walter did not sleep well that night.\*

### **Louis and Auto-Rail Travel**

Louis Hill was closely associated with travel by motor car, both in Minnesota and out west. Like his father, he traveled because the family's wide ranging business interests made it necessary. However, Louis' interests in the outdoors and art exceeded those of his father. He was a respectable artist in his own right and specialized in landscapes. He thrived on natural beauty and spent more time on rustic vacations than did James J. Hill. Yet, as a businessman he saw the promotion of tourism as good business for the railroad, and was reported to have coined the slogan, "See America First." Louis saw motor transport vehicles as valuable adjuncts

to the railroads, and not as dangerous competitors or replacements.

Years earlier he had hunted and camped in the northern Rockies and had become enchanted with the scenery and the Native Americans of the area. The Northern Pacific Railroad ran across southern Montana near Yellowstone National Park. The promoters of that railroad used Yellowstone to attract tourist business. In light of that competition, Louis actively

### **Louis Hill Coined The Slogan, 'See America First'**

promoted the designation of the northern Montana Rockies as Glacier National Park. The Great Northern Railway ran along the southern boundary of the park and cars or autobuses provided a faster and more convenient means to transport tourists from the railway station into the scenic grandeur of the park.

In developing Glacier National Park and the tourist facilities of the Glacier Park Land Company, Louis Hill motored extensively about the mountains. He supported the purchase of a number of open topped touring buses built by the White Motor Company of Cleveland, Ohio. More recent models of those touring buses can be seen in Glacier today. In addition, Louis had an interest in the construction of the Prince of Wales Hotel at Waterton, just across the United States-Canada border. Caravans of White vehicles took tourists from Glacier Park Hotel to Waterton.

Louis Hill supported the improvement of auto travel in Minnesota. In the early 1920s, he became one of the citizen members of the state highway commission. However, he was promoting auto tours

from Minnesota earlier than that. He became one of the sponsors of the Glidden motor tours, and in 1913 sponsored the last of those tours. It left Minneapolis and followed the route of the Great Northern Railway to Glacier, which had become a National Park only three years earlier.

Louis Hill was so enamored of motor-ing as an adjunct to rail travel that he had his private railroad car modified to carry a motor vehicle. The seventy-seven-foot railroad car, built in 1905 in the Great Northern car shops, was also used by his father, and was designated simply "A-22." In 1914, Louis had nearly eighteen feet of the railroad car remodeled into an "auto room." This change left A-22 with only one bedroom. However, bunk beds were put in the "auto room," so servants or children could sleep there during long trips. The chauffeur often rode in the car when it was in the auto room, and Louis' son, Jerome, was also known to ride there.\*\*

### **Louis' Children**

Louis Hill's children, Louis, Jr., Maud, Jerome and Cortlandt, were introduced to travel by train, car, yacht, and ocean liner at an early age. The boys went with their father and grandparents to Glacier on several occasions, and all the children accompanied their parents to Europe after World War I. Young Louis Hill, Jr., had the distinction of being invited on his grandfather's annual, and generally all-male, fishing vacation to the Riviere Ste Jean on three occasions. He was there in 1912, 1914, and again in 1915. James J. Hill also invited several of his sons-in-law, in most cases only once. Evidently they didn't adapt well to the environment, either on the yacht or ashore. One sought to keep the servants at his beck and call and was never invited again, according to Louis

*\*In those days no proper boy, young man, or gentleman would be seen in public without a cap or hat, indicating that Walter was rather disconcerted. The St. Paul newspapers were quite detailed in their coverage of the accident. The Dispatch reported on June 19, that Louis Hill and Chief of Police O'Connor visited the scene of the accident and interviewed the witnesses. Louis reported years later that Chief O'Connor's brother, Richard, an old*

*friend and former employee of James J. Hill's, was called in. He advised that Walter be sent to the North Oaks farm and kept there. Richard, known as "the Cardinal," and John, known as "the Big Fellow," were the political leaders of St. Paul.*

*\*\*The Hill railroad car, A-22, is now part of the collection of the Mid-Continent Railroad Museum at North Freedom, Wisconsin.*

Hill, Sr.

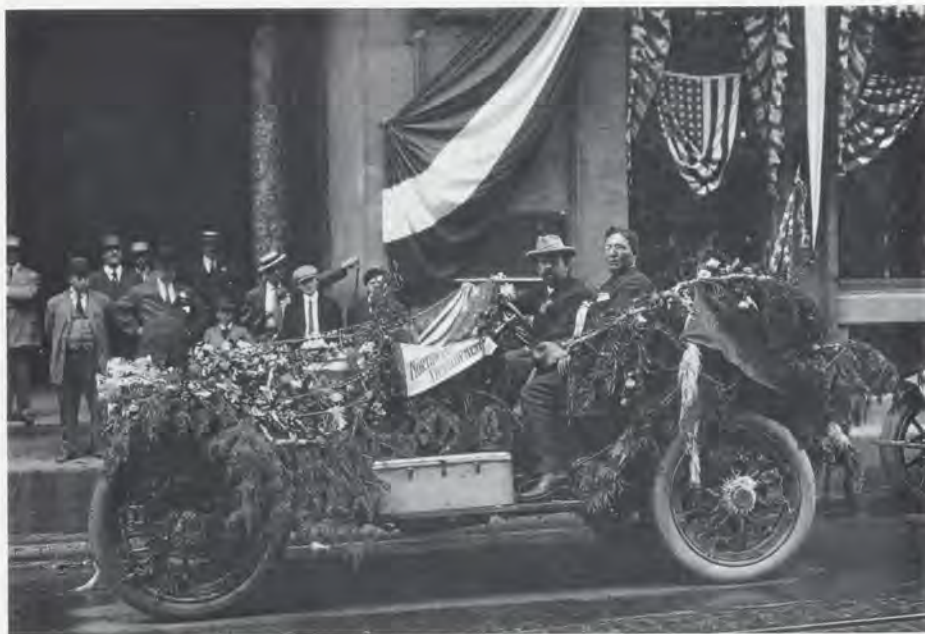
In 1913, Jerome and Cortlandt, known as "Corty," accompanied their grandparents to Glacier National Park. The boys were part of an entourage that included several long-time employees of the railway, who made up the Great Northern Veterans Association. The occasion was James J. Hill's seventy-fifth birthday. The train stopped at Havre, Montana, en route to Glacier for one of several celebrations.

Cortlandt Hill developed an interest in railroad equipment in his adult years. He was associated with a company that built refrigeration equipment for railroad freight cars. In 1933-1934, the Budd Manufacturing Company, the General Motors Corporation, and the Burlington Railroad developed America's first stainless steel, diesel electric streamlined passenger train, the Burlington Zephyr. Other railroads quickly followed, and Cortlandt Hill became interested in the design of a passenger car to meet the competition. Like the Zephyr, it was a lightweight, low center of gravity railroad coach and like the pioneer Zephyr, the weight was reduced by sharing one four-wheeled truck between two cars. The lighter weight would have helped reduce fuel costs during the Depression, and the low center of gravity enabled the light coaches to negotiate curves at high speeds. However, like Chrysler's Airflow automobile of the mid-1930s, the streamlined design was rather radical for popular tastes.

### Conclusion

On James J. Hill's seventy-seventh birthday in 1915, the *Boston Record* reported that the semi-retired, ex-president of the Great Northern Railway spent much of the day tramping about the grounds of the Minnesota State Fair. On that occasion, the "empire builder" remarked that he would rather watch a grazing herd of cattle than the best baseball game in the world. The *Record* went on to report that Hill walked to the Minnesota Club for a forty-five cent lunch of tripe, gave away thoroughbred bulls to farmers in the Northwest to breed dual purpose cattle, and was completing a \$200,000 reference library, as well as a \$4 million office building.

Hill's tramp about the fairgrounds on his seventy-seventh birthday was like that



Louis Hill, left, at the wheel of a flower-draped car. This was the Northwest Development Congress in Eugene, Oregon, June 11, 1912.

of many folks from St. Paul and Minneapolis. However, while most of them arrived on foot, bicycle or streetcar, Hill rode out in an automobile. St. Paul residents at that time of the twentieth century could easily take the streetcars of Thomas Lowry's Twin City Rapid Transit Company to Lexington or Nicollet baseball parks to watch a ball game, but it was rather unlikely that Hill would take the train to Montana just to watch some grazing cattle. Week-end travels to Como or Phalen parks were easily accomplished, as were short trips across the Mississippi to visit Fort Snelling, Minnehaha Falls or Lakes Calhoun and Harriet. For extra special occasions, folks could travel by streetcar northeast to Wildwood amusement park on White Bear Lake. The more venturesome could continue on to Mahtomedi and to Stillwater and the St. Croix River. Those attracted by the lure of the west could take interurban streetcars to Deephaven, Excelsior and Tonka Bay, all on Lake Minnetonka. Once at the lake they could visit the Big Island amusement park and picnic grounds, or ride the lake on excursion boats. By 1915 the boats were considerably smaller than the 300-foot *Belle of Minnetonka* which Hill operated from his Lafayette Hotel at the lake in the 1870s and 1880s.

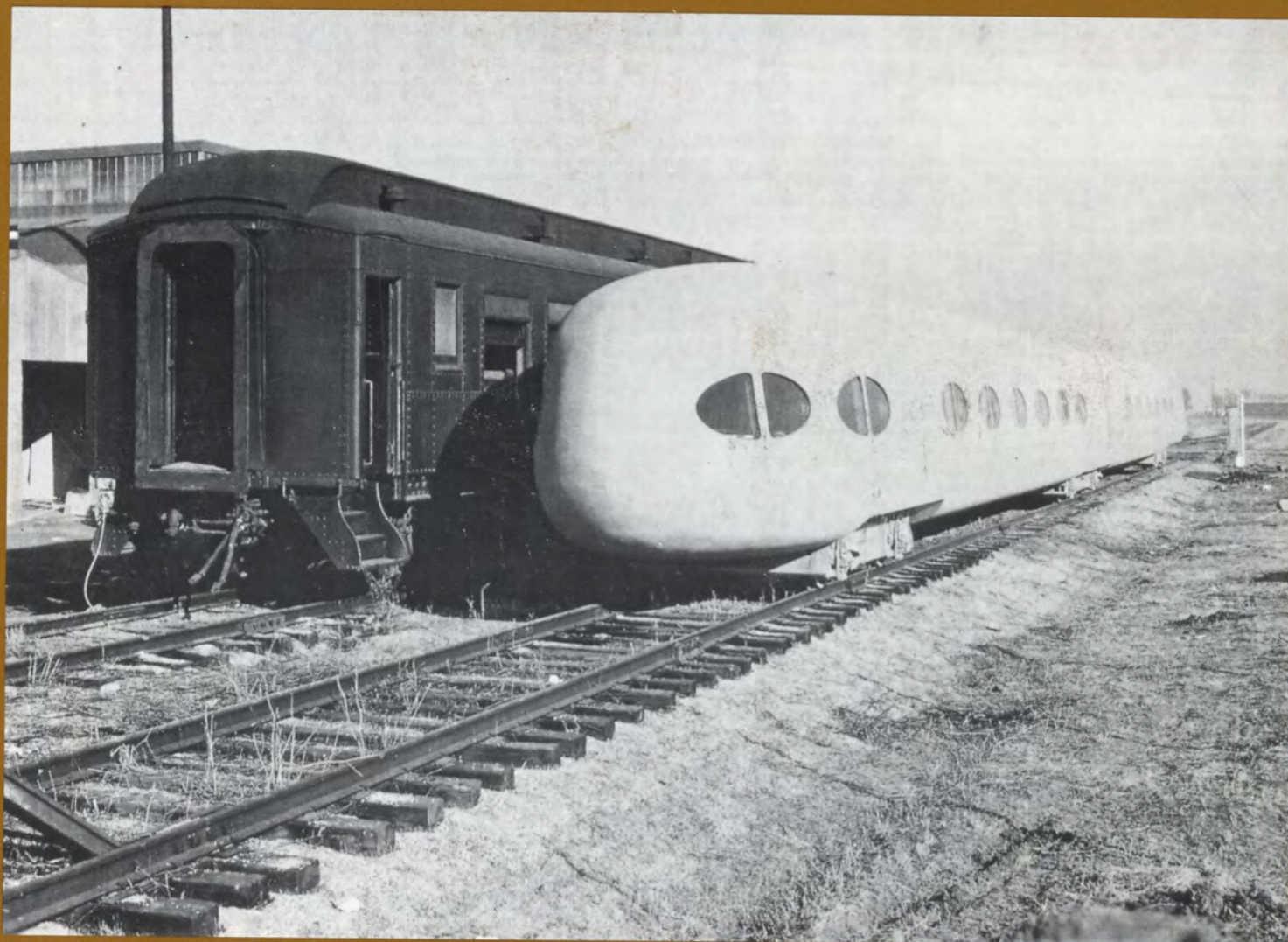
Unlike average folk, the visit of James

J. Hill, or his family, to the fair or the nearby lakes was not a special occasion but part of a lifetime of perpetual travel to and from St. Paul that began when Hill arrived from Ontario. As his business activities spread and his fortune grew, so did the range of their travels. Even in today's era of massive long distance travel by jet and auto, few can match the peregrinating Hills of the early twentieth century.

*This is Thomas C. Buckley's second article for Ramsey County History. His first on James J. Hill and his yacht Wacouta appeared in the summer, 1990, issue of the magazine. He is an associate professor in social and behavioral sciences and adjunct associate professor of history at the University of Minnesota.*

### Sources

This article is based principally on research in the Louis Hill papers and Mary Hill diaries at the James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul. Also used were articles in *Northern Lights* and *Encounters* magazines; *James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest*; *The Great Northern Railroad, A History*, and *The Story of American Railroads*. A fully annotated copy of the manuscript is available in the Ramsey County Historical Society office in Landmark Center, St. Paul.



*Prototype of a streamlined passenger coach next to a standard railroad coach of the 1930s at Inglewood, California. The new coach was designed by Cortlandt Hill, grandson of James J. Hill. At 32,000 pounds, the bullet-shaped coach was one-fifth the weight of the older coach. See story beginning on page 14.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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