
JAMES JEROME HILL

SAINT PAUL, 1913.

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In 1856 an eighteen year old boy from Canada arrived in Saint Paul, Minnesota, then a frontier village. Born near Guelph, Ontario, September 16, 1838, of well-to-do Scotch-Irish parents, James J. Hill, educated till his fifteenth year at a small academy, expected to study for the medical profession. His father's death interfered with this plan, and he found employment in a country store. Ambitious for a different experience and a larger field, he came to the United States and, after traveling through several states, settled in Minnesota, at Saint Paul in July, 1856.

For nine years he was employed as a clerk in the office of a Mississippi River steamboat company, making a careful study all the time of transportation in its different phases and of the fuel situation, then so closely connected with it. In 1865 he became agent of one of the Mississippi steamboat lines, and in 1867 engaged independently in a general transportation and fuel business. He first brought mineral coal to Saint Paul. He also began his experience as a railroad man

by becoming station agent of the only railroad then entering Saint Paul. He formed a fuel and warehousing firm, and in 1870 organized the Red River Transportation Company to carry on trade between the United States and Manitoba. He established, in 1872, the first regular through transportation service between Saint Paul and Winnipeg, then Fort Garry.

The Saint Paul & Pacific Railroad Company, which went into the hands of a receiver in 1873, had built some lines and done some grading in Minnesota, but was encumbered with an enormous debt of nearly \$33,000,000. Almost no one except Mr. Hill believed in its future. He did, because he believed in the future of the country. With three associates he bought the defaulted bonds in 1878, built lines and extensions to make the fragments into something like a system, extended its tracks to the Canadian boundary to connect with a government line to Winnipeg, and, in 1879, organized the Saint Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway Company to take over all these properties and build on them as a foundation.

As the railroad developed the country and the country made new demands on the railroad, the system grew rapidly. Mr. Hill saw early that the line must ultimately extend to the Pacific Coast, and made his plans accordingly. Without any assistance from the Government, the railroad was constructed between

the Northern Pacific and the international boundary, through a country whose immense resources very few appreciated at that time. This undertaking was conceived, financed and carried out, in spite of all difficulties, without a pause. In 1887 the line reached Helena, Montana; and by 1898 the system, now called the Great Northern, reached Seattle on Puget Sound. The outline of Mr. Hill's work was drawn, and the important details were later filled in.

Already the lines of the system reached out into British Columbia and into the iron ore producing district of Northern Minnesota. A steamship company to operate on the Great Lakes had been formed and a line to Duluth opened, making the railroad independent in its eastern connections. A line of steamships was established by the Great Northern between the Pacific Coast and the Orient. In 1901 the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific jointly purchased the stock of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company. The Burlington system acquired control of the Colorado & Southern, and the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific jointly built a line on the north bank of the Columbia River into Portland. By these extensions and connections the Great Northern was enabled to reach all the most important markets of the West. The system proper has grown to 7,800 miles.

While these developments in the industrial history of the country are listed under the name of the Great Northern, the motive power behind them was James J. Hill. He foresaw the coming progress of the country and its needs. He planned and executed for that. He financed them through all their vicissitudes and through different periods of national stress, with such success that his company never passed a dividend, and its credit has always stood high in the most disastrous times. He laid out and enforced upon all connected with the management of the lines a system of economy in operation that has made the Great Northern notable for efficiency. Low grades and easy curves in construction; powerful engines and cars of large capacity; the adjustment of traffic so as to reduce the haul of empty cars to the minimum,—all that goes toward handling the largest volume of traffic at the lowest cost were a part of his plan when they were not the familiar ideas in the railroad world that they are today. While Mr. Hill is the most conspicuous figure in the development of the Northwest, his name stands for constructive effort in every department of the practical work of railroading.

Mr. Hill's life-work in the railroad field by no means marks the limit of his qualities and activities. He is a lover and connoisseur of the arts. His gallery of paintings of the modern French school in his Saint Paul

home is one of the finest in the world. He has remained throughout his life a tireless reader and thinker. He has made the agricultural development of the country a special study, and through numerous addresses and by practical work on the farms of the Northwest has led the movement for better farm methods. His book, "Highways of Progress", is a painstaking study of a number of the most important features of national development, and the problems of industry and government connected with them. He is a generous giver, and many educational institutions throughout the Northwest owe their efficiency or their existence to his liberality. Although nominally withdrawn from active business life, his touch is felt by all the great enterprises in which he is still as much personally interested as ever; and he still performs a daily task that would be too heavy for most men. In virtue of his many and varied acquirements and achievements, Yale University conferred upon Mr. Hill in 1910 the degree of LL.D.

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