

Tikkun Olam

**Jewish Women Serving Their
St. Paul Community**

KATE DIETRICK, GABRIELLE HORNER, AND
JANET KAMPF, PAGE 11



Our Lady of Good Counsel/Our Lady of Peace

**Two Names, Decades of Daily Mercy, and Innumerable
Blessings at St. Paul's Free Hospice Home**

CHRISTINA CAPECCHI, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

Jewish women in the Twin Cities have served communities in need since the late 1800s and continue to do so today. One organization is the National Council of Jewish Women Minnesota, which formed as separate sections in St. Paul and Minneapolis in 1893. Check out what this now-combined organization has accomplished in the last year—during a pandemic, no less!

Amount spent on programs and services:
\$105,566

Funding provided to local public school families in financial crisis:
\$13,522

Books distributed to free libraries in a St. Paul neighborhood through the Books to Borrow initiative:
1,800

Hygiene products delivered through the Just Periods program:
41,484

Number of women involved in the Muslim and Jewish Women of Minnesota initiative who contacted state lawmakers about economic security and gender justice at a virtual “Day at the Capitol” event:
66

The Minnesota NCJW has accomplished much over 128 years, thanks, in part, to the early efforts of their first- and second-generation predecessors—five leaders are featured in “*Tikkun Olam: Jewish Women Serving Their St. Paul Community*” on page 11.

SOURCE: National Council of Jewish Women Minnesota, *2020-2021 Annual Report*, <https://www.ncjwmn.org/2020-2021-annual-report/>.

ON THE COVER



Sister Mary Regina shares a rosary with a patient so she may spend time reflecting at Our Lady of Good Counsel Home. This free care facility opened in St. Paul in 1941. Today it is known as Our Lady of Peace Hospice. *Undated photo by Richard Schweizer, courtesy of the Dominican Sisters, Congregation of St. Rose of Lima.*

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Message from the Editorial Board

Legacy builders see needs and deficits and, through personal transformation, become the people who usher in better ways to address issues. Such are the legacies of several leaders featured in *Ramsey County History* this November.

Over fifty years, Mother Alphonsa, her friend Mother Rose, and the Hawthorne Dominicans opened seven free hospice homes for the cancerous poor—including St. Paul’s Our Lady of Good Counsel. Mother Alphonsa’s ministry took her on a long journey from her beginnings as a privileged child of American author Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In the late 1800s, three Jewish immigrant women settled in St. Paul—Hannah Austrian, Sophie Wirth, and Annie Paper. Each helped found or contributed to organizations to provide relief for impoverished Jewish families, embrace the resettling of immigrants, support education and job training, and rally for other basic rights. Their work inspired and mentored a second generation of leaders, including Gretta Freeman and Rhoda Redleaf, who with others from the National Council of Jewish Women, piloted a prekindergarten program—a precursor to Head Start.

Empire Builder James J. Hill centered much of his philanthropy on community building. Hill’s own formal education ended when he was young, but he always nurtured an abiding love of learning through books. The James J. Hill Reference Library in downtown St. Paul was his final gift to his adopted city.

This issue celebrates the vision, determination, and the communities of generosity built by these several extraordinary people and the organizations with which they were associated.

Anne Field
Chair, Editorial Board

Correction: Regrets to Dr. David Lanegran, professor emeritus in the Department of Geography at Macalester College. He was incorrectly identified in “*The Aesthetics of Bridge Design: A Paean to Two of St. Paul’s Elegant Park Bridges*,” which ran in the Summer 2021 issue of *Ramsey County History*.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks former Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr., and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon. Sincere thanks to Our Lady of Peace Hospice for their financial support.

Closing the Book

The James Jerome Hill Reference Library, 1921-2021

EILEEN MCCORMACK

To see student reactions to the Hill Library following a 1971 field trip, go to <https://publishing.rchs.com/publishing/magazine/ramsey-county-history-magazine-volume-56-3-fall-2021/>.

... the Hill Reference Library, where I used to sit at a dark wood table writing my high school term papers. It was the room where, in a way, I first was a writer, bent to my task, closed into a majestic room lined to the ceiling with books, books, books. The most beautiful room I'd ever sat in—and somehow, it was mine. I could come in, claim my place, snap on the study lamp, and be—at home and also off to the wonderful, otherly Elsewhere I longed for.¹

—PATRICIA HAMPL, WRITER

In June 2019, when the James J. Hill Center Board of Directors announced the formal closing of the iconic building at Fourth and Market Streets in St. Paul, people came downtown for one last visit—many to say goodbye to an

institution that had been part of their lives for decades and some who had never been inside the library but were curious. The reaction of those visitors was awe. The wonderment upon stepping inside the stunning edifice must have been similar to that which patrons experienced in 1921 when the James Jerome Hill Reference Library first opened.

Entering the lobby and continuing through the glass-paneled French doors into the reading room that ran almost the full length of the building never failed to impress. The marble floors and large study tables with leather chairs and beautiful ornamented study lamps filled the room's center, with many smaller tables in the bookshelf alcoves along both sides. Fluted ionic colonnades ultimately took ones' eyes to

The grand reading room on the first level of the James J. Hill Center shortly after the building sold in 2021. Courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewske and Leaetta Hough.

Study tables were often filled with high school and college students, teachers, authors, and business researchers, including the scholars seen here in the 1960s. Copy of original courtesy of Eileen McCormack.



the skylight, six levels above. And books, books, books on every level.

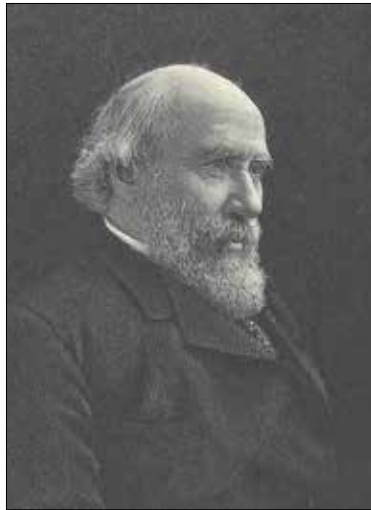
The Hill Library was James J. Hill's final gift to St. Paul. His lifetime philanthropy was centered on community building in the areas where his Great Northern Railway operated. Education was always a focus. Although his formal schooling ended when he was fourteen, he had absorbed the strong practical studies of science, history, and geography and nurtured a deep love of reading. He owed his success to hard work, books, and dreams born of literary adventures. An original library memo stated, "It is the intention to create and maintain a selected, practical, living reference library as an aid to scholarship, investigation and research."² This was a place where St. Paulites could conduct research, study, or gather for events, lectures, concerts, or community meetings.

Getting Ready to Build a Library

In 1912, Hill retired as chairman of the board of the Great Northern Railway and began planning his reference library in his adopted hometown of St. Paul. One man who had Hill's ear and was instrumental in the early planning was Joseph Pyle. Pyle, editor of the *The St. Paul Globe*, which Hill owned for a decade, was also Hill's speechwriter and would later author the first Hill biography. Hill personally selected Pyle to head his special library.³

Hill wrote his friend and business associate, J. Pierpont Morgan in Manhattan, "I am getting ready to build a reference library in St. Paul and . . . I would be greatly obliged if you would send me a photograph showing the general outside appearance of your library."⁴ New York architect Electus D. Litchfield incorporated classical designs from Morgan's institution when he completed his drawings for Hill. The building, sited between the Mississippi River on the south and Rice Park on the north, was designed in the Beaux-Arts style, which was characterized by massive proportions and a formal design highlighting order and symmetry.⁵

Hill pledged \$750,000 for the structure, and Litchfield designed both Hill's library and an adjoining new public library planned for the remainder of the block. The exterior is pink Tennessee marble; the interior walls and imposing columns are built of Kettle River sandstone.⁶



James J. Hill trusted Joseph Pyle and discussed at length his vision for what the institution would offer the citizens of St. Paul. Pyle shared Hill's vision. Together, they determined what individual books and maps were needed for the library's reference collection. All subjects except law, medicine, and popular fiction would be included, with the largest holdings featuring science, technology, and transportation. *Copies of originals courtesy of Eileen McCormack.*

An Uneven Beginning

From the first shovel that broke ground for the foundation of the Hill Library in 1913 until the day in December 1921 when the library opened to the public, the journey was hampered by several events (including World War I) that jeopardized its completion. When Hill died in May 1916, only the exterior of the library was completed, and most books were yet to be purchased. More importantly, Hill had not made known his arrangements for the institution's continued viability through establishment of an endowment. In fact, Hill, the man who was so attentive to every detail of every project he touched, died without a will.

His wife, Mary, and her family found themselves undertaking operational, managerial, and endowment tasks that her husband would have handled. Family members scrambled to establish a board of trustees. Fortunately, Pyle had worked so closely with Hill that he was able to move ahead with book purchases and staff hires. In early 1917, family heirs agreed to set aside funds for the completion of the library's interior (\$63,000), books (\$100,000), and endowment (\$617,000).⁷

Mary added personal funds to bring the endowment to \$1 million in the five years prior to her death in 1921 and had the bulk of her husband's personal book and art collections delivered to the new library. The endowment

Many of the fixtures Mary Hill and other family members chose for the library can still be seen gracing the walls and ceilings of the building today. In a 1917 "Consent by Heirs of James J. Hill" document, an estimate of expenditures for light fixtures, book racks, furniture and furnishings, and improvement of grounds and sidewalks listed at \$45,000. The family made sure the bills were paid. *Courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewske and Leaetta Hough.*



continued to grow through gifts and bequests from the Hill children in the first fifty years after which, infusions of significant funds to the endowment essentially ceased. The Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation did make many large program grants to the Hill Library over the years.⁸

Hill had left little specific direction to the architect for the interior spaces. On this subject, Litchfield wrote that in 1915 Hill told him, "Go ahead and build the exterior and we will leave the details of the finish and part of its arrangement to be worked on as we go along."⁹ Mary, son Louis, and daughters Charlotte Hill Slade, Rachel Hill Boeckmann, Gertrude Hill Gavin, and Clara Hill were left to make decisions on the interior furnishings.¹⁰

The executed projects appear to be a single imposing structure under one roof. However, each institution is built upon a separate foundation and welcomes guests through separate entrances, with just one connecting interior door. Even though the Hill Library is only about a third of the entire structure, the feature of two formal and balanced entrances allow it to appear to be half of the block-long structure. *Copy of original courtesy of Eileen McCormack.*

Filling the Shelves with Books

From 1912 until Hill's death, Pyle often had daily conversations with his boss about book selection. Hill insisted on, "every work . . . that had contributed something material and enduring to human thought, human knowledge, or human progress."¹¹ In addition, he requested a "general encyclopedia in each of the leading modern languages and . . . a dictionary of every known language that was not archaic or of a mere dialect."¹²

Pyle certainly had his work cut out for him. Although he had a scholar's knowledge in several of the subjects covered, he contacted experts and requested their assistance and collection catalogs. He spread the word to university professors, reference librarians, and museum directors. Pyle also asked for bibliographic lists and created amended booklists (many thousands of titles) to pass on to Hill for approval.¹³

World War I made the purchase of books difficult, especially in the scientific field because many important volumes were from Germany. Pyle kept booksellers constantly occupied locating books for the Hill Library. When the institution opened on December 20, 1921, 10,000 books filled the shelves. In 1940, the annual report noted the library owned ". . . more than 142,000 books and 960 periodicals."¹⁴

Early on, many large and small donations enhanced the collection. These private libraries and individual volumes from family members and friends contained thousands of books and folio editions, many of which included maps



and illustrations. Some books were shelved in the reading room. Numerous rare and valuable items designated as special collections joined Hill's personal books in the Hill Room on the second floor. These materials could be viewed or used for research by appointment only.

Staff at institutions and government departments aware of Pyle's search for books made important gifts during the early years. A listing of these in the library's 1922 annual report shows 210 donors gave 981 volumes, 281 maps, 158 pamphlets, and thirty-one serials to the library. Many were government documents, current books, or periodicals in the transportation, science, and technical fields.¹⁵

Pyle always kept his eyes open for unique books, both for study and exhibiting. In the 1927 annual report, he describes one such accession,

... the eight volume set of *Antiquities of the Russian Empire*, published by order of Czar Nicolas [sic] in 1849 to 1855. . . . all copies were reserved by the Czar for presentation to reigning sovereigns and a few friends, contains 508 sumptuous plates, faithfully reproducing specimens of the art treasures of Russia."¹⁶

Pyle also notes,

... most of the objects of art . . . have probably by now perished from the face of the earth, the settings broken up and the jewels disposed of in the terrible convulsions that have swept the Russian empire for the last ten years.¹⁷

This is just one example of the unique volumes owned by the Hill Library. By 1949, the library held 154,000 volumes and as the number of books grew, so did the number of card catalogs.

Early Library Services and Invaluable Librarians

When students and scholars arrived at the Hill Library having rarely been in a research institution before, the first stop was the librarian's desk to explain their quest. The librarian would suggest consulting the card catalog or might direct searchers to one of the library's subject



bibliographies. Books were pulled and delivered by a blue-smocked page. Several librarians were bilingual. It was a necessary skill because some of the materials—primarily art and science—were written in foreign languages. In other instances for example, if a pen pal hailed from France or another country, librarians could help patrons with their correspondence.

When research was extensive, one of the twelve individual study rooms could serve as a private office. A researcher's notes and books remained undisturbed until the work was completed, even if it took months. Authors, educators, and graduate students used the study rooms, as did government researchers and scientists. During the busy war years, employees from 3M, Honeywell, Economics Laboratory, Inc. (today's Ecolab), and others were at the library regularly. Their research often led to innovation and new product development.

Those who were not serious scholars were welcome to settle down at a reading table and select books on early voyages around the world from 1519 to 1617, eighteenth-century English coffee houses, or pretty much any other subject one wished to peruse.

Pyle saw the space as a "Library for Libraries," and many interlibrary loan requests from around the state and nation were processed weekly. Books on fifteenth century English author Samuel Pepys, arid conditions in North Dakota, the Pleistocene glacial period, Hindu customs, or a

James J. Hill determined the subjects he wanted to include in his collection: general works, philosophy and religion, sciences auxiliary to history, history and topography, American history, geography, economics and sociology, political science, education, music, fine arts, languages and literature, science, agriculture, technology, transportation, military science, naval science, and bibliography. Few such books filled the shelves when this photo was taken in 2021. *Courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewske and Leaetta Hough.*

1922 request from George A. Hormel & Co. for the “*Butchers’, Packers’ and Sausage Makers’ Red Book,*” were dispatched promptly.¹⁸

Correspondence shows how important the library’s role was. For example, on March 27, 1925, in appreciation for the assistance staff had given her, Nelle Olson of the Buhl Public Library in northeastern Minnesota wrote, “The help which such a library as yours gives to the smaller libraries of the state is by no means the least of the fine things it is doing . . .”¹⁹

Perrie Jones, supervisor of Minnesota State Institutional Libraries at the time, was a frequent correspondent with Hill librarians. On occasion, she sent over inmate queries. The prisoners asked many questions. Hill staff researched all and, with one exception, answered all:

- a. Are machine guns on modern airplanes synchronized with the propeller so that the pilot can fire through the propeller without hitting it?

- b. On one seater planes are the guns mounted in the same position as on two seaters?

In a reply to these questions, the suspicious librarian declined to answer, as she explained to Ms. Jones: “As I telephoned you this morning, I do not care to be accessory to a bank robbery with armoured [sic] airplane get away.”²⁰

Exhibiting Literary and Artistic Treasures

The Hill Library was a place for curious minds. The community-based programs and exhibits made the institution a popular place, and praise for the library and its staff often appeared in city newspapers.²¹

The materials that the Hill Library exhibited over the years came from portfolios of prints or plates housed in special collections. Some of the most important exhibits were curated from Hill’s American Indian collections of artists and photographers, including Seth Eastman,

Early Library Leadership

Just three people directed the James Jerome Hill Reference Library in the institution’s first fifty years. These head librarians are still remembered today for their love of books and intense focus on patrons and their ever-varied reading and research requests:

Joseph Gilpin Pyle (1913-1930): At the request of James J. Hill, Joseph Pyle served as head librarian until his death in 1930. Pyle came to Minnesota after graduating from Yale University. He taught at Shattuck, a boarding school in Faribault, Minnesota, and wrote for the *Pioneer Press* before working for Hill, first at *The St. Paul Globe* and then at the Hill Library.^a

Helen K. Starr (1930-1949): Pyle was succeeded by Helen Starr. He hired her in 1918 for the position of chief cataloger of collections. She came to St. Paul from the Library of Congress, so her experience was valuable for a new library. Starr’s tenure in the leadership role took place during the library’s turbulent Great Depression and World War II years. She became the public face of the library in the community. She was a member of many

local and national library groups, spoke and wrote on innovative library projects, and kept the Hill Library in the news. Starr also was responsible for frequent exhibits of the institution’s collections.^b

Russell F. Barnes (1949-1971): Director Russell Barnes, who earned a BA and MA in library science from Columbia University, became head of the Hill Library upon Starr’s retirement, following in the footsteps of his predecessors in collection management with an emphasis on patron service. Taking a page from Starr’s professional book, he was president of the Minnesota Special Libraries Association and served on several St. Paul civic councils. In the 1960s, the board began to consider operational changes. Barnes opposed some of these decisions, especially the termination of book purchases in several subject areas. In 1971, Barnes left the Hill Library. James J. Hill’s granddaughter Mrs. Peter Ffolliott said of Barnes, “He tried hard to follow the wishes of my grandfather . . . He ran a very dignified, nice library. He was always helpful and always available.”^c

Karl Bodmer, Edward Curtis, and George Catlin. These exhibitions also traveled to colleges.

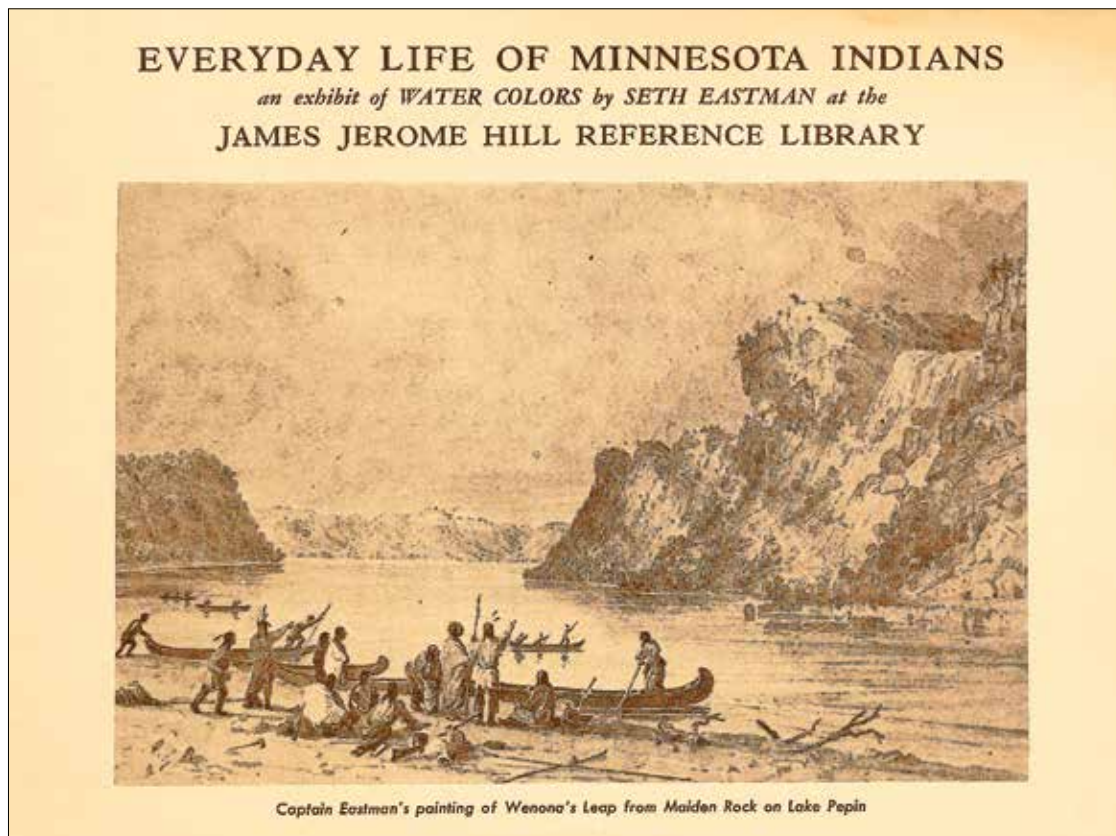
Exhibits were quite popular. Many of the rare books on birds, flowers and gardens, the people and art of India, and famous artists, contained beautiful plates that crowds flocked to see. During the 1950s and '60s, staff displayed the masterpiece *Birds of America* by John James Audubon in an exhibit case in the lobby. Hill had purchased the coveted book for his personal library in 1891. Every day, a librarian turned the page so visitors could admire the exquisite illustrations.²²

Making Changes

It is clear from early Hill Library annual reports that financial challenges were present from the beginning, due, in part, to Hill's death intestate and board concerns that the endowment was not sufficient to adequately fund the institution. Another issue that concerned the board was lower attendance beginning in the late 1940s. In addition, some patrons who formerly used the library extensively now had other



Folio No. 34: illustration of a fork-tailed flycatcher in John James Audubon's *Birds of America*, one of the most coveted books by booksellers and dealers over the last century. In the public domain, accessed on Wikipedia Commons.



This 1958 invite to view a Seth Eastman exhibition at the Hill Library was sent to patrons on occasion of the Minnesota State Centennial celebrations. Captain Seth Eastman was stationed at Fort Snelling in the 1840s. The accomplished artist painted the everyday life and ceremonies of the Dakota and Ojibwe in the Upper Mississippi River Valley. James J. Hill's sixty-six original Eastman watercolors composed the largest collection in the United States. *Courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewske and Leaetta Hough.*

options—many businesses began developing their own in-house research libraries, and college libraries expanded their collections.

In the mid-1950s, the board hired consultants to find solutions to their challenges and voted to implement cooperative programs that would appeal to local colleges. The Hill Library catalog and the catalogs of other local libraries were shared. Director Russell Barnes supported the college outreach programs, which served the wider community and brought additional activity to the library; however, he opposed board decisions in the late 1960s to narrow the focus of the institution, thereby reducing some subject area collections. Some board members during the transition felt the modest endowment could not sustain the library and voted to narrow Hill's vision by operating as a business information and reference library only.²³ In 1971, Barnes left the Hill Library. Virgil Massman, who agreed with the board on many proposed changes, replaced Barnes.

In 1976, the library officially changed its collection policy to purchase and retain only titles concerned with business, technology, and transportation. Books on the history of the United States, Minnesota, and American Indians were preserved, but no new books were added. The sale of general collection books began and continued into the 1980s.

While the library was narrowing its focus in some areas, in 1982, the Hill family guardianship committee turned the ownership of the invaluable James J. Hill Papers over to the Hill Library. The board hired Dr. W. Thomas White as curator, and the collection was opened to researchers.²⁴ Four years later, the Louis W. Hill Papers, an even larger manuscript collection, also came to the library. A grant from the Northwest Area Foundation covered the hiring of staff to process this collection.

These historically important papers, along with smaller Hill-related collections, attracted significant national and international scholars: "Every year more than 250 scholars . . . researched in the Hill archives."²⁵ Staff mounted exhibits of materials from the collections regularly and presented "Hill Moments" anecdotes at internal meetings. The curator and others wrote and spoke on collection contents to promote

research in the papers. Staff maintained archival preservation for the original manuscript and map materials that spanned more than a century in American history.²⁶

In 1986, Massman left the Hill Library. The next decade saw the library entering the computer era. Sheila Meyer served as the executive director from 1987 to 1994. Managers were hired in newly created administrative departments throughout the institution. Outside consultants held training sessions and staff development programs, and a fee-for-service research department—HillSearch—was in development.²⁷

During Meyer's tenure, the library began selling its special collection of books and art. The first—the famed *Birds of America*—went up for auction at Sotheby's in 1987. According to Meyer, "This just seemed like a good time to sell' . . . because the book just doesn't fit into its collection."²⁸ The book, however, failed to reach the required \$1 million asking price. In the end, the folio went to a private Japanese university for the intended price in 1989.²⁹

In 1994, the library received \$1.8 million for the remaining materials in its special collections. Hill's 600-volume private library, the American Indian collections, and the original art and rare books donated by Hill family members were all sold, as were the rare books contributed to the institution by Frederick Weyerhaeuser and other St. Paul citizens.³⁰ A number of the more than one thousand books were large folio editions containing maps, plates, and prints, including *Audubon's Animals: The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* (1845); *Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory* (1848) by H. Warre; [George] *Catlin's North American Indian Portfolio* (1844); and *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels . . . Corps of Discovery . . . Lewis and Clarke* [sic], (1807), by Patrick Gass.³¹

That same year, Meyer left the Hill Library.

The End of an Era for Bibliophiles

In 1995, the board launched a website—www.jjhill.org—and hired Rachel Berry as the new director. When Berry passed away within a few short months, a board member served as interim director. In 1997, Richard Anderson hired into the position. During his tenure, many

changes took place in response to the growth and popularity of the Internet. Easy access to the World Wide Web had made a huge impact on the workplace and would soon determine the way most people in this country lived their lives and conducted business. The Hill Library found itself playing catch-up as the information retrieval landscape rapidly morphed and marched forward.

In response, Anderson proposed a sweeping overhaul to the way the library conducted business. Under his leadership, and with board approval, the institution's name changed to the James J. Hill Group, and he launched a new division called METIS, which required significant library funds for project implementation, extensive technology purchases, new sales, legal, and technical staff, and its own offices across the river in Minneapolis. Anderson and the board envisioned METIS would transform the institution into a global provider of business research and information, with company profiling, prospect identification, market/industry overviews, preliminary trademark searches, and other services. Yet, before long, the new entity took on a life of its own, too far removed from the activities and services going on at the library. METIS never met the goals set, and, in 2001, the board halted the project. Anderson left the Hill Library. The METIS office in Minneapolis closed. The James J. Hill Group reverted to the James J. Hill Reference Library.³²

Fee-for-service continued as the library's focus. However, many businesses could do their own research with tech-savvy employees in their own offices. Just as companies began to create their own libraries for research and development in the 1950s, they no longer relied heavily on the Hill Library at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Sam Richter took the director reins in 2001 with an \$18 million endowment that had lost more than half its \$40 million value since 1998. Richter's entrepreneurial approach focused on individuals and small businesses. The library retooled the subscription-based HillSearch. Richter offered paid yearly memberships that ". . . put together customized Internet search packages" for clients. The library provided both ". . . access to and [staff] assistance in



finding practical business information" to help clients succeed. Richter brought research back to the Hill Library. He connected with community business organizations, minority groups, the Minnesota Job Workforce Center, and other civic organizations. Despite these efforts that initially saw increased patronage and earned revenue (the endowment rose to \$24 million for a time), the library's financial situation did not improve as substantially as had been hoped.³³

Also during Richter's tenure, in 2007, the prized Hill Papers collection acquired in the 1980s and carefully curated over the years, closed and was transferred to the Minnesota Historical Society in 2008. That same year, Richter left the Hill Library.

From 2009 to 2013, the library experienced yet another seismic shift. Many staff members left, all book and periodical purchases ceased, and HillSearch was discontinued. Board members served as directors most of this time, and the institution, once again, rebranded as the James J. Hill Center. Several new staff were hired. In 2016, Tamara Prato stepped up as acting director. During the day, people came for one-on-one research help and public programs that stressed mentoring, networking, and collaborative activities. The evenings and weekends were given over to public concerts, weddings, and events, all of which continued

The services offered during the final years continued to focus on individual and small businesses at the same time leadership struggled with the library's identity. Was it a business library, an entrepreneur training site, a historic site for visitors, a concert and wedding venue, or had the library essentially left the Hill Library? *Courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewske and Leaetta Hough.*

To see more stunning photographs of the J. J. Hill Center before it sold, including James J. Hill's roll-top desk, lamps, a card catalog, library stamps, and more, go to <https://publishing.rchs.com/publishing/magazine/ramsey-county-history-magazine-volume-56-3-fall-2021/>.

until the library finally closed in 2019, two years short of its one-hundredth birthday.

When the sale to Peter Remes of First & First Creative Real Estate was finalized earlier in 2021, the James J. Hill Center Board of Directors announced its plan to form The Mary Hill/J.J. Hill Library Foundation “. . . [to] focus on better serving the broader Saint Paul Community” using the remaining endowment and funds realized from the sale of the building.³⁴

The last forty plus years at the Hill Library were tumultuous. The disposition of the unique collections held by the library and narrowing its focus were monumental shifts from the institution's original purpose. The METIS experiment that ended in 2001 cost the library financially. Staff turnover skyrocketed because of the uncertain working environment and continual leadership changes. During the first fifty years, just three directors oversaw the library. In its last forty-eight years, the library had fourteen directors—seven hired and seven interim board members.

The name “James J. Hill” remains inscribed above the outer library door, along with a few portraits and mementos of Hill's life and career inside the building. The civic leader's vision for the library, the books he chose for the shelves, his own books, art, maps, and his personal and business correspondence are mostly gone as are the gifts his family, friends, and others generously donated to the institution.

Today, Hill's legacy lives on across St. Paul, Minnesota, and all the way to the Pacific Northwest, but his dream “to create and maintain a selected, practical, living reference library as an aid to scholarship, investigation and research”³⁵ has quietly ended.

Eileen McCormack is an independent researcher and writer who has contributed several articles to Ramsey County History magazine. She collaborated with Biloine W. Young on The Dutiful Son, Louis W. Hill: Life in the Shadow of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill (2010), published by Ramsey County Historical Society.

At the close of 2020, Hill librarians prepared a small number (2,055) of its remaining books and periodicals for educational and historical institutions throughout the city, state, and country. Many of those were history and railroad volumes. *Courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewske and Leaetta Hough.*



NOTES

Author notes on citations: *The James J. Hill Center board and director graciously allowed the author access to their institutional archive for research purposes. The archive is uncataloged and private. The author's general knowledge from fourteen years as a curator of the Hill Family papers before their removal to the Minnesota Historical Society and the institutional archive were used in writing this article. Published source material is cited when available.*

1. Patricia Hampl, "Foreword," in Biloine W. Young, *A Noble Task: The Saint Paul Public Library Celebrates 125!* (Afton: Afton Historical Society Press, 2007), 13.

2. "Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration," pamphlet, James Jerome Hill Reference Library, May 21-26, 1971, in private collection of Eileen McCormack.

3. Joseph Gilpin Pyle, *The Life of James J. Hill* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1917), 304, 383-386.

4. Young, 63.

5. Young, 63. The Beaux-Arts style often includes columns, pediments, cornices, and elaborate detailing.

6. Young, 59-61, 63; Pyle, 303. "History," James J. Hill Center website, accessed August 17, 2021, <http://jjhill.org/history/>.

7. "Consent By Heirs Of James J. Hill to transfer of securities and cash to James Jerome Hill Reference Library," legal document, James J. Hill Estate, January 2, 1917, 2-3, in Louis W. Hill Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota (hereafter MNHS).

8. Hill's son Louis and Louis's wife, Maud, established the Lexington Foundation in 1934. Trustees renamed the nonprofit after the couple in 1950. In 1974, the name changed once again to the Northwest Area Foundation.

9. Electus Litchfield, letter to Helen Starr, April 16, 1937, 6, in the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

10. Mary T. Hill, diary, April 3, 1917, Louis W. Hill Papers, MNHS.

11. W. Thomas White, "James J. Hill's Library: the first 75 years," *Minnesota History* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 125.

12. Joseph Pyle, "Librarian Report," February 20, 1917, 3-4, in the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives. Pyle often sent reports to the board of trustees during the years leading up to the opening.

13. Compiled from Joseph Pyle's early annual report writings and other material in the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

14. White, 127.

15. "Annual Report, 1922," J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

16. "Annual Report, 1927," 6. The library purchased *Antiquities of the Russian Empire* for \$650 in October 1927 from the library of Haggerston Castle in Northumberland, England. Plates include sacred images, paintings, crucifixes, ancient crowns, weapons, and more.

17. "Annual Report, 1927."

18. In the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. News clippings in the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

22. "Exhibits December 1944-November 1945," copy of list in Eileen McCormack collection; Steve Plumb, email correspondence with author, October 6, 2021.

23. Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Splendor of Letters: The Permanence of Books in an Impermanent World* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2003), 195. Basbanes writes about books and book culture. Here, he addresses "the willful destruction of books and libraries is in Sarajevo, Tibet, and Cambodia. . . [and] the matter of 'discards' . . . that may lead to the loss of 'last copies' of important work." He devotes nine pages to the Hill Library.

24. In 1955, the family constructed a vault for the Hill Papers in the basement of the library and had the collection organized and preserved; however, it was not open to the public.

25. Greg Erickson, "Empire Builder's Legacy," *Saint Paul Skyway News*, April 9-15, 1996.

26. Erickson.

27. In the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

28. "Rail baron's bird book could bring \$1.4 million at auction," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, December 2, 1987, 2; Mary Abbe Martin, "Book valued at \$1.4 million fails to sell at auction," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, December 3, 1987, 5A-B.

29. Basbanes, 197; "Rare Audubon 'Birds of America' Sells for \$9.6 Million in New York," *Reuters*, June 14, 2018. In just over the last decade, rare copies of the Audubon book have sold for \$9 and \$10 million.

30. Basbanes, 198.

31. In the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

32. In the private J. J. Hill Center institutional archives.

33. Neal St. Anthony, "He's been working on the library," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, February 8, 2005, D1; Todd Nelson, "James J. Hill legacy a wealth of information," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 13, 2007, D1.

34. Bob Shaw, "James J. Hill Center in downtown St. Paul sold," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 16, 2021, 1, 14A.

35. "Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration."

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

The Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) strives to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, deliver inspiring history programming, and incorporate local history in education.

The Society was established in 1949 to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, the original programs told the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Heyáta Othúnwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 and rededicated in 2016 as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. The Society serves more than 15,000 students annually on field trips or through school outreach. Programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, & Inclusion

RCHS is committed to ensuring it preserves and presents our county's history. As we continue our work to incorporate more culturally diverse histories, we have made a commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion that is based on this core idea: RCHS exists to serve ALL who call Ramsey County home. To learn more, please see www.rchs.com/about.

Acknowledging This Sacred Dakota Land

Mnisóta Makhóche, the land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds, extends beyond the modern borders of Minnesota and is the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Dakhóta (Dakota) people. It is also home to the Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples, all who make up a vibrant community in Mnisóta Makhóche. RCHS acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands.

RCHS is committed to preserving our past, informing our present, and inspiring our future. Part of doing so is acknowledging the painful history and current challenges facing the Dakota people just as we celebrate the contributions of Dakota and other Indigenous peoples.

Find our full Land Acknowledgment Statement on our website, www.rchs.com. This includes actionable ways in which RCHS pledges to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóche.

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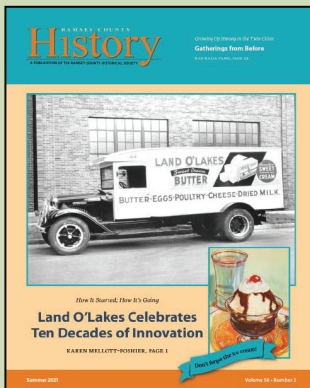


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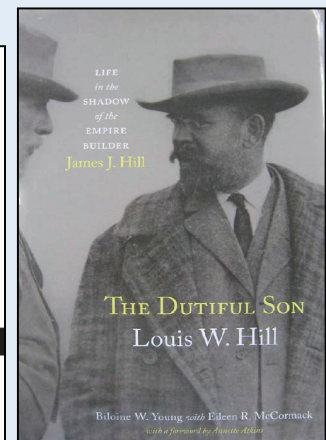
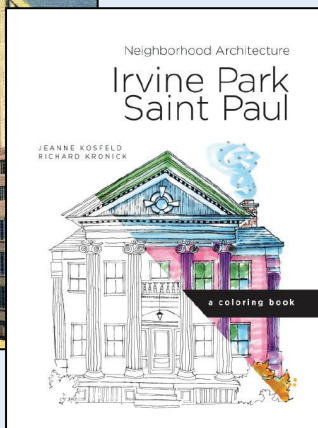
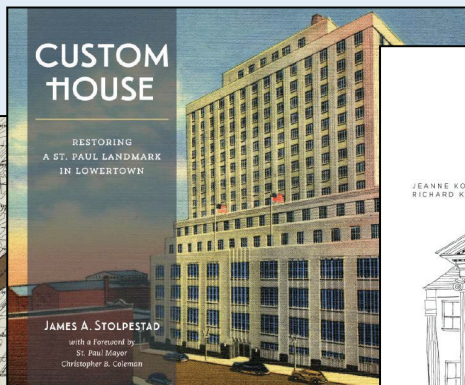
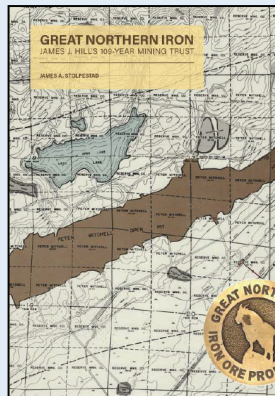


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Closing the Book

THE JAMES JEROME HILL REFERENCE LIBRARY, 1921–2021

EILEEN MCCORMACK, PAGE 22



A reflection of what once was: The James Jerome Hill Reference Library opened in 1921—an invaluable educational gift to the community from the late railroad magnate James J. Hill. Two years shy of its one-hundredth birthday, the doors closed. It sold to a developer in 2021.
Courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewske and Leaetta Hough.