

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Winter 2015

Volume 49, Number 4

“With Pen, Ink, and
Paper”

*October 1857: The Kochen-
dorfers Arrive in St. Paul*

Daniel C. Munson

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“He Was a Dear Friend”

Robert C. Minor: Steward on James J. Hill’s
Private Railway Car

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Robert Minor, right, and his son, Walter, at James J. Hill’s fishing camp on the Saint John River in Quebec, Canada in 1919. Minor worked as the steward on Hill’s private railroad car and would also handle cooking duties when Hill made his annual summer retreat to his fishing lodge. Photo reproduced by permission from a private collection.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 49, Number 4

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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William Boss and His Specialty Manufacturing Company
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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue brings us fascinating portraits of different lives intersecting with history. Eileen McCormack has examined materials from the Hill family’s papers at the Minnesota Historical Society to bring us the story of Robert C. Minor, who had a place of honor as the African-American steward of James J. Hill’s private railroad car. Daniel Munson has unearthed the detailed letters of Catherine Kochendorfer, who arrived in St. Paul by wagon from Illinois, but soon moved with her family near Redwood Falls and lost her life in the Dakota conflict of 1862. And Harlan Stoehr shares the reflections and career history of William Boss, a pioneering agricultural engineer who taught at the University of Minnesota’s School of Agriculture, held numerous patents, and founded the Specialty Manufacturing Company. Issues like this remind us of RCHS’s mission to preserve, share, and honor the memories of citizens who have gone before us. All important lives, all worth remembering, and all fun to read about!

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

“He Was a Dear Friend”

Robert C. Minor: Steward on James J. Hill’s Private Railway Car

Eileen R. McCormack

May 19, 1947

Dear Walter,

I was out of town and did not hear of your Father’s death until I returned and read about it in the Saint Paul Recorder. You may be sure I am so very sorry to hear of his passing. He was a dear friend and I do not think that I have many friends who I have known as long. We had a lot of fun together, and believe me I have many happy memories of my association with him. I feel so lucky that I was able to have a nice long visit with him not too long ago, and at that time I was so glad that he was feeling well after his long illness and that he really seemed to be in good shape again and enjoying life as he usually did.

If you are ever in Saint Paul with a minute to spare, don’t forget I would like to have a chance to have a short visit. I am not writing to any of the others as I do not know them as well as you, but I hope that when you see them you will mention that I would have written them if I had known their correct addresses.

Louis Hill, Jr.¹



This 1913 photo of James J. Hill, standing left alongside his private railway car, A-18, and his second son, Louis W. Hill, middle ground right, visually documents the relationship Robert C. Minor, background center in white jacket, had with the Hill family. Minor, a black steward employed by the Great Northern Railway, was responsible for the food supplies and cooking on the A-18 and taking care of many of Hill’s personal needs when he traveled by rail. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Louis W. Hill Jr. wrote this brief letter to Walter Minor shortly after the death of Robert C. Minor, the long-time steward on James J. Hill’s private railway car and one of the black employees of the Great Northern Railway at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a good place to begin this narrative. Who was the man that was the recipient of two separate Hill family trusts and who elicited such kind words from Jim Hill’s grandson?

For most of his adult life, Robert Clark Minor was an employee of the Great Northern Railway. Much has been written about the men of color who worked as porters for the Pullman Company, the developer and largest operator of sleeping cars on American railroads. Others, like Minor, were employed by the railroads as dining and sleeping car workers. All had long hours on the job each day, spent many days away from their homes, and experienced difficult working conditions. In a host of ways, their story was Robert Minor’s story; however his position as steward and cook on James J. Hill’s private rail car for more than twenty years makes his story a bit different.²

James J. Hill, builder and president of the Great Northern, was known for his strong work ethic and his attention to every little detail. Hard work and long hours were the norm for Minor as well. He was responsible for ordering and keeping precise accounts of supplies for the private car trips. Confidentiality was an important consideration for a person in Minor’s position. On trips Hill was often accompanied by business associates discussing sensitive financial matters.

Although we do not have specific material that speaks to the personal relationship between Minor and Hill, there is documentation that demonstrates the respect and trust that existed between the two men.

Born in 1863

In the James J. Hill Papers at the Minnesota Historical Society, the research material on Minor and his position with the railway, where after 1897 he worked exclusively for Hill, includes letters, cables, and financial records that document how Minor went about his job. Along with a few photographs, these records supply some personal tidbits that will help the reader to “see” Robert Minor.

No family photographs, letters, or descendant memories appear to have survived Minor. Therefore this narrative will use the oral histories and material about life in the St. Paul community where Minor lived to form a context of his private life. Public documents furnish the statistics that help to place Minor in his birthplace of Houma, Louisiana and his adult life in St. Paul, Minnesota.

According to his death certificate, Robert Clark Minor was born in Houma, Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana on July 29, 1863 in the midst of America’s Civil War. Whether his father or his mother was a slave, white, or a free mulatto is unknown.

Houma was named after the American Indian tribe of Houma people. By 1834 European settlers had moved into the area and the city was incorporated in 1848. At the time of Minor’s birth, Louisiana was a slave state and the area had a number of sugar plantations. His father is listed as Clark Minor; his mother’s name is not shown.³

Federal census records for 1880 have two listings for “laborers” named Robert Minor. One is a 17-year-old living in Louisiana; the other is an 18-year-old man living in Mississippi. The next listing found for Minor is in the 1890 *Saint Paul City Directory*. It reports that he was rooming at 93 Summit Avenue and was employed as a waiter at the Aberdeen Hotel. In the 1893 directory, he is listed as a dining car waiter on the Northern Pacific Railway and rooming at 300 Carroll Avenue. The 1895 directory shows Minor now working as a porter on the Great Northern Railway.⁴

Minor married Addie Mae Crawford on April 15, 1896 in Chicago. They returned to St. Paul and purchased a home at 324 Farrington Street, where they lived until 1908 when they moved to a new home at 471 West Central Avenue



On September 25, 1916, The Appeal, an African-American newspaper published in St. Paul, printed this photo of Addie Minor, who also advertised her work as a music teacher in The Helper, a publication of the St. James A.M.E. Church, where the Minors were members. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

but seemed to have retained ownership of the Farrington property. The Minors had four children: twins, Clinton Hill and Robert Hill born August 13, 1902; a daughter, Leah Mae, born January 4, 1904; and Walter Jerome, who was born on August 12, 1905. Minor was a member of the Mason’s Pioneer Lodge No.1 and St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church where he was at one time a steward of the church. Surviving records show that James Hill contributed to the reduction of the debt of St. James Church on more than one occasion.⁵

Scant information can be found on Robert and Addie’s children. There is a census record for 1930 that shows both Clinton and Robert living in Montana and working for the Great Northern Railway. Leah married and lived in North Carolina and later in Texas where she taught in the music department at Prairie View A&M

University. The youngest child, Walter J. Minor, became a physician. After high school, he attended Macalester College for his freshman year and then transferred to the University of Minnesota where he received his medical degree in 1931. In 1932 he began his practice in Houston, Texas. Dr. Walter Minor’s biographical profile on the University of Houston website reads in part:

Houston Negro Hospital was the only [Houston] hospital during that time where Dr. Minor could practice as a black physician under segregation laws. . . . He served as president of the medical staff and chief of surgery during his time there. Because of segregation, not only was Dr. Minor not allowed to work in other hospitals, but he was also excluded from professional medical organizations. He persisted, however, and finally in 1954 he was admitted into the Harris County [Texas] Medical Society. As a result of this membership status, he was permitted to join other hospital staffs in the area. . . . In 1984, Dr. Minor was honored by Riverside General Hospital for over fifty years of achievement and service as a Houston physician.⁶



The home of Addie and Robert Minor at 471 West Central Avenue in St. Paul. Photo reproduced from The Appeal, September 25, 1910. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



The Great Northern Railway's "President's Special," known simply as A-18, was purchased for Hill in 1900. This would be Robert Minor's railroad home for almost twenty years. Photo courtesy of Arthur D. Durbin and the Great Northern Railway Historical Association.

The Rondo Neighborhood

From 1890 until his death in 1947, Minor lived and raised his family in the St. Paul neighborhood, now known as Rondo. In the early 1900s, Rondo was racially diverse; however discriminatory real estate practices that excluded African Americans from home ownership in some areas of the city resulted in many black people buying homes in this neighborhood.

Rondo contained many African-American-owned businesses that served everyday needs. Residents shopped, visited the doctor, attended religious services, and had their hair cut or their will drawn up in the neighborhood. Those pursuits, as well as organized activities for children, and social clubs for adults, resulted in a close-knit community. David Vassar Taylor writes in the foreword of *Voices of Rondo: Oral Histories of Saint Paul's Historic Black Community*, the people, "developed organizations and activities designed to educate, provide recreational outlets, and to attend to their spiritual needs, and the Black press kept the community in contact with national movements."⁷

Perhaps owing to the amount of time Minor was away from home, a random search of *The Appeal*, St. Paul's African American newspaper, only turned up a couple references to him. In the December 26, 1891 issue a review of the Elite Soiree reports, "The most recherché

affair of the season was the first grand musical and literary entertainment given by the Elite Social Club." Robert Minor is listed as president of the Club and he gave the opening address. Following the program, guests enjoyed supper with "toothsome viands," danced to the Prof. Kleist Orchestra, and finally "at 2:30 carriages were called and the happy throng departed for their homes."⁸

On the other hand, *The Appeal* mentions Addie Minor frequently. She was a "music teacher [and] leading soprano in St. Paul." There are a number of reports of concerts, plays, and musical events that mention Addie or Mrs. Minor. For *The Appeal's* Quarto-Centennial Celebration, Addie performed a solo, "Butterfly." Congratulations printed in the newspaper on the occasion included:

We will do all we can to make the Quarto-Centennial an event to be long remembered.
Mr. and Mrs. R.C. Minor

Addie was very active in the choir of the St. James AME Church. *The Helper*, the newsletter of the church, included an advertisement reading:

Musical Instruction
Mrs. Minor
Piano and vocal lessons
given at her residence or your home.
Piano 50 cents, voice \$1.00

Leah Mae Minor, Robert and Addie's daughter, inherited her mother's musi-

cal talent. In *Voices of Rondo*, Kathryn Coram Gagnon remembers Leah's participation in activities at Hallie Q. Brown Community Center where she was involved with the music programs.⁹

Working for the Railroad

As mentioned, the Great Northern Railway was an employer of many men who lived in Rondo. In her memoir of growing up in this neighborhood, *Days of Rondo*, Evelyn Fairbanks writes,

These jobs were considered to be excellent with steady work and good tips. The Black class system did not operate by ranking actual jobs. Status was based on who you worked for rather than what you did, with self-employment being the highest.¹⁰

Robert Minor, based on this "ranking," must have held a fairly high status within the Rondo community given the work he did for James Hill.

In January 1897 Charlie Holt, who was then the steward on Hill's private car, died. His wife sent a note to Frank Ward, general superintendent of the Great Northern Railway, requesting help in covering \$103 in funeral costs for her husband. Ward writes "Mr. Hill said that \$100 be sent to Mrs. Holt & that 'Robert' (the colored man downstairs) will convey it to her." In October of that same year Mrs. Holt died and her funeral expenses were paid by Hill as well.¹¹

The "Robert" mentioned by Frank Ward must be Minor. He began working for the Great Northern in 1895 and occasionally was recruited to serve at events held in Hill's home at 240 Summit Avenue.

—September 1895 payment in full for services rendered on occasion of reception on 5th instant at 240 Summit Avenue. \$3

—October 14, 1895 payment in full for services as waiter on occasion of Bishop Whipple reception. \$3

In any case, Minor did take over the duties as Hill's steward after the death of Holt.¹²

Wherever the "President's Special" went, Minor was in charge of the preparations and ensured that everything progressed smoothly for the Empire Builder and occasionally his family members. Business trips from St. Paul to Seattle to maintain the viability of the Great Northern lines were the norm, as were trips east to New York City where Hill conducted much of the financial activities of his railway concerns. For James J. Hill, railroad operations and the financial investment vital to their continued success were his main concerns.¹³

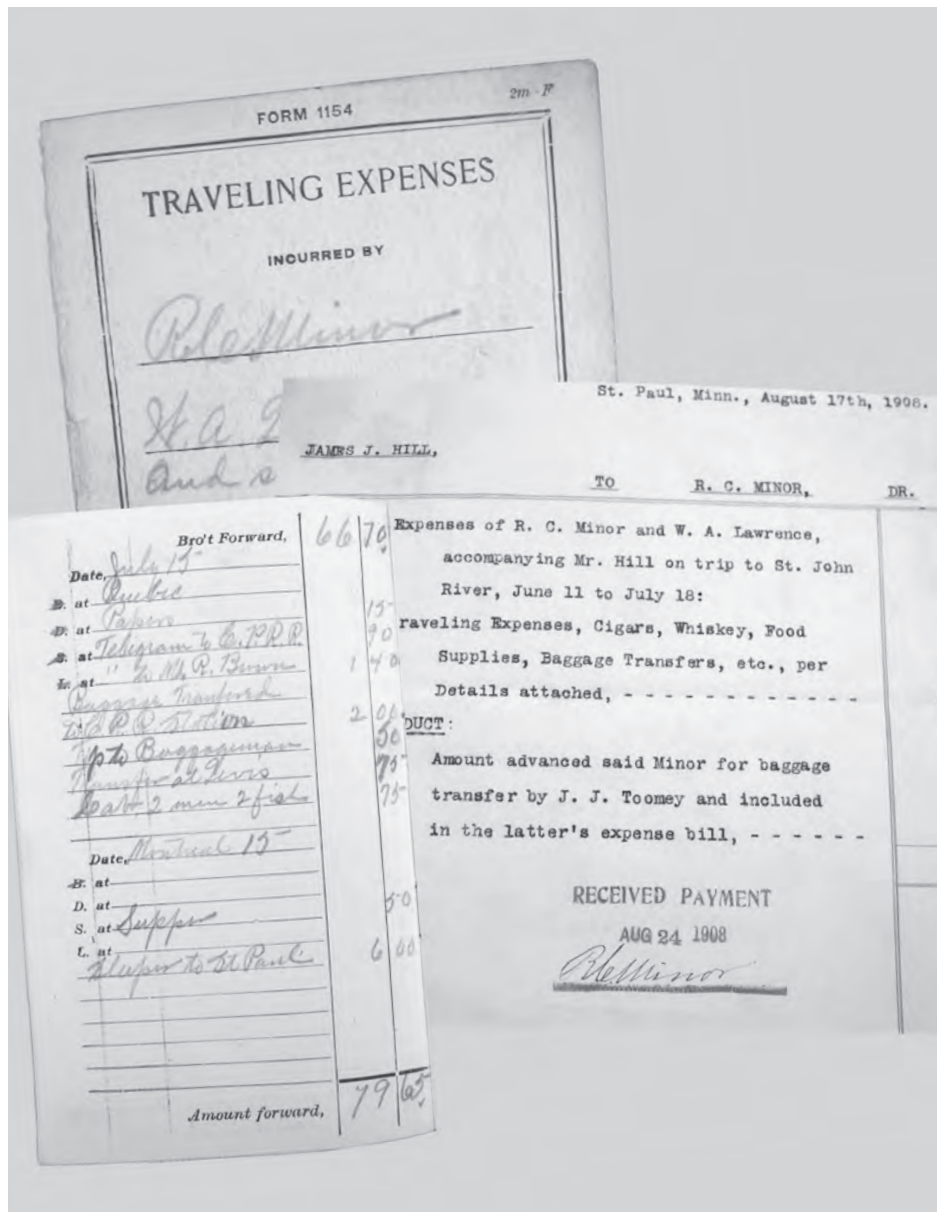
We know that in addition to his work on the A-18, Minor also worked in the railway office when Hill was there. In April 1903 David Weed, captain of Hill's yacht *Wacouta*, wrote to John Toomey, Hill's private secretary, suggesting that perhaps Minor could come to the yacht right away and remain until Hill's annual fishing trip in late June. Weed had a new cook and wanted Minor to teach him "Mr. Hill's way of cooking." Weed wrote:

I would like for him to come as soon as he can so to get stores before we leave the dock as I would rather he would order what he thinks Mr Hill would like.

Don't think Roberts color will make any trouble for me as the officers like him very much. . . .

Toomey responded to Weed,

You seem to have a wrong impression in regard to Robert, as he has other duties to perform other than accompanying Mr. Hill



This composite photo shows the cover of Robert Minor's July 1908 expense book for a trip to the Saint John River fishing camp. The page for July 15 shows expenses that Minor had that day, including newspapers, telegrams, baggage expenses, bait purchased for fishing, meals, and tips. The portion of the third page contains a record of the reimbursement Minor received in August for these July expenses with his signature at the bottom acknowledging the payment. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

on the fishing trip to the River St. John annually. Robert is Head Porter on Mr. Hill's private car, and, in addition to taking charge of Mr. Hill and his friends when they make a trip by rail, he has other parties to look after who use the car during Mr. Hill's absence. When not employed on the car he is on duty in the waiting room adjoining the President's Office, and is kept quite busy most of the time with the visitors to that office. Under the circumstances I do not see how we can

comply with your request in this regard as Mr. Hill spends a good deal more time in the West than on the "Wacouta," and it would not do to put another man in the place of Robert, who has had years of training and is very familiar with everything.¹⁴

The annual salmon fishing trips to the Saint John River in Quebec were the only real vacation that Hill ever took. In 1900 Hill purchased both the *Wacouta*,



Mary T. Hill, left, and James J. Hill. This photo was taken shortly before James' death in May 1916. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

a 245-foot sail/steam yacht, and a lease on a salmon river. Every year from 1900 until Hill's last trip in 1915, the two-week trip to the Hill Camp required planning that began in early April. Minor was an important player in the preparations. He often went to New York City to confer with Captain Weed on the supplies that would be needed for the trip, both for the yacht's storeroom and for the lodge on the river. Minor was given a cash advance or credit authority to purchase supplies. His personal expenses and random purchases for Hill were meticulously recorded in a "Traveling Expenses" book. The little book for the 1908 trip shows travel expenses and such "random" charges as "100 cigars, 4 bottles whiskey, 6 sponges, 1 bottle Listerine, cod tongues (on four dates), eggs, etc."¹⁵

The correspondence and voucher records for the fishing trips are extensive. Hill invited many of the same friends each year and the remoteness of the camp meant Toomey had to arrange everyone's transportation, often on short notice. Toomey also had to be in constant contact with the guardians of the river to ascertain when the ice was out, have them procure sufficient guides, and prepare the

lodge for the fishermen. Then all would wait in anticipation for the first salmon to be spotted going up river and the trip would begin!

When Minor sailed on the *Wacouta*, he would help with the meal preparation onboard. While on the river he almost always brought an assistant to help with both the cooking and serving of meals to Hill and his guests. If Hill or any guests

were coming to Quebec City by rail from St. Paul, then Minor would normally be in the car, and the yacht would pick everyone up for the two-day trip down the Saint Lawrence to the Hill Camp.

Of course Minor's trip to the Saint John River was just an interval in a year filled with business trips and family trips. He was often away from home for days or sometimes weeks at a time.



Dressed for work in the kitchen about 1912, Robert Minor holds a 34-pound salmon that George C. Clark caught while he was a guest at Hill's Saint John River fishing lodge in Quebec. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



On September 15, 1918 members of the Great Northern Railway Veterans Association gathered at the family cemetery on the Hill farm in North Oaks for a memorial service to honor the late James J. Hill. Mary Hill stands to the left of the Celtic cross with daughters Charlotte Hill Slade and Clara Hill and grandchildren seated in front of her.

Minor was an employee of the Great Northern and his monthly wage of \$75 was paid by the railroad. It does not seem to have increased from 1897 to 1916. There is perhaps a reason for this. In 1892 his predecessor, Charlie Holt, asked for an increase from \$60 to \$75 (\$75 is roughly equal to \$1,800 in today's dollars). The Great Northern superintendent of Dining and Sleeping Cars wrote Hill saying, "As I understand the extra money that he makes on his car amounts to considerable. If you would look after him it will prevent the rest from asking an increase or feel that they were not paid relatively." It seems from a handwritten note on this letter that Hill agreed to "look after him." It is likely that the same arrangement applied to Minor's salary.¹⁶

Trips to New York City or west on the rail lines were fairly frequent. Normally Minor would determine how long the trip would be and how many people were traveling in the car and stock A-18 accordingly. He ordered supplies from the railroad commissary and placed requests for perishables to be picked up at depots along the way. When family members used the car for personal travel, Minor often found himself with various additional duties.

Mary Hill and her children, Rachel, Clara, Gertrude and Walter, took car A-18 to visit the World's Fair in St. Louis for six days in October 1904. Before leaving

St. Louis, Minor purchased some additional supplies for the trip home (grapefruit, celery, apples, milk and cream, and bread) and was reimbursed for the \$5.05 he spent. In 1912 Mary Hill made her only visit to Hill Camp in Quebec. On the way back to the yacht, they found the launch could not cross the sand bar and they waited for four hours. She wrote in her diary, "Robert thoughtfully brought along some food and prepared lunch for us in R. Chambers home [at Saint John Village at the mouth of the river]."¹⁷

Mary's diaries mention Minor many times, often just writing that he met them in Chicago, on their way home from New York, or arrived with "Papa" or family members, "Louis, Maud, Papa, George and Robert left for home via Erie R. R. today at 2 p.m." On the day Louis Hill Sr. was married in New York City, Mary wrote, "John Upham and Robert are working to get all in order for the great event." From Jekyl Island, South Carolina in 1908 she wrote, "... Charlotte and children arrived in good time quite well; not fatigued. Robert came on car with them; bringing a birthday cake for Charlotte. It is her birthday."¹⁸

During the late summer of 1901, Minor was in the East for over a month. We know this because, once again the Hill Papers have a voucher that he submitted for reimbursement of \$110.51, expenses from August 4th to September

5th. That summer the Hills leased an apartment in New York and Minor helped with hanging curtains, repairing furniture and running errands when the family was not traveling in A-18 or sailing on the *Wacouta*. Minor shopped for food, picked up laundry, purchased furnishings, and handled all travel arrangements and provisioning of the rail car. From his receipts we know he spent time in Boston and Bar Harbor, Maine; however most of the time he was in New York City.¹⁹

The winter of 1905 found Mary Hill seriously ill with lung and heart problems and in early February she went to Jekyl Island, where the Hills had an apartment, and later to a clinic in the Adirondacks for treatment. She was away from home for over six months and Hill spent much of the time with her. From what can be gathered, Minor was also away from his family for extended periods during this time. A-18 was in use often for Mary Hill's travels, her family's visits, and for physicians coming from New York City.

Based on these examples of extremely long trips that Minor took with the Hill family, we also have to wonder what was happening at home on Farrington Avenue. In 1905 Addie Minor had three-year-old twin boys, a one-year-old daughter, and was pregnant with her fourth child, due in August. Her situation was the same as other families of railroad workers who lived in Rondo. The women became very



The far left side of the panoramic photo on this page shows the president of the Veterans, William J. McMillan, kneeling apart. Robert Minor is shown standing in the back row, second man from the right edge of the group. Photo courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

independent out of necessity. In *Voices of Rondo*, a number of the essays speak to employment on the railroad and the harsh, discriminatory conditions and heavy work schedules that impacted individual lives and families.

Robert Minor may have had an easier time on the road than his fellow dining car waiters; however he certainly experienced the same discrimination and heavy work schedule that they endured. Although the Hills seemed to appreciate and value him, I doubt any of them ever said to themselves, “I must ask Robert if my leaving for New York on Tuesday instead of Thursday as planned is convenient for him, since he has hardly been home with his family this month.” As with many of his fellow railroad workers his value was primarily that he did his job well and as Toomey wrote, “*it would not do to put another man in the place of Robert, who has had years of training and is very familiar with everything.*”²⁰

In Recognition of Faithful Service

On April 13, 1916, James Hill arrived home from New York on the A-18. It would be the last trip he and Robert Minor would make together. On May 29, 1916, after a brief illness, James J. Hill died at the age of seventy-seven. The funeral was held in the parlor of his home on Summit Avenue and Mary Hill chose

Robert Minor to be one of the pallbearers for her husband. Since Hill had died intestate, family members met to discuss a few people they felt their husband/father would have wanted to be remembered. They all decided that Minor should receive a trust that read as follows:

JAMES J. HILL ESTATE—February 6, 1917
 AGREEMENT BETWEEN
 NORTHWESTERN TRUST COMPANY
 AND HEIRS OF JAMES J. HILL
 RE: \$5,000 TRUST FUND
 LIFE TENANT: ROBERT MINOR

We, the undersigned, heirs at law of James J. Hill, as an evidence of our appreciation, and in recognition of the faithful service of Robert C. Minor to our husband and father, hereby request Louis W. Hill, as administrator of the estate and as a gift from each of us in proportion to our respective interests in said estate, out of the funds now in the possession as administrator, to assign, transfer and set over to the Northwestern Trust Company of Saint Paul, Minnesota, the sum of five thousand dollars, in trust and to be invested and reinvested in good farm mortgages bearing interest, if practicable, at the rate of six per centum (6%) per annum; the net income from said trust fund to be paid monthly to ROBERT C. MINOR, of Saint Paul, Minnesota, during his natural life; and, upon his death, the principal of said trust fund together with any income then undis-

tributed shall be paid over, absolutely, to the JAMES JEROME HILL REFERENCE LIBRARY, a corporation created and existing under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Minnesota.²¹

After the death of James Hill, Minor remained as steward on Car A-18 when the car was used by Mary Hill for trips to New York City or Jekyl Island and for other trips the car was scheduled to take. In 1919 and 1920 Minor accompanied Hill family members to the Saint John River for salmon fishing. On May 5, 1920 Anson Beard, one of Hill’s sons-in-law, wrote to John Toomey:

Will you be kind enough to ask Robert Minor if he has a list of the supplies which he purchased in Quebec for the salmon fishing party and the name of the man who furnished the supplies; if so, will you kindly send the list to me? Also ask Robert if it will be possible for him and his boy [Walter] to join us this year.

Minor subsequently cabled Beard on May 25th: “Have arranged to make the trip and will be ready to leave here about June twelfth arriving Quebec fourteenth.”²²

In a letter to her daughter Gertrude, on September 16, 1918, Mary Hill wrote:

Today is Papa’s 80th birthday. The [Great Northern Railway] Veterans observed it memorably in large number about 400 came

out bringing flowers, the Banner They sang three hymns. There was a short address mostly to the men and recalling their "Chief." The whole gathering was photographed. Then each dropped a white carnation on the grave and came down to the house for a short while. I think it is a most impressive sight to see so many old and elderly men. This is Roberts first year of being a veteran. None felt the solemnity of the ceremony more than he. As he dropped his carnation tears ran down his cheeks. The only colored member.²³

The Great Northern Railway Veterans Association was formed in 1913 and its members were men who had worked for the railroad for at least 25 years.

In 1919 Mary Hill formed trusts for eleven valued employees who had served the family in jobs such as nurse, chauffeur, houseman, and handyman. She included Minor:

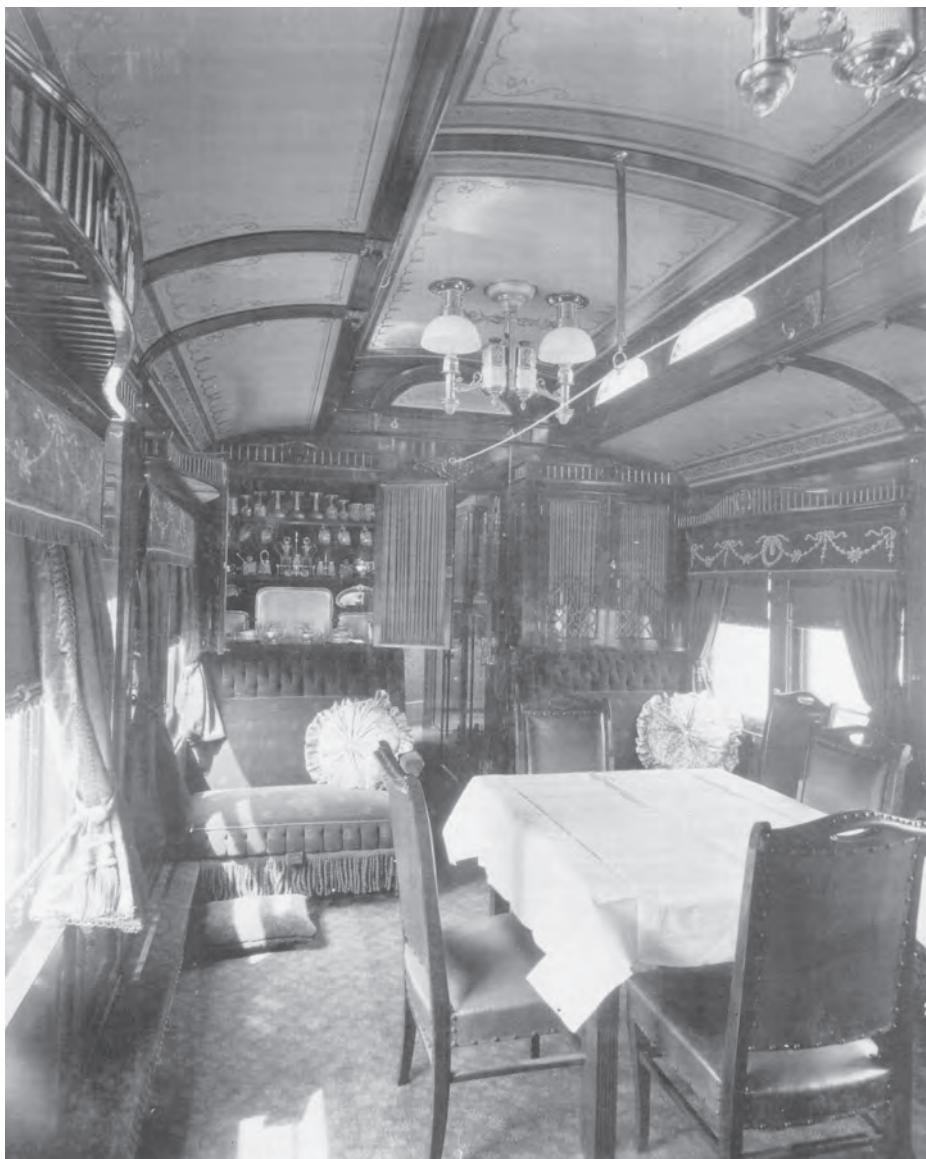
MARY T. HILL TRUST—November 26, 1919

I, Mary T. Hill, of the City of St. Paul, Minnesota do hereby assign and deliver to Northwestern Trust Company of St. Paul, as Trustee, Great Northern Railway Company First and Refunding Gold Mortgage Bonds of the par or face value hereinafter specified, in trust for the following purpose:

Such bonds to the amount of Two Thousand Dollars (\$2,000.00) in trust for Robert C. Minor, of St. Paul, Minnesota, formerly employee of the Great Northern Railway Company, the income to be paid to him for the term of five (5) years from the date hereof; upon the expiration of the period of five (5) years or upon the earlier death of Robert C. Minor, the trust shall terminate and the property so set apart shall be paid over and delivered to him, his heirs, executors, administrators or assigns.²⁴

Mary Hill was in fragile health during the last two years of her life and was confined to her home for much of that time. On July 23, 1920 she noted in her diary, "Robert Minor came in to see me today. Told me about his children." She died on November 21, 1921.²⁵

In 1915 the Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railways and First National Bank of Saint Paul, all Hill controlled entities, moved into a new



The dining area of Hill's private railroad car, A-18. Robert Minor spent many working hours in this place. Photo courtesy of Arthur D. Durbin and the Great Northern Railway Historical Association.

building on Fifth and Jackson Streets. By 1920, when Minor no longer was needed on the private car, he began a new job as an elevator operator in the bank area of the new building. He remained at the bank until his retirement.

Robert Minor died on May 11, 1947, at the age of 83 years, from lung cancer. He was in Asheville, North Carolina at the home of his daughter, Leah Minor Butler, at the time of his death. The Great Northern Railway arranged for his remains to be returned to St. Paul for the funeral service and burial. The following

cable was sent to Leah from the St. Paul office of the railroad:

Leah Minor Butler

Have arranged the following which you may call for on the way to St. Paul. Southern at depot agent Asheville thence Cincinnati. New York Central at depot agent Cincinnati thence Chicago, Ill. CB&Q at Union Station Chicago, thence St. Paul.

C. E. Finley.²⁶

On May 15, 1947 Robert Clark Minor arrived at St. Paul's Union Depot, his final train journey home.

Afterthought

During the long trips to Seattle and New York, Hill and Minor were often the only people in car A-18. Since Hill worked almost nonstop, I am sure he spent much of his time doing business; however we know that he did relax occasionally by playing solitaire or doing puzzles. In conclusion I want to offer a bit of speculation. As I wrote early in this piece, we have no specific written documentation showing what the relationship was between these two men. The length of time Minor worked on A-18 shows he was valued, and after Hill's death the Hill family demonstrated the high regard they had for Robert Minor. This is the picture I have in my mind.

Opening Scene:

March 1909, evening.
Dining room of car A-18 on the Great Northern Railway tracks, somewhere between Chinook and East Glacier, Montana.

Actors:

James Hill—sitting at a table with a puzzle spread out before him.
Robert Minor—entering the room.

Dialogue:

HILL: "Well Bob that was a great dinner. You know how much I love pigs-feet and Mrs. Hill never serves them at home."
MINOR: "I am glad you enjoyed dinner." He stands watching the progress of the

puzzle and points to a piece. "I think that may be part of the cow's ear."

Ending Scene:

Hill and Minor sitting at the table working on the puzzle as the train speeds west to Seattle.

Curtain.²⁷

Eileen R. McCormack thanks Marvin Roger Anderson for his help with the research for this article. She has a Master of Liberal Studies in history, museum studies, and historic preservation from the University of Minnesota and collaborated with Biloine W. Young in publishing The Dutiful Son: Louis W. Hill (2010). She is also a partner in Archival Solutions, LLP, St. Paul, Minn.

Notes

1. Louis W. Hill Jr. letter to Walter J. Minor, May 19, 1947, Louis W. Hill Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota [hereinafter referred to as LWHP].

2. For background on the work experiences of black Pullman porters, see for example, Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Patricia and Frederick McKissack, *A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter* (New York: Walker and Co., 1989); and Arthur C. McWatt, "A Greater Victory: The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in St. Paul," *Minnesota History*, 55, no. 5 (Spring 1997): 202–16.

3. Public Record information such as census, birth, death records, and marriage certificates are from www.Ancestry.com unless otherwise noted.

4. Residence and work position information, from Saint Paul City Directory Collection, City Plat Maps & Building Permit Collection, unless otherwise noted, Ramsey County Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

5. Some of James Hill's contributions to St. James A.M.E. Church: March 1898, \$100; August 1898, \$500; October 1913, \$100. James J. Hill Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota [hereinafter referred to as JJHP].

6. www.history.uh.edu/cph/tobearfruit/resources_bios_minor.html

7. Kathleen Jill Hope Cavett, ed., *Voices of Rondo: Oral Histories of Saint Paul's Historic Black Community* (Minneapolis: Syren Book Company, 2005), xiv–xv.

8. *The Appeal*, December 26, 1891, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota [hereinafter referred to as MHS].

9. *The Appeal*, September 1910, MHS; *The Helper*, May 7, 1916, St. James A.M.E. Church, MHS; Cavett, 165.

10. Evelyn Fairbanks, *Days of Rondo* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990), 94–95.

11. January 16, 1897, voucher 1985; October 7, 1897, voucher 3436, JJHP.

12. September 1895, voucher 1419; October 14, 1895, voucher 1610, JJHP.

13. Information on railroad questions was graciously supplied by members of the Great Northern Railway Historical Society; a special thank you to Ken Middleton who shared scans of the exterior and dining room of car A-18 that were used in his article, "Great Northern Official and Business Cars," *GNRHS Reference Sheet No. 333*, March 2006, pp. 9–16. Original photos were in American Car & Foundry Photographs from the collection of Arthur D. Dubin.

14. David Weed letter to John Toomey, April 28, 1903; John Toomey letter to David Weed, May 13, 1903, JJHP.

15. August 17, 1908, voucher 31828, JJHP.

16. George Burney letter to C.W. Case to James J. Hill, October 26–27, 1892, JJHP.

17. December 1904, voucher 22363, JJHP; Mary T. Hill Diary, July 14, 1912, LWHP

18. Mary T. Hill Diary, September 2, 1901; June 5, 1901; and February 26, 1908, LWHP.

19. September 1901, voucher 13744, JJHP.

20. John Toomey letter to David Weed, May 13, 1903, JJHP.

21. James J. Hill Estate, February 9, 1917, LWHP.

22. Anson Beard letter to John Toomey, May 5, 1920; Robert Minor letter to Anson Beard, May 25, 1920, LWHP.

23. Mary T. Hill letter to Gertrude Gavin, September 16, 1918, Boeckmann and Ffolliott Families Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

24. Mary T. Hill Estate, November 26, 1919, LWHP.

25. Mary T. Hill Diary, July 23, 1920, LWHP.

26. C. E. Finley (GNR Vice President) to Leah M. Butler, May 13, 1947, LWHP.

27. Eileen R. McCormack, Speculation.

R.C.H.S.

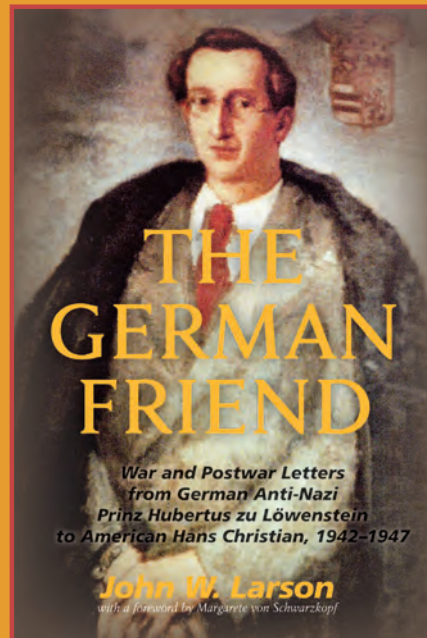
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