

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
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A Roof Over Their Heads:  
The Ramsey County Home

*Page 13*

**Summer, 2000**

Volume 35, Number 2

*Dilettante, Renaissance Man, Intelligence Officer*  
Jerome Hill and His 'Dearest Mother' Letters

*—Page 4*



James J. Hill, II (Jerome Hill) in Air Corps uniform, photographed around 1942, probably at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. See article beginning on Page 4.



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 35, Number 2

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## CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 Dilettante, Renaissance Man, Intelligence Officer  
Jerome Hill and His World War II Letters from  
France to His 'Dearest Mother'  
*G. Richard Slade*
- 13 A Roof Over Their Heads  
The History of the Old Ramsey County 'Poor Farm'  
*Pete Boulay*
- 20 Plans for Preserving 'Potters' Field'—Heritage of the  
Public Welfare System  
*Robert C. Vogel*
- 22 Recounting the 1962 Recount  
The Closest Race for Governor in Minnesota's History  
*Thomas J. Kelley*
- 24 Growing Up in St. Paul  
After Fifty Years, You Can Go Home Again  
*Penny Payte McLeaish*
- 26 Books, Etc.

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## Message from the Editorial Board

Because the more recent issues of *Ramsey County History* have concentrated on the mid-nineteenth century and the area's pioneer heritage, this issue shifts to the mid-twentieth century with the wartime experiences of Jerome Hill, grandson and namesake of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill. Historian and author G. Richard Slade uses Jerome Hill's letters to his mother while Hill was serving as an Army Air Forces intelligence officer in France in the summer of 1944 as a window on southern France and Paris immediately following liberation by the Allies. Jerome Hill's reports of what he saw allow the reader to glimpse Paris through the eyes of an observer who knew it well before the German army overran it in 1940. We then turn to a subject close at hand—the story of the Ramsey County "Poor Farm" and its adjacent cemetery in Maplewood. Authors Pete Boulay and Robert C. Vogel both make a strong case for the value and usefulness of local history in current policy-making decisions. Rounding out this issue is Tom Kelley's account of the 1962 gubernatorial election recount. Although the recount itself is a familiar story in Minnesota politics, Kelley provides the perspective of an insider who participated in the process as the state's first Election Procedures Advisor. His reminiscences remind us that balloting in elections is a serious business that is sometimes overlooked in the heat of a campaign.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*



# *Dilettante, Renaissance Man, Intelligence Officer*

## Jerome Hill and His World War II Letters from France to His 'Dearest Mother'

*G. Richard Slade*

James Jerome Hill II was—in the most correct use of the word—a *dilettante*, although his drive to perfection in his work and his patience in continuing a challenging project extend the limits of that description. Third child of Louis Warren Hill and Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor Hill, Jerome was born in St. Paul on March 2, 1905, not only with a silver spoon in his mouth, but also carrying a collection of genes which combined to form him as a man of vast and educated interests, a multi-faceted artist and a facile story teller.

His heritage included, in addition to the wealth created by his grandfather and namesake and extended by his father, the sense of family values and good manners held by his mother; the energy and determination of the original James Jerome Hill; and the broadly diverse fascination of his father with the technologies and esthetics of the twentieth century. Jerome's family was quite close, with the four siblings being born in a four-year span. Young Jerome was particularly fond of his slightly older sister Maud, and also enjoyed the company of older brother Louis and younger brother Cortlandt.

Jerome was exposed to the fine arts from earliest childhood; the Louis Hills lived next door to Grandfather James J's Summit Avenue mansion, and were frequent visitors to the big house and its gallery of first-rate Barbizon paintings. Father Louis was an early tinkerer with motion picture making, and enjoyed using the vast scenery of Glacier Park as a setting for films featuring members of his young and active family. Louis would take his favorite touring automobile on a special rail car that traveled behind Great Northern trains to be sure that his family could get about despite a paucity of real roads.

Young Jerome showed an early interest in making art, and his bedroom in their Summit Avenue home was fitted out with special drawers and tables to accommodate his drawing. A second-floor classroom at St. Paul Academy was (and still is) graced by a 1922 Jerome Hill-painted

mural of a nude (towel draped by school administration request) Archimedes running down a classical street shouting "Eureka" upon his discovery of the displacement of volume in his bath.

After St. Paul Academy, a day school where the students wore uniforms and underwent a modest training in military drill, and an experience which Jerome enjoyed and which he believed gave him a boost in his later army days, he went east to school and graduated from Yale in 1926, just before the depression. For the next dozen years, Jerome built a full life around those activities that he enjoyed, and refined his esthetic senses of cre-

ation, learning and understanding.

### **Writing Home**

Jerome had a personal discipline that was not unusual in the aeons preceding cell phones, e-mail, copying machines, and fax; that meant he wrote his mother weekly about his life and goings-on. The letters were not always consequential,<sup>1</sup> and generally focused on Jerome's extensive social life: who was in town, with whom he had dined (and where), what sort of physical activity was on the agenda, the movies he had seen and enjoyed, and a bit of scheduling. Jerome's life extended well beyond St. Paul. Although he and his siblings had built a chalet-style retreat at North Oaks, Jerome no longer lived in Minnesota. Cortie and Maud had moved west and based their separate lives around Los Angeles (Cortie) and San Francisco (Maud). Older brother Louis stayed in St. Paul and took care of family business. Father, Louis, Sr., and mother Maud had noncompatible life styles and lived in separate houses three blocks apart in St. Paul for two decades.

Mother Maud was Jerome's correspondent of choice—she was doting (to the extent of, among other things, arranging for a weekly box of Dean's peanut brittle to be sent to Jerome well into his army career); she was titillated by gossip about the famous names that Jerome was able to drop easily; and she always answered his letters promptly. Despite one or two visits that she would arrange each year to visit Jerome and the handful of stops that Jerome would make in St. Paul, usually on his way somewhere else, the correspondence flowed smoothly and endlessly. Jerome would pick up stationery wherever he might be, from hotels, railroad trains, transatlantic liners, or,



*An informal Jerome Hill in 1907 when he was around two years old.*





*James J. Hill with his wife, Mary, two of his grandchildren and many of his Great Northern Railroad employees at Glacier Park, Montana, in 1913. James J. Hill, II, (Jerome) is the boy on the left, standing next to his brother, Cortlandt. Brown Photo, St. Paul. All photographs with this article, including the portrait of Jerome Hill on the front cover of this issue, are from the Hill family archives at the James Jerome Hill Library in St. Paul, Minnesota.*

lacking such fine material, he wrote on telegraph blanks or baggage labels or whatever was handy. He would use pens or pencils—the former sputtered and leaked, the latter were often illegible when the paper was poor. It was a push as to whether his handwriting was worse than his mother's was, but often someone secretarial would recopy his more abstruse letters.

### **The Life of the Dilettante**

Both Jerome and his mother had wide circles of friends; when Maud came to visit, Jerome would introduce her to his current circle of companions, and he would then keep her posted on their continuing activities. He was actively inter-

ested in the affairs of his siblings and spasmodically conscientious about the numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins who lived in his expanding universe—initially New York City but soon on to the continent and Paris. From 1934 on, Jerome leased an apartment at 16 rue St. Simon in the 7th Arrondissement (just across from the rue du Bac Metro station) that was as much his permanent address as New York City. He would go on from there to the music festivals in Salzburg or to skiing in the Alps—particularly St. Anton in Austria. He took tennis and skiing lessons in the proper seasons and studied languages fairly seriously—both conversational French and German.

With his Austrian friend Otto Lang, he produced a series of skiing movies filmed in Europe; Franconia, New Hampshire; Lake Placid, New York, and Sun Valley, Idaho. In the winter of 1936, a note to his mother reported that Sun Valley has a “sort of continuous cable with arm chairs that hoist you up.” In 1937, he wrote that he had finally located Edward Weston, one of his photographer friends, in California where Weston was living off the proceeds of a Guggenheim prize “free to move where and when he wants.” Jerome convinced him to take a suite of images of his California siblings and included his visiting cousin, Georgianna Slade Peet. Later that year, Jerome was stranded in Salzburg when friend “Tim went off with



the key to the Bugatti so I am temporarily without a car."

### Buying 'Cassis'

By the end of 1938, it was clear that difficult times were on the horizon, although the common attitude among Jerome's crowd was persistently rosy. Writing from France, he noted that: "Everyone is very optimistic here about the international situation, although international questions leave much to be desired. Aren't the Italians childish?" Personally undaunted, Jerome was moving ahead with a special personal project, the acquisition of an unusual property in Cassis, a small fishing village southeast of Marseilles. He and his friends had enjoyed painting vacations in the region for a number of years; the same light and ambiance had attracted Dufy, Vlaminck, Matisse, and Derain some decades earlier. The particular site Jerome was negotiating to buy had been a gun battery emplacement dating from the Napoleonic Wars, overlooking and defending the Cassis harbor. Across the access road from the particular property was a small hotel with pleasant rooms and a good kitchen. The village, huddled at the base of the grand massif Cap Canaille, featured a modest gambling casino on the long quai, was a safe harbor for casual sailors, and a fishing port.

On February 23, 1939, Jerome wrote mother Maud that "I am working very hard to get the lovely piece of property at the entrance to the port above the beach. . . . It belongs to an Englishman and entails a lot of red tape, but I believe I can bring it off." And he did, reporting in July that "the papers are all signed and I spend a lot of every day wandering about the property, measuring off and pacing, listening for sound sources, and eating up the view. It really is the most beautiful 'corner' in Cassis. . . . The first thing I shall construct is the tennis court." In the same letter [July 16, 1939] he adds, "everyone expects tense days as soon as the harvest is in (but no war)." On August 1, Jerome's little party moved into his new villa. On September 1, with dive bombers and panzers moving into the north of France, Jerome and a friend drove to Switzerland by night, using the light of the moon to navigate, rather



Jerome's "Dearest Mother," Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor Hill with, left to right, Maud, Jerome, Louis, Jr., and Cortlandt on the Hill railroad car A-22 in 1909. Jerome was four years old at the time.

than headlights. He would be gone from France for almost five years.

### The Moves Toward War

Full of energy, Jerome and friend Otto Lang were back in Sun Valley in the winter of 1940, working on a new skiing movie. Jerome also skied and filmed in Oregon and California, and acquired a piece of property in California's Sugar Bowl, a small and special ski area west of Lake Tahoe on the California side of the Donner Pass. He began to plan a small chalet that would be built in the summer. World affairs continued to loom larger as he noted to his mother in May, "the less said about the war the better." Jerome had donated an ambulance to the French army and he had just heard that it had been blown to pieces. In September he noted dourly that he had been "on this

side" for more than a year, which had broken an eighteen-year record of overseas adventures. More to the point, he would be required to register for the draft on October 16 and asked Frank Butler, the family attorney back in St. Paul, whether it was better to register in New York, Minnesota, or California. They agreed on the latter.

The spring of 1941 was filled with a series of family emergencies, particularly sister Maud's contested divorce, and, for her, Jerome played the roles of counselor and sympathizer. He advised his mother to stay out of California for the time being lest she be caught up in the legal wrangles. He was busy with the construction of his Sugar Bowl chalet and by December 1, it was in pretty complete form. With his typically non-omniscient timing, he noted that "I am in touch with



my Draft Board and have told them that I am here [Sugar Bowl] until Sunday and then in Palm Springs until further notice. It is so hard to see further into the future." Sunday, of course, would be December 7, 1941 and the beginning of the United States' part of the war.

Jerome was ambivalent; he had a minor defect in his metabolism that would keep him out of the most physical part of the war, but he was inclined to the Beau Geste role of accepting the draft as would any ordinary citizen. On the other hand, his friends and relatives were busy lobbying whatever important people they knew to 1) make Jerome an officer and 2) get him into some area, such as making training films, where his professional experience might be used effectively away from the front lines. In January, 1942, he mused with his mother that "I could get no sort of a job from the 'Intelligence' without being in the Navy and that is out because of my eyes. Am working on the Signal Corps now." And a few days later "I shall pursue my naval intelligence inquiries. They don't seem to be very anxious to have me but I understand they are swamped with people asking." He went up to the Sugar Bowl with sister Maud and her new beau, Hannes Schroll, for a skiing picnic. It was a wonderful moment. His next letter was delayed until March but came, in due time, from Fort Haan in Riverside, California, where Private James J Hill found himself a new trainee in Reconnaissance Company, 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion, United States Army.

### Basic Training

The thirty-seven-year-old draftee enjoyed the game and the anonymity of being Private James Hill (the army has always been notoriously unable to handle middle names) and his records showed a vague reference to his civilian career as having been a "house-painter from Saint Paul." He relished the weekly shipment of Dean's peanut brittle candy, but when his mother sent him a selection of sewing kits to make a choice, he was embarrassed and concerned that his "cover" might be at risk.<sup>2</sup> Private Hill did well at basic training; he was in good physical condition and remembered the basic drill steps from St. Paul Academy ("dust cover-

ed mouldy memories"). Field training continued with rifles of the same vintage as he had used at SPA, and he did his fair share of KP (kitchen chores from 5:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.). By and large, life was not too bad: "We are treated very well, a lot better than in most restaurants, and are never crowded or shoved around." His sybaritic values appeared as he noted that "the fatigues, when washed several times, get that wonderful cobalt blue that I always associate with Marseilles and Cassis fishermen." He responded to some of his mother's more doting questions about army life: "I have a flash-light, thanks." Hankies—"I seem to have plenty" and (dear mother) "We do not exactly associate with our superior officers."

By the end of May, the unit had completed basic training and was ready to move. Jerome had begun to do some field intelligence work, studying aerial photos of the maneuvers and analyzing tank formations; his superiors recognized his skills in this area and he was promoted to corporal, which he noted meant more of directing people to do things and less of doing them himself. Jerome's unit, the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was transferred to a Texas base but Jerome was detached and sent to New Jersey. One of the many tentacles working in his interests had succeeded in having him transferred to the Signal Corps. In the process, however, he was reduced back to private. He reported to his mother, "I would have been put in Headquarters [had he remained with the Tank Destroyer unit] doing intelligence work. They had been building me up through my work—aerial photograph reading, sketching, etc." During the summer of 1942, Jerome was assigned to a film-making unit in New Jersey producing training films for the army. Making films was interesting work, and he enjoyed it; even more, he enjoyed the access to New York City and the opportunity to reestablish his cosmopolitan social life with friends and relatives. This gave him much to write Maud about while not revealing details about his work in the army.

Jerome was still ambivalent about applying to Officers Candidate School although it appeared that he would need to be an officer to direct films. He took a



*A seventeen-year-old Jerome Hill photographed in St. Paul around 1922.*

necessary physical examination just in case, and wrote John DeQuedville Briggs, headmaster of the St. Paul Academy, for a character recommendation. In August, a brief note written on a torn laundry list arrived in St. Paul to report that Jerome's unit would be on extended maneuvers based around Fort Benning, Georgia, making training films in the field. Although he was a conscientious correspondent, Jerome was also careful about giving his mother any specific details about his unit, the officers, and his activities. There was always a matter of security, and he knew that his mother had a good imagination and loved to talk. He did tell her that he was promoted to private first class in October. The maneuvers extended into November, and as they ended, Jerome finally decided that he would apply for Officer Candidate School.

### Officer Training

In January, 1943, after Jerome had been accepted to OCS, he was transferred to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, for training. Again he had access to New York City, but the school was demanding and he worked hard to do well, graduating on April 24 as a new second lieutenant. His first assignment would be to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where he became a part of the HQ Army Air Forces Air Intelligence School, as both a student and a member of the faculty. He asked his mother to





*Jerome Hill's family, photographed by William Bull, St. Paul, around 1920. Jerome's father, Louis W. Hill, Sr., is on the right, with Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor Hill on the left. The four children are Louis W. Hill, Jr., James J. Hill II (Jerome), Maud Van Cortlandt (Maudie), and Cortlandt Taylor Hill.*

send him all of his personal photographic files and negatives; some of those, taken as a tourist, of harbors and other sensitive sites, would prove interesting to his Intelligence unit. Jerome noted their particular focus on an image featuring female relatives on the beach at Cannes. He supposed that it was the road system visible behind the women that was the point of interest. In December he had the unique pleasure of reviewing a photo-reconnaissance overview of his Cassis property taken during the previous summer. "Everything is in good shape," he reported, adding "the tennis court looks as if it has been planted with vegetables."

Along with this letter, Jerome sent a package of socks home for mending.<sup>3</sup>

By March of 1944, it became apparent that the Harrisburg operation was being shut down; some parts would be moving to Florida, others to Europe. His colonel assured Jerome that he was "not likely" to be moved to Florida. The periodic letters became increasingly obscure as Jerome's overseas orders finally came through [after the fact, Jerome wrote, "he had hoped that the idea was conveyed to you" after a brief visit by sister Maud just before he sailed]. Jerome was assigned as liaison to a Free French Air Force unit in North Africa, sited outside of Oran. The

sea voyage to Africa gave him a chance to read, paint, and practice his French. He extended his interests (and killed time) by learning Gregorian chants from a fellow officer; Jerome was fascinated with the rhythms. By June he reported that he was living "in splendor in an Arabian nights palace" with good food and a satisfying job. "It is terrible not to be in the big 'doings' though;" the June 6 invasion of Normandy was clearly the big doings.

Allied forces had invaded Sicily as early as July 1943, and had progressively landed troops up the western coast of Italy as far as Anzio by January 1944. Jerome made a number of trips to liber-



ated areas of Sicily and Italy, but continued to serve in a liaison/intelligence role with the French during this period.

### Back to France

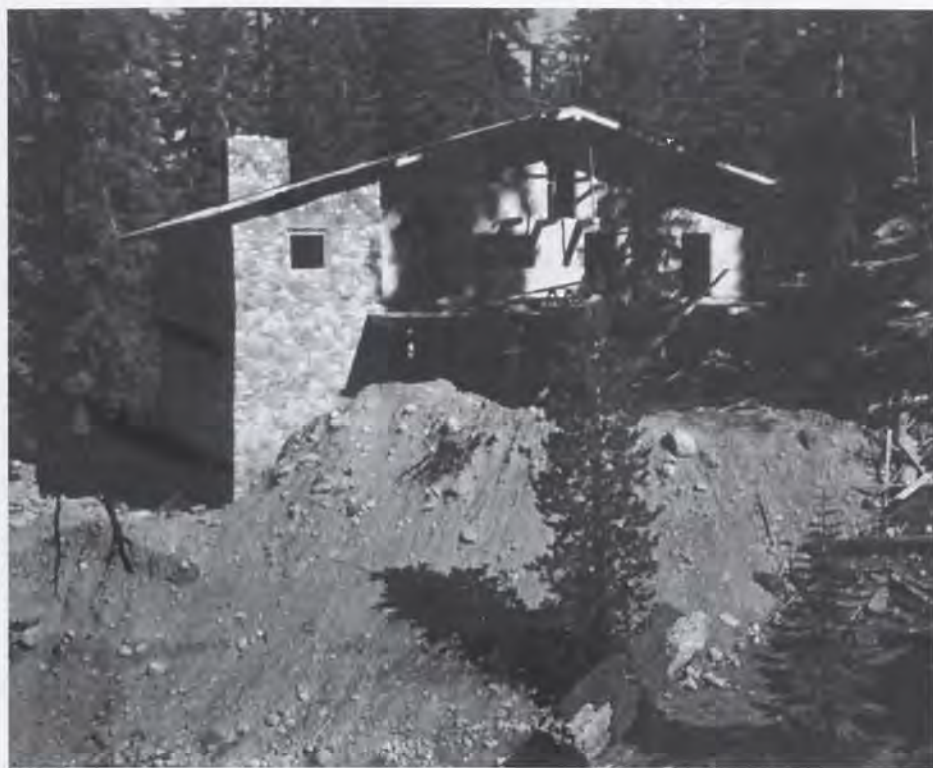
On August 15, 1944, the Americans and French landed joint forces near Toulon, a major port in the south of France. The Americans headed east toward the Alps, and the French moved west toward Marseilles. Jerome, among the first to go ashore, was attached to the French units headed toward Cassis and beyond. In northern France, the allied armies were moving swiftly across Europe toward Germany. On August 24, units of the Free French Army under General Leclerc entered Paris. The war was far from over, but Jerome's personal targets were within sight.

Jerome Hill had matured considerably from his role of dilettante; he had worked hard to become a respected member of Air Force Intelligence. With the end of hostilities almost in sight, his personal objectives for the war (to recover his properties in Paris and Cassis) were at hand. His life was substantially focused on meeting his military commitments and yet he retained the artist's eye for scenery and settings. It was remarkable, virtually impossible, that Jerome could have accomplished so much in so little time, particularly since there was no reason for the U.S. army to go out of its way to make things happen for him, and Jerome appears to have accepted the tasks given him without bending them to any personal agenda. At any rate, here he was on the Riviera in his own vehicle, heading for Cassis:<sup>4</sup>

*Dearest Mother,*

*When I knocked on Charlotte's door and she opened it and we faced each other, neither of us could speak. I finally had to tell her that I would pick up lunch at the hotel and return later.<sup>5</sup>*

*But let's go back a little. The day before, we had landed in a neighboring large port<sup>6</sup> in the midst of a rainstorm—landed in the true sense of the word, in that we had been beached by small craft, the port facilities being still incapacitated. The scene was a Cézanne summer landscape with a cloudy*



*Jerome Hill's Sugar Bowl home in 1941.*

*sky (you know the large canvas in the Chicago museum). I was the first man on the beach and was able to do some active reconnaissance, diverting the vehicles and the men to their proper positions. By knocking at the farm gates and asking our way around we finally located a huge stone barn on the top of a hill, with two lofts of hay and plenty of room, heated by twelve cows and as many large percheron horses. Then it was a question of locating the [troops] proceeding on foot and by vehicle. . . .*

*Toward the end of the [next] morning a French captain, my buddy in the squadron and another American liaison officer and I, pushed off to go down (to the sea<sup>7</sup>). We passed through (the pottery making town), detouring several times for broken bridges and then up through the tortuous canyon roads, lined with blackberry bushes. There were German gun emplacements along the way and especially at the top, heavy concrete barriers and tank obstacles. The forests have been extensively burned. The "pretty girl" was in good condition, but already from the first glimpse of the port, two vast liners lying on their sides at a crazy angle, one against the other, dwarfed everything<sup>8</sup>. . . .*

*I stopped [at] the Englishman's (establishment)<sup>9</sup> and found his place in good condition but him still [away], expected daily by his people. We sampled last year's and the year before's wines and found them as good as ever. The car [Jerome's Bugatti], needless to say, had been taken. It was an extraordinary moment, as you can imagine and not unlike a dream. . . . I hurried on to the house and found the gate unlocked. Charlotte was preparing lunch and through the glass door I could see the spotless kitchen. The house was clean but somewhat denuded and the scene which I previously described took only a few minutes. One look at what used to be the tennis court showed me we would have to proceed with caution. It looked like a study in booby traps. . . . The little house is filled with [what] Harrisburg<sup>10</sup> would have called "documents"—uniforms, gas masks, diaries, newspapers, Mineralvasser bottles, letters and gadgets of all kinds. . . .*

*At the hotel, things seem exactly the same, except for tomato plants where the geraniums used to be. If anything, it looks rather cleaner and better kept up. Madame had gone to Marseilles but mademoiselle and monsieur and the bartender gave us a very hearty and*



touching welcome. The lunch and the drinks which they produced in no time at all were of the old quality and all "on the house". . . . The tales they told were unbelievable. . . .

To go back to the house, your clothes and mine are non-existent. The china and silver and the linen seem to have been farmed out to the Agostinis and other people and are presumably O.K. Some of the furniture has disappeared but the house is entirely habitable. When I called on the lawyer I found him out, but his wife gave me a satisfactory account of all Charlotte's activities. . . .

It was wonderful that Jerome's studio and Cassis as a community had survived substantially without damage; Jerome knew that the Germans had not destroyed Paris, but the city had been intensely occupied, and Jerome had had no word of what might have happened to his apartment. The war was continuing, with the Germans periodically making a determined battle out of a losing cause. Jerome was detached from liaison and returned to headquarters for more formal intelligence work.<sup>11</sup> In due course, then, around October 1, 1944, he was transferred to further his duties in Paris:

*On a recent trip to Paris I was able to locate all of my belongings. With the exception of a couple of Caraceni suits that Frank Arthur<sup>12</sup> had to sell in a very straightened [sic] moment; everything is intact, although somewhat scattered.*

*The return to the city was even more dream-like than I had expected. Strangely enough, from Dijon over, I had been unable to locate a single recognizable town or landscape feature, and the airfield itself, which turned out later to be Orly, bore no resemblance to anything I had ever known before. Even the bus ride into town passed through unfamiliar streets and boulevards. It was evening: the hour between sunset and the turning on of headlights. After a shorter time than seemed possible to get us into the center of town, the bus gave a sudden turn and Notre Dame loomed up just beside us, silver in the evening light, more beautiful, it seemed to me, than ever before. From there on in to the Place Vendome, and as a matter of fact, for most of the rest of the evening, I was flooded with tears.*

*It was something of a trial to have a very of-*



Undated photo of Jerome filming an actor, perhaps in Cassis, France.

*icious little WAC who couldn't even pronounce the name of the street we were on, assign me to a room in an absolutely unknown hotel on an absolutely unknown street near the Palais Royal. It turned out to be not too bad, with a comfortable bed and hot running water, a thing which one has Saturdays and Sundays only at the Meurice and Crillon.<sup>13</sup>*

*After a very good dinner. . . . at the transient officer's mess near St. Augustin, I started off alone for the Rue St. Simon through the dark streets. This was a completely new experience. First of all, one could see stars in the sky. Paris before had always had a rosy glow that dimmed out everything except the fullest of moons. And then the streets were relatively empty, an occasional bicycle, a darkened jeep, and then suddenly a truck with powerful headlights illuminating the façade of a building one had never noticed before,—one's shadow, for a moment, covered the whole colonnade before the Chambre des Deputes. The little islands or refuges have been removed from the boulevards, (presumably to facilitate the movement of German war machines) and consequently certain squares seem like wide rivers of pavement, whose remote tree-lined shores offer in the dark only a relative security. . . . The Seine was calm and reflected the stars. Distant*

*monuments were visible and lined up where one didn't expect them. One was conscious of a characteristic silhouette at the end of every perspective. . . . In Marseilles, you know, there are so many bullet holes in the shutters that the streets are dappled with pin-points of light, but here one has only the faintest sense of well lighted interiors, blotted from the outer darkness by curtains and shades and persiennes. The sixth floor at 16 Rue de St. Simon was aglow. The light was pink. I had forgotten that I had ordered the linen curtains dyed that summer of '39 and had been visualizing them all along as white! My mind couldn't recall where the bell was, but my hand found it automatically.*

*The concierge and her husband were at home putting up apple jelly, and we had a delightful visit. The [Jerome's] apartment had been sublet for several years to a French couple. Neither of them was in Paris. It was the cook who had the lights on. The French couple worked in the Resistance and were often away. They are nice people, apparently. I called the next day and they were still out, but I went in and looked around and could tell they had taste and culture. Their library so nearly resembled mine that I wondered if maybe Frank Arthur had left some books behind. The piano was well cared for and in tune. There were flowers about and a crackling fire in the Salamander. The rug was theirs, a huge oriental affair that covered the whole floor. My beds were missing. So were several lamps. . . . Frank Arthur had done a very smart thing. Had this stuff been in my name,<sup>14</sup> it would all have been seized. He took books, cameras, films, linen, clothing, porcelain, bronze, etc., to his home and office and declared them as belonging to his French wife. He then sublet the apartment, furnished, to these French people whom he knew, and they declared the [remaining] contents as theirs (with an agreement of responsibility between them and Arthur). With the rent they paid him, he was able to pay my rent, taxes, and also back pay for Constance.<sup>15</sup>*

*At the bank<sup>16</sup> I found Felix and all the old employees (I still have a fairly hefty balance) . . .*

*And having found the material aspects of his pre-war life in Paris in remarkably sound condition, including his bank bal-*





Jerome in Air Corps uniform posing with a cardboard cutout around 1945.

ance, Jerome continued, turning his artistic eye to the more general status of fashion, the arts and the broader affairs of his favorite city:

*So much for people. Now a little about feminine fashion. Correspondents at the liberation spoke of girls on bicycles with sun-burned legs and simple black dresses. This*

*was summer garb. Now that the winter toilettes are out one can see that the organism of style has gone on independently of the outside world, with which I guess it had little or no contact. Well, it has gone quite another way. The silhouette is astonishing. All skirts are knee length and very full—all sleeves and shoulders are full, all waists are belted and small. The shoes have built up*

*soles, away beyond the necessities of wartime economy, but it is particularly the hats that astonish. These crown the same strange coiffures that we have in America—the high pompadour before at the same time as the low chignon behind. Above all this is either a turban or a bonnet or both—a turban on a bonnet, or a bonnet on a turban. The turban is a scarf wound over a form which is symmetrical and heart-shaped, and the fringed ends of the scarf often hang down on one side. The bonnet is a felt affair covered with feathers or ribbons, flaring at the top at least a foot above the head. The final effect of the diabolical silhouette and the wide upper story is very 1835–1840. It is not altogether pleasing. On a bicycle it is amazing.*

*The theatre is starting up again. I went to performances of “La Bouche” and “La Haut” both by Maurice Yvain and dating from about twenty years ago. The first was especially good. It was at Mogador and the orchestra and voices were a delight. I thought back to our first trip to Paris in 1922 when we saw it in the tiny Daunou theatre. Moliere is playing everywhere. . . .*

*Now for the Salon d’Automne; it is most interesting! In fact, it caused such a scandal at the vernissage that there are blue spots on the walls of that new museum building Quai de Tokio where people threw bottles of ink. All because one entire room was devoted to the eighty or so pictures that Picasso has painted since 1939. To be sure, they are astonishing canvasses and they were hung without frames. They go on from the Guernica into a new mood,—the subject matter fairly conventional, but the colors clear and “cirard” [sic] well set off with lots of black and white. There are many pictures of children (needless to say with multiple faces and banana fingers) and a whole series of skulls, human and bovine. In fact, in the midst of these pictures is hung a sort of sculpted skull with antlers or horns. On close inspection it turns out to be a bicycle seat with a pair of handlebars mounted behind it!<sup>17</sup> More surprising to me even than the Picassos are two small Braques that indicate a great evolution of style and method,—black and white again and much rich purple,—with an arabesque and linear rhythm far more energetic than*



before. Matisse is represented by a beautiful but not very recent still life, Bonnard has two marvels of color and pattern, whiter and clearer and more subtle even than before. . . .

Most of the shops and restaurants are open (except for conspicuous German of collaborationists' houses such as Heinkel and Maxims),—but eating away from the messes is not too satisfactory and useless anyway because the messes are so good. The night clubs are all in existence, but very expensive. A martini at the Ritz bar cost \$1.20.

The Germans had been relatively kind in the four years of occupation. While most landmarks had been preserved, many familiar buildings and monuments had been used and abused. The German military had no tolerance for the French underground resistance, and those participating in such activity were executed as they were captured.

*A conspicuous change in the aspect of the city is the absence of many bronze statues. One didn't perhaps remember just what was commemorated at the crossing of the Boul. St. Germaine and Boul. Raspail or even behind the Madelaine,—but the pedestals are empty now, as are several in the Tuileries and the long Quais. Henry V is still on the Pont Neuf and so is Louis XIV in the round square. Both Joans of Arc are in place but Shakespeare is gone from the Boul. Haussman. . . . As a matter of fact, the Luxembourg [Gardens] is very shocking indeed. The gardens are still closed because of mines; many earthworks and concrete pillboxes can be seen through the broken grills; the tree trunks are scarred and battered; the rear façade of the Odeon is pock-marked and the palace itself has suffered materially without being actually destroyed. All along the sidewalks and walls in this quarter are little mounds of flowers with plaques indicating where and how such and such a man or woman died. There are places where these are so numerous that one has to pick one's way through them. . . . All over here there are small arms fire holes in the buildings revealing the clean can [sic] stone beneath, like newly cut flesh wounds. One pillar is gone from the colossal order on the Crillon. The fountains are intact. The horses of Marly were removed to safety before the*

*war. The Tuileries are the world's finest motorpool. For some reason or other the jeeps and trucks are no less shocking in this purely 18th century landscape than the tomato vines that alternate with the rose trees in the flower beds.*

### And, in Summary:

*As a matter of fact, Paris has never been as beautiful. It seemed to me that the vast harmony of its layout—a beauty that is man-made in its entirety (except for the modest presence of the river and certain small, almost inconsiderable hills)—the flow of avenue into place, of narrow winding streets into mathematically planned square, the play of perspectives lined with green, of rhythmic bridges and noble monuments perfectly framed,—that this ensemble, surpassing even the most perfect single masterpiece, qualifies the city as the greatest work of art one can expect to see on earth.*

On this note<sup>18</sup> and in this setting, perhaps the Place Vendome, we leave Jerome. The war was not over, his service would continue for another year, and his correspondence with his mother would last until her death (in 1961 at the age of ninety-one). He would move back into his Paris apartment in a couple of months and would carefully continue his restoration of the Cassis property as a special center for artists—especially painters. The early part of Jerome's life journey, which we have shared by peeking into his mother's correspondence files, was been one of maturation and determination. Returning to the France that he loved created a watershed of purpose and a stimulant to Jerome's diversified artistic accomplishments of the next twenty-five years.

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*from the College of Art and Design. James Jerome Hill was Slade's father's first cousin. The author of this article and the editor of Ramsey County History wish to thank Eileen McCormack of the James J. Hill Library for her help in the publication of this article.*

### Endnotes

1. The first letter in Maud Hill's Jerome file was dated 1912, when he was seven, and somehow reflected the tone of his future correspondence: "I love you and I hope you are having a nice time. We are all well and happy. I am in the dining room now."
2. Private Hill painted a Botticelli-like scene on a fellow soldier's plaster arm cast; a photograph of that work was reproduced in Letters to *Life* magazine, causing a vast amusement among those who identified the "housepainter."
3. From this point, it is impossible to tell, from Jerome's letters home, what his military career actually was. The disinformation and non-information in his letters kept his mother from gossiping about military secrets, but it means that we, as readers of those letters, are also in the dark. We will note a couple of gleams of light as they occurred.
4. The balance of this essay is almost verbatim from two letters, one each dealing with the return to Cassis and to Paris.
5. Charlotte was the person who, with her husband, had staffed Cassis for Jerome. Thus Charlotte's door was actually Jerome's door. The hotel was across the road.
6. Euphemism due to censorship. Probably Toulon.
7. Several euphemisms about Cassis.
8. The departing German military tried to leave the port in unusable condition.
9. The man who had sold Jerome the property.
- 10 Jerome's Army Airforce Intelligence School.
11. Jerome's Aunt Gertrude (Gertrude Hill Gavin, sister to Louis, Sr.) had finally figured out, through her husband's cousin's nephew, that Jerome was doing intelligence work on the staff of Air Force General Ira Eaker. Jerome hinted at this but never directly confirmed his position. The report, as circulated by "Aunt Gee," was that Jerome was doing so well that he might be kept on for some time.
12. Jerome's agent who had remained in Paris.
13. Two traditional five-star hotels.
14. As the property of a U.S. citizen.
15. Jerome's erstwhile housekeeper.
16. J. P. Morgan *et Cie.*, of course.
17. The *New York Times* dated February 5, 1999, reviewed an exhibition entitled "Picasso and the War





*Dairy herd at the Ramsey County Home in Maplewood in 1923. Minnesota Historical Society photograph. See Pete Boulay's history of the Ramsey County "Poor Farm" beginning on page 13.*

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