

Citizens versus the Freeway:

RIP-35E and the Pleasant Avenue Route through St. Paul

John Watson Milton

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When the Minnesota Department of Highways published its official state highway map in 1972, it included an insert map that showed how the interstate highway system would eventually crisscross the city of St. Paul. The dashed lines to the left of center indicate that the section of I-35E running north-south along the Pleasant Avenue corridor was incomplete. Map courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

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The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
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A Message from the Editorial Board

History is not always harmonious. When President Dwight Eisenhower envisioned a vast system of interstate highways, designers did not plan for parkways as part of that system. But over many years and several court battles, tenacious St. Paul citizens and legislators managed to carve out an exception: 35E as it runs through downtown St. Paul. John Milton has carefully researched this chapter of Ramsey County history and uncovers its complex and relevant story in this issue. Gerald Scalze shares the story of Ralph Scalze, a strong labor leader who negotiated increased benefits on behalf of workers at the Seeger Refrigerator Company during the 1950s. On a less serious note, Linda McShannock shows us some photographs of young men outside an East Side gas station in 1941, capturing a lighthearted moment just before the United States entered World War II. We don't know the names of all the men in these pictures; contribute to history and help our editor identify them!

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Book Reviews

Harriman vs. Hill: Wall Street's Great Railroad War

Larry Haeg
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 2013
376 pages; \$29.95.
Reviewed by Eileen R. McCormack

Larry Haeg's recent book, *Harriman vs. Hill: Wall Street's Great Railroad War*, made this reviewer breathe a huge sigh of relief. Finally, after two decades of working with James J. Hill historical resources, I discovered a narrative that *clearly* explained what happened at the New York City Stock Exchange during the spring of 1901.

Haeg has written about the fight between railroad titans Edward H. Harriman, head of the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads, and James Hill, head of the Great Northern and largest individual shareholder of the Northern Pacific Railway. In order to connect to eastern markets, both men went after the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy line and, ultimately, control of the Northern Pacific. It is that Northern Pacific stock battle that forms the central conflict, but by no means the only conflict, in this history.

The book is not just about the Northern Pacific Railway stock corner or even the activities of the investors who bought and sold the shares or those who invested in short-term speculation. It is also not just about the big investment company players, J. P. Morgan & Company and Jacob Schiff's Kuhn, Loeb & Company. In the more than 100 years that have elapsed since the "first modern-day panic on the New York Stock Exchange," we have seen other instances of the ups and downs of



Wall Street and become familiar with all but the most convoluted investment activities that Haeg relates.

Harriman vs. Hill is about the antagonistic and competitive relationship between two men whose business acumen and methods were similar. They operated their rail lines with far-reaching vision and meticulous precision. That vision was limitless and that precision was so legendary that "hands-on" does not begin to describe their control of every aspect of their railroad businesses. Haeg walks the reader through the history of these two men battling for control of rail lines before and after the Northern Pacific issue.

Harriman "became and always remained a creature of Wall Street." In 1870, twenty-three years before Hill's Great Northern Railway reached Seattle, Harriman joined the New York Stock Exchange (Hill was never on the

trading floor) and grew into an expert in the economics of railroading. Hill was a railroad builder and most at home on the tracks of his railroad checking grades and equipment or in his office studying and refining all aspects of its operations.

Their personalities were quite different and Haeg has made good use of published resources to point out those differences. Haeg writes, "[Hill] was naturally engaging, gregarious, a talker holding forth around hot stoves and railroad sidings." Harriman "was secretive, furtive, calculating" and "unlike Hill was essentially friendless." Ironically, it was the close friends of Hill, long-standing investors and business associates, who played a critical role in preventing Harriman from getting control of enough Northern Pacific stock.

In many ways Haeg has written not just a historical account of the Northern Pacific corner, but also a narrative that reads like a cleverly conceived mystery novel. The story takes you on an adventure complete with engaging characters, who at times wear the mantle of both hero and villain, and unstoppable out-of-control events. In the end it makes you want to know more about the characters and question their participation in those events:

What if Hill had/had not . . . ?

What if Harriman had/had not . . . ?

What if Morgan had/had not . . . ?

What if Schiff had/had not . . . ?

As with all carefully and extensively researched historical narratives, Haeg's book answers many questions. It is an important contribution to the story of Wall Street investment in the Gilded Age, a time of tremendous growth and change in the financing of

large corporations in the U.S. In addition, Haeg's effort adds significantly to our knowledge of the individual men who were involved in this event that ultimately led to Theodore Roosevelt's trust busting efforts, in particular the Supreme Court's decision in the *Northern Securities* case (1904), and extensive government regulation of railroads and the stock market.

Eileen R. McCormack was a curator in the Hill Family Papers while they were housed at the James J. Hill Reference Library. Presently she operates Archival Solutions, LLP, a research, writing and archival business in Saint Paul.

University Avenue: One street, a thousand dreams

Produced by Meyers Communications Group, St. Paul, Minn., in partnership with the Ramsey County Historical Society and tpt (Twin Cities Public Television).

Length: 57 minutes; plus two extra segments on Porky's and Prospect Park; 2012.

Available for \$25.00 from Ramsey County Historical Society, other retail outlets, and online at

www.universityavenue.net

Reviewed by John Kaul

I asked myself how a filmmaker (Meyers Communications Group) could turn a battered boulevard into interesting history. Having worked in St. Paul for more than 40 years, I have seen mostly decline as car dealers, manufacturers, and restaurants failed. Sad to say, I knew almost nothing about University Avenue's glorious past. This film, with its excellent research, editing, great interviews, archival imagery, and high production values, filled in the blanks and held my rapt attention from start to finish.

Did you know that what is today called University Avenue was, in the 1830s, a footpath between the nascent port of St. Paul and St. Anthony Falls? An early design for the avenue imag-



ined a gigantic greenway/roadway linking the two cities with a 660-foot-wide right-of-way!

University Avenue was born in the age of steam locomotives. At one point, the rapid growth of lumber, flour milling, and manufacturing, justified three trains shuttling continuously between Minneapolis and St. Paul. By the 1880s, James J. Hill pulled together nine railroads to create an immense rail transfer yard, incorporated as the Minnesota Transfer Railway at University and Prior, which all nine roads jointly owned. That cooperative venture spawned a large horse brokerage nearby. The horses moved the freight and provided fleets of horsepower for police and fire departments all over the Midwest. Tens of thousands of horses were sold during busy months and the Zimmerman Brokerage was the largest supplier of horses and mules for the U.S. Army during World War I.

In the 1890s, the streetcar was introduced in the Twin Cities. By the early twentieth century, hundreds of cars were being manufactured in St. Paul. Soon they were running along University Avenue every ten minutes; then every three minutes; and ultimately every minute during rush hour. The streetcar remained dominant until the end of World War II. Then migra-

tion to the suburbs and the advent of the "Automobile Age" changed everything. By 1954 streetcars were gone, hundreds of which met ignominious death by fire. By the early 1960s, the interstate highway system killed what remained of St. Paul's preeminent commercial corridor, University Avenue.

The high quality archival photos and films contained in this documentary depict life along this corridor, from its inception to the present day. They are riveting. Long-time residents of Ramsey County will remember the Faust Theater, the Prom Ballroom, the Rondo neighborhood, Montgomery Ward, Brown and Bigelow, Porky's, the Criterion and the Blue Horse restaurants, and a host of other bygone landmarks.

Ultimately, it took yet another wave of immigrants to breathe life into this moribund thoroughfare. This film tells us not only about the history, but also about the rebirth of University Avenue as a bustling community of color, ethnicity, tradition, and enterprise.

The billion dollar public investment in building the Central Corridor light rail system (now known as the Green Line) has caused great hardship for businesses along its route, but that same construction project has already stimulated almost two billion dollars in private development around this major artery between St. Paul's Union Station and the heart of Minneapolis. Consequently, this reviewer believes the Central Corridor and this new wave of Americans who live, work, and operate businesses along this essential route will soon restore University Avenue to its former grandeur. *University Avenue: One street, a thousand dreams* proves that history does repeat itself.

John Kaul describes himself as "an artist locked up in the body of a lobbyist." John lives in Afton, Minnesota, and is on the board of directors of the Washington County Historical Society. When he is not influencing policy in St. Paul, he enjoys filmmaking, photography, reading history, and kayaking with friends and family.

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On January 7, 1949, members of Local No. 20459 of the Refrigerators Workers Union elected Ralph M. Scalze, front row, center, their president and secretary-treasurer (business agent). For more on Ralph Scalze and his leadership of the Refrigerator Workers at the Seeger Company plant in St. Paul, see page 18. Photo courtesy of Gerald E. Scalze.