



“A WILD HURRAH”

The Great Northern Celebration of 1893

Susan E. Williams

“THE LAST SPIKE of the Great Northern track laying was driven this evening, thirteen miles below the summit of Stevens, on the western slope of the Cascades. The only officials present were General Supt. C[orne-lius] Shields and Supt. J[ohn] D. Farrell. As the last rail was brought forward by the workmen and laid in position, Messrs. Shields and Farrell took spike mauls from the spikers’ hands and with alternate blows drove home the last spike. It is not golden, but only iron. So unpretentiously was it done that the laborers ten rods away were not aware of it until the little group on the spot set up a wild hurrah.”¹

January 6, 1893, marked the completion of Minnesota’s second transcontinental railroad. The driving of the final spike at Scenic, Washington, did not inspire the

spontaneous jubilation experienced with the achievement of earlier transcontinental railroads; only the workmen and two district superintendents posed for the official photograph. In St. Paul, the *Pioneer Press* reported the event in a few uninspired paragraphs and speculated on the whereabouts of James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern line. “Where is Jim Hill was an unanswered question. Mr. Hill and other officials from St. Paul were expected and the date of completion was wired several days ago. As no announcement of their coming was made, the work pushed forward and closed without any demonstration or attempt of ceremony.” Hill remained at home as the last spike on the Great Northern was driven, because, as he explained in a telegram to Marcus Daly of the Anaconda Copper Company in Butte, Montana, his lame shoulder prevented him from going out. He hoped, however, to start west by the end of the week, in spite of the rheumatism that ostensibly prevented his presence at the completion of his transcontinental railroad.²

The quiet January announcement from Washington State precipitated a storm of planning in St. Paul. Mindful, perhaps, of the celebration a decade earlier when Henry Villard of the Northern Pacific received the plaudits of the city, or of the honors paid to Hill by Minneapolis in 1884, community leaders moved to commemorate Jim Hill’s achievement by financing a mammoth celebration to be held in June. In anticipation of the Great Northern’s completion, Alderman John Copeland proposed that a sum of \$10,000 be used for “defraying the expenses of the celebration to be given in this city.” By passing Copeland’s resolution, the city fathers were able to show their appreciation for Hill’s contribu-

¹ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 7, 1893. The Northern Pacific completed the first northern transcontinental road on August 22, 1883.

² Albro Martin, *James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest*, 396 (New York, 1976); *Pioneer Press*, January 7, 1893; Hill to Marcus Daly (telegram), January 8, 1893, in General Correspondence folder, James J. Hill Papers, James Jerome Hill Reference Library, St. Paul.

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tions in advancing the financial interests of St. Paul as terminus of the road.³

To draw the reticent railroad builder into the public observance, the planners organized a special evening when people from all walks of life could informally honor Hill, shake his hand, and collectively offer him a large sterling bowl inscribed with the words: "Presented to James J. Hill by the citizens of St. Paul." The presentation of the bowl was to be but one of the ceremonial events during the three-day Great Northern celebration. Downtown St. Paul was transformed into a magical city of elaborate decoration and patriotic colors. Flags, bunting, and portraits of Hill draped the business establishments and crisscrossed Third Street; four triumphal arches festooned in red, white, and blue ribbons spanned the parade route. The Propylon Arch at Third and Cedar and the electrified Arch of Honor at Smith Park had been constructed with some of the money allotted by the city. The Northern Pacific Railroad paid homage to Hill with an arch located at Third and Jackson, and the Great Northern also participated by constructing an arch at the corner of Third and Broadway. A magnificent parade of six divisions of horsemen, bands, and floats wove through the streets and under the arches on the afternoon of June 7.⁴

On the reviewing stand Hill watched the parade pass. The mounted police led the procession, followed by the fire department, bands, and various military units; then came five divisions of floats. The first represented the history of transportation and the growth of the Northwest in which Hill had played such a vital part. Next came the floats of the various states and cities directly linked to St. Paul by the Great Northern Railway; Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Montana, and Washington

all participated. The last three divisions included marvelous and ingenious floats created by the individual manufacturers, jobbers, and merchants of St. Paul. The "Barge of Peace" fashioned by the Powers Dry Goods Company drew particular attention with decorations of blue, white, and gold. The vehicle was pulled by 12 horses, each wearing a white blanket with black letters that spelled out the name of the firm. Finch, Van Slyck, Young and Company, an early St. Paul wholesale jobbing house, created a double float representing their growth. On the first wagon stood a model of the firm's original 1862 building, followed by a striking representation of their new business block located on the west side of Sibley between Fourth and Fifth streets. Both Powers Dry Goods and Finch, Van Slyck, and Young won prizes for artistic merit.⁵

The wholesale hardware company of Farwell, Ozmun, and Kirk manufactured an enormous elephant upon which were mounted replicas of knives and guns included in their warehouse stock. The Theo. Hamm Brewing Company displayed a large cask and an Amer-

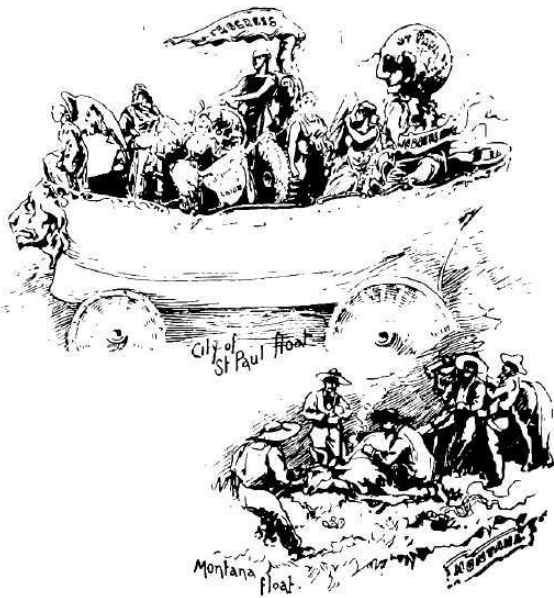
³City of St. Paul, *Proceedings of the Common Council*, 1892, 343 (St. Paul, 1893); *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 9, 1893. For the 1883 celebration, see *Pioneer Press*, September 4, 1883. On September 9, 1884, the "citizens of Minneapolis" — primarily business leaders of that city — honored Hill with a presentation tray. See Francis J. Puig, "The Hill Tray," in *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin*, vol. 64, p. 42-53 (1981). More information on this gift is in George A. Brackett Papers, MHS.

⁴City of St. Paul, *Report of the City Comptroller*, 1893, 309 (St. Paul, 1894); *St. Paul Dispatch*, January 2, June 9, 1893.

⁵Here and below, see *Pioneer Press*, June 8, 1893; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1893, p. 544, 1130.

RAILROAD CREWS watch as Great Northern officials drive the line's final spike.





ican eagle astride a large "H," its trademark. Lanpher, Finch, and Skinner, furriers, had two floats in the parade: one showing hunters in an Arctic wasteland, the other featuring craftsmen making garments from some captured furs.

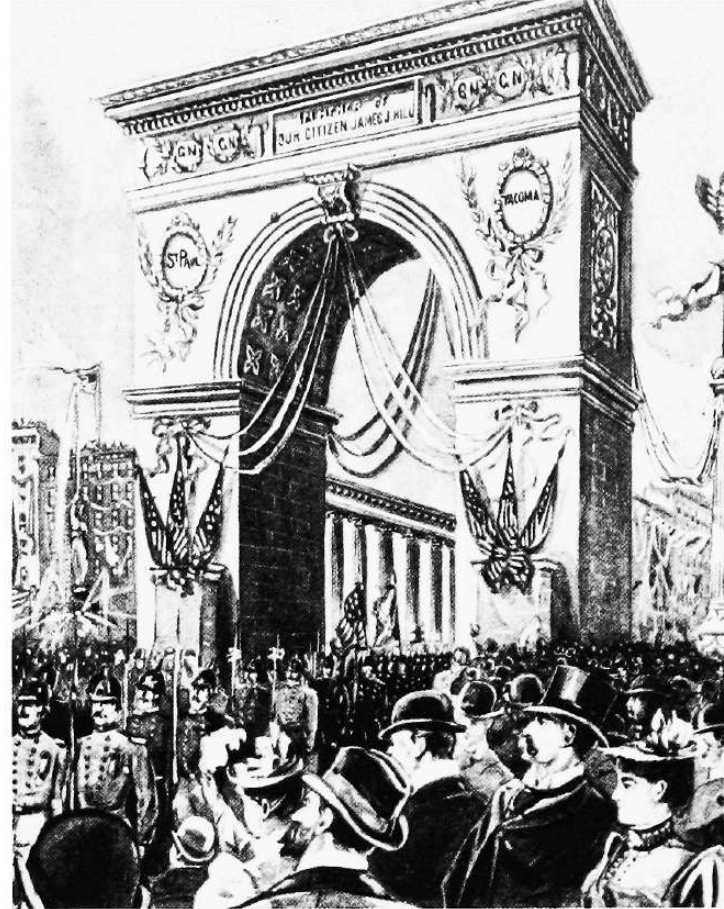
The following evening, June 8, citizens gathered in the auditorium to fete the Empire Builder, as Hill came to be known. The reception lasted from 8 o'clock until 10 and "partakes in no sense of a private character. No invitations have been or will be issued, except those through the press of the city. It is expected that a large part of the gathering will consist of ladies who will assist in receiving the comers." The highlight of the occasion occurred when Mayor Frederick P. Wright presented the bowl to Hill "in behalf of the city and citizens of St. Paul."⁶

The silver bowl awarded to Hill is one of the few remaining artifacts representing the completion of the Great Northern Railway. Railroad officials often presented a gold watch or silver hollow ware to key employees; the gift, from employer to employee, became an expected memento at the completion of service. But the citizens of St. Paul had no such relationship with Hill; they enlarged upon the tradition, transforming the usual donor to recipient.

The bowl they gave Jim Hill was crafted by the Whiting Manufacturing Company, a Newark, New Jersey, firm noted for fine hollow ware. The bowl and accompanying ladle include two identification marks: a distinctive lion and "W" indicate the Whiting trademark, and "Topliff and Co." is the imprint of a St. Paul jeweler.

⁶ *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 8, 1893.

⁷ Dorothy T. Rainwater, *Encyclopedia of American Silver Manufacturers*, 187 (New York, 1978); *St. Paul City Directories*, 1890-97.



TRIUMPHAL ARCH and colonnade erected at St. Paul's Smith Park

Both marks appear on the base of the bowl and on the shank of the ladle. Jewelers George R. and Frederick G. Topliff, briefly established in the city at 335 Robert Street, ordered the set from Whiting, selecting representative photographs taken during Hill's career to decorate the object.⁷ An inscription encircling the rim of the bowl reads, "Great Northern Railroad Completed Across Our Continent MDCCCXCIII."

The large punch bowl, with a capacity of 18 quarts, is ornamented with bands of acanthus leaves around the lower body, the collar, and the base, and set with a pair of scrolled handles. One side contains a cast portrait of Hill as a young man of about 30 years. The image is centered in a decorative cartouche draped with laurel branches, and the initials "J. J. H." form a monogram below. Banners flying on both sides of the portrait carry the establishment dates of Hill's early St. Paul business ventures. The date 1856 found on the left banner marked the year when Hill arrived in St. Paul from the East. He had found immediate employment as a shipping clerk with Brunson, Lewis and White, agents for the Dubuque Packet Company. The warehouse of this company, shown below and to the left of the cartouche, includes a large quantity of stores waiting to be loaded on a nearby wagon. During three years of employment with this firm, Hill was introduced to the complexities of

steamboat shipping on the Mississippi. He learned his lessons well.⁸

On the banner to the right of the cartouche the date 1864 commemorates Hill's first warehouse on the city's lower levee. With the coming of railroad transportation in the 1860s, Hill and his partners George Blanchard and William A. Wellington dealt with problems of transferring merchandise from river to rail by constructing this building that could accommodate dockage, storage, and rail facilities under one roof. The low structure, situated in front of the St. Paul and Pacific grain elevator, boasted a sign reading "Jas. J. Hill."⁹

A portrait of Hill taken about 1893 by Pach Brothers of New York appears in the cartouche on the reverse of the bowl. By the age of 55, Hill had become an expert on the opportunities for financial development of the Northwest. He had amassed a fortune and enlarged his business concerns to include river transportation, wholesale merchandising, and commodity trading in wood, coal, salt, and grains. But most important, Hill built railroads. Their extent appears on the map of the Northwest covering the side of the bowl below the cartouche.¹⁰

The transportation lines in Minnesota, shown to the right on the bowl's map, represent Hill's earliest railroad building. His long association with the St. Paul and Pacific encouraged acquisition of that road when it fell

into mismanagement during the Panic of 1873. In association with Norman Kittson, an old friend and neighbor, Donald A. Smith, commissioner of the Hudson's Bay Company, and George Stephen, president of the Bank of Montreal, Hill gathered enough financial resources to purchase the railroad, gambling that the government land grants could be gained by completing the line to the Canadian border by 1879. With Hill's acquisition of the company, the "William Crooks," the first engine purchased for use on St. Paul railroads, became a part of his rolling stock. The famous engine is shown on the handle of the ladle. Pushed by Hill's constant attention to detail, the St. Paul and Pacific extended mile by mile along the fertile Red River and continued across the international boundary to Winnipeg. Upon completion, the railroad became reorganized under the name St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba.¹¹

⁸ Martin, *Hill*, 34, 35, 38; *Pioneer Press*, June 8, 1893. The original photograph of Hill as a young man is in the J. J. Hill Reference Library.

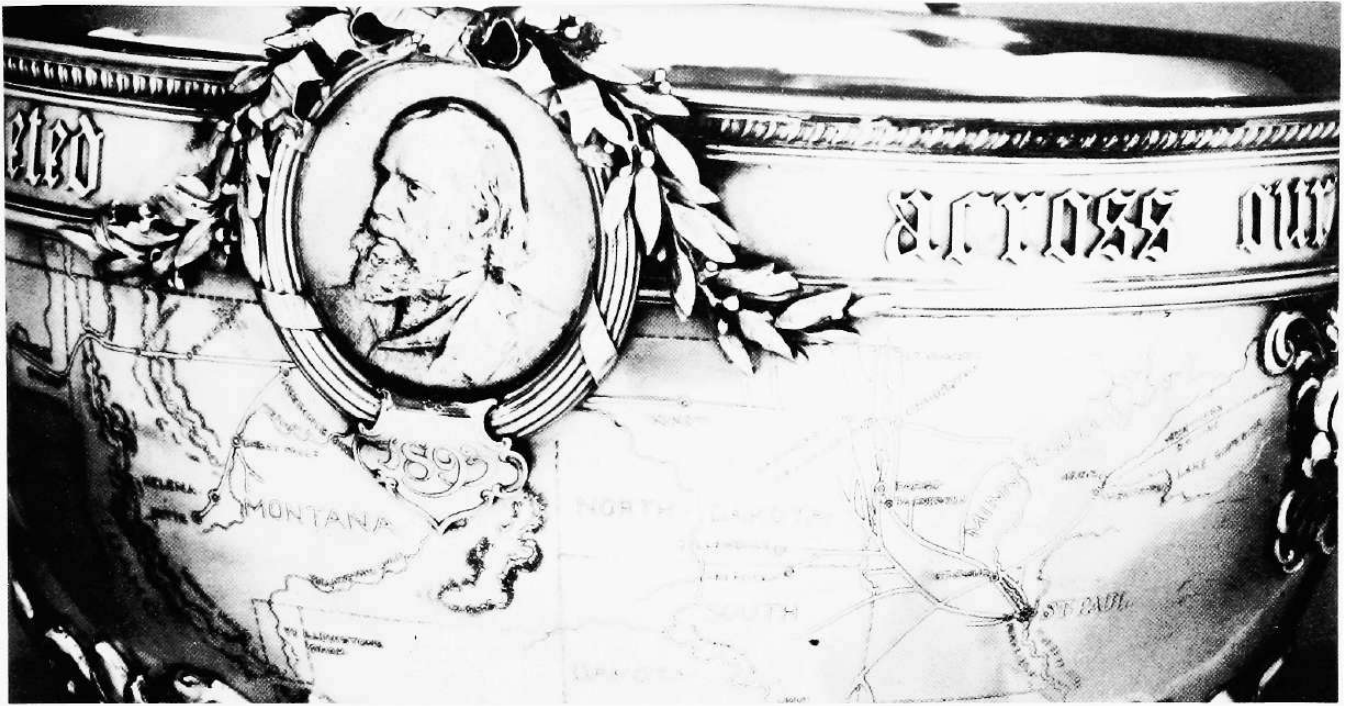
⁹ Hill's warehouse was built in 1866, not 1864 as it appears on the banner; *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat*, May 17, 1866; Martin, *Hill*, 50-53.

¹⁰ An original Pach Bros. photograph is in the J. J. Hill Reference Library.

¹¹ *Pioneer Press*, June 8, 1893; Martin, *Hill*, 119, 131-135, 190.

PRESENTATION BOWL, showing the young Hill's early enterprises, and a detail of the other side (top, opposite page)





As his commitment to expanding the railroad to the Pacific increased, Hill reorganized the Manitoba as the Great Northern Railway in 1889. He sent surveyors and engineers into the mountains to find the straightest line and the lowest grade. In treks across the Continental Divide, engineer John F. Stevens relocated the "lost" Marias Pass, first discovered during the government railroad surveys of 1853–54. Stevens outlined the grade as the best possible route for the Great Northern through the Rocky Mountains, and by the fall of 1892 the eastern track-laying division approached the men working from the west. The teams met in the Cascades on January 6.¹²



THE CROOKS
engine detail on the
silver ladle

Almost every citizen would be affected in some way by the commencement of direct rail service from St. Paul to Everett, Washington. The natural resources of

the upper Northwest could now be tapped, and the new line brought increased population with every trip. Farms and mines developed along the tracks, and agricultural products, ore, and lumber poured into the city. With expansion came modern industrial equipment and manufactured goods that flowed from the East through St. Paul, bringing increased wealth and more jobs to the city.

And so salesmen, clerks, and mill workers joined the St. Paul celebration, crowding the grandstand and the sidewalks of the parade route or attending the evening reception in the hope of getting a glimpse of Hill. They joined the patriotic pageant which sparked the senses and tugged at heartstrings. In the days that followed the celebration, downtown returned to normal. The arches came down and the bunting disappeared; perhaps some kept a flag or two or a newspaper to remind them of the event. The presentation bowl became a part of the Hill family silver inventory, first at 240 Summit Avenue, and later in the home of Hill's great-grandson, Anson Beard, Jr. At the official opening of the James J. Hill House in December, 1981, Beard presented the bowl to the Minnesota Historical Society, returning it, in effect, to the citizens of the state. There it will continue to commemorate the completion of the Great Northern and the man whose dream had made it possible.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS on pages 119 and 121 are from *Frank Leslie's Weekly*, June 15, 1893, p. 385; photographs of the Hill bowl are by staff photographer Elizabeth Hall; the one on page 120 is in the MHS audio-visual library.

¹² Martin, *Hill*, 381–383.



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