

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
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**Spring 2006**

Volume 41, Number 1

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The Cave Under  
the Castle*

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*Mary Mehegan Hill (1867). This painting is from a wedding photograph. The date of the painting and the artist are not known. In 1956 a member of the Hill family gave this painting to the James J. Hill Reference Library. Reproduced by permission of the James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, Minnesota. Photograph by Maureen McGinn.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 41, Number 1

Spring 2006

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect,  
preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public,  
recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make  
available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major  
responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

## A Message from the Editorial Board

Our Spring issue leads with dual articles presenting a vibrant portrait of old Lowertown, which now remains only as a fragment of a neighborhood tucked within a spaghetti-like web of freeway lanes. Eileen McCormack describes the social and economic framework that nourished Jim and Mary Hill from 1867 until 1891, when they moved to their Summit Avenue mansion. And David Riehle portrays the homes and businesses of working-class St. Paul citizens in the same neighborhood. Greg Brick leads a reader's tour underneath the streets in the West Seventh area, through thirty miles of corridors leading to caves that once cooled German-style lager beer brewed by the Stahlmann, and later Schmidt, breweries. Bernice Fisher provides an evocative remembrance of attending St. Adalbert's Catholic school in a Polish neighborhood full of traditions. Finally, many treasures await readers who sample our reviewers' picks marking, among others, Minnesota's state capitol building, the career of a recent riverboat legend, and the story of a gifted educator who grew up on a farm supplying butter and meat to city dwellers. We are proud of the last, *Pearl and the Howling Hound Farm*, which is one of our own recent publications, available through RCHS. Happy reading!

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

# Lost Neighborhood

## Mary Hill's Lowertown, 1867–1891

*Eileen R. McCormack*

*“We have commenced to move, it is a most serious business to me. I can not help feeling that I shall wish myself back here many times. It is hard for me to leave the house where so many hopeful years have been spent.”*

—Mary T. Hill, 1891<sup>1</sup>

In 1857 St. Paul's commercial center was the Lower Landing, largely due to its position in relation to the bluffs that edged the Mississippi River. This business area and the adjoining neighborhood were known as Lowertown. Its boundaries, its homes, its parks and social amenities, its shops, its churches and schools, and its inhabitants defined the neighborhood. What made Lowertown a vibrant, comfortable place to live was its people and their network of social relationships. This nexus of associations and friendships was certainly the reason for Mary Hill's concern in 1891 about leaving “the house where so many hopeful years have been spent,” as she prepared for the move she and her family were about to make to Summit Avenue.

Since arriving in St. Paul as a young child in 1850, Mary had lived most of her life in the Lowertown area. Mary's parents, Mary and Timothy Mehegan, had settled their family on Bench Street, near Bishop Cretin's chapel on the lower levee bluff. Later as an adult, Mary and James Hill lived in Lowertown from their

marriage in 1867 until 1891, when they moved to the mansion that James built on Summit Avenue. The Hill children were all born in Lowertown and many of Mary's life-long friendships began there. The strength of those neighborhood associations is evident in her diaries.

Beginning in 1883 and continuing until 1921 (with periods missing because she either did not keep a diary or her diary has apparently been lost), Mary Hill's diaries are housed in the James J. Hill Library. They are a record of Mary's daily activities: what she did; where she went; her family's activities; family illnesses; letters she sent and received; and her occasional comments on noteworthy events, either local or national. Her diaries are not appointment books nor do they include personal, introspective thoughts. Very little personal writing by Mary Hill, other than letters that she wrote to her son, Louis, has survived.

Mary's neighbors, during her twenty-four-year residence in Lowertown, were the Uphams, the Gotzians and the Schurmeiers. All had homes in, or adjoining, a square block area bordered by Ninth and Tenth streets and Wacouta and Canada streets. Their longevity in the area and the availability of Hill family documentation, make these

four families an interesting tool for a study of one segment of the population during the early years of Lowertown.<sup>2</sup>

James J. Hill, Conrad Gotzian, Casper Schurmeier and Henry Upham all arrived in St. Paul between 1855 and 1857. All lived in St. Paul the rest of their lives; working, marrying, raising their families, and finally dying there. As St. Paul was taking shape on the banks of the Mississippi River during the years just prior to statehood, these were four of the settlers who came to seek their fortunes. In 1850 the population of St. Paul was approximately 2,000 people and by 1857 it had grown to almost 10,000. The river was the origin of its settlement, and the town grew outward from its banks and bluffs. A great number of the new arrivals to the city were involved in real estate speculation and/or entrepreneurial ventures. With

*July 21, 2006, will mark the 150th anniversary of the arrival of James J. Hill in St. Paul. Although St. Paul had been incorporated as a city in 1854, it was still a small territorial town with unpaved streets and few large buildings when Hill arrived by steamboat from Illinois. Hill's future wife, Mary Mehegan, and her family had come to Minnesota's capital city just six years earlier.*



*John Upham, Ruth Hill, and Rachel Hill in 1889 playing in the James J. Hill stable yard, Ninth and Canada streets. The First Baptist Church, the Upham, and Hill houses are visible in the far background. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*



Clara Hill, Grace Upham, Mary Hill, Jim Hill, Mamie Hill, Gertrude Upham, Grace Upham standing; Charlotte Hill, Rachel Hill, nurse, Gertrude Hill middle row sitting; John Upham, Ruth Hill sitting in front. 1883—Porch of Upham residence, 9th and Wacouta streets, St. Paul, Minnesota. Photo courtesy of Louis W. Hill Papers, James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.



Henry Upham and James Hill residences, 9th Street, St. Paul, Minnesota, about 1885. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

the Panic of 1857 and the unfortunate financial consequences that resulted, many of these men either chose or were forced to leave St. Paul, as the city lost half of its population. Hill, Schurmeier, Upham and Gotzian were among those who stayed.<sup>3</sup>

Casper H. Schurmeier, born in Germany in 1815, arrived in St. Paul in 1855 and worked in the wood/fuel business. He also purchased large amounts of land within what are now the city limits of St. Paul. By 1863 he was living at Ninth and Canada streets. The U. S. Census of 1870 shows his occupation as “Speculator,” and lists his wife, Caroline, and six children, Louisa, Henry, Theodore, Gustave, Benjamin, Lena, and Ida. The Schurmeiers also had five children, born prior to 1857, who died at young ages. The census notes three domestic servants living in the home. Casper Schurmeier died in 1873, and his family continued to live in the same house for a number of years. Caroline Schurmeier died in 1887.<sup>4</sup>

Conrad Gotzian, also born in Germany in 1835, came to St. Paul in 1855, the same year as Schurmeier. Gotzian started a shoe-making business, which would be his life’s work. His first small shop was located on Sixth and Jackson streets. Although Gotzian died in 1887, his sons carried on the trade, and in 1892 constructed a large factory, designed by Cass Gilbert, at the corner of Smith Park (now Mears Park) on Fifth and Wacouta. The Gotzian residence, in the 1863 *City Directory*, is at Tenth near Canada street. The U. S. Census of 1880 lists his wife, Caroline, and six children, Caroline, Helena, Paul, Harriet, Vallie, and Roberta. The Gotzians also had three children who died prior to 1880, Samuel, William, and Frank. Three domestic servants also lived in their home. After Conrad Gotzian’s death, his family stayed in their home until it, along with the Upham residence, was purchased by Bethesda Hospital. After 1892, Mary Hill’s diaries frequently mention calling on Mrs. Gotzian at her summer residence on Manitou Island, White Bear Lake. Mary also writes of visiting the Gotzian’s adult daughter, Caroline, who married Theodore Schurmeier, and lived on Crocus Hill, in the city.<sup>5</sup>

Henry Upham was born in Massachusetts in 1837 and worked as a bank

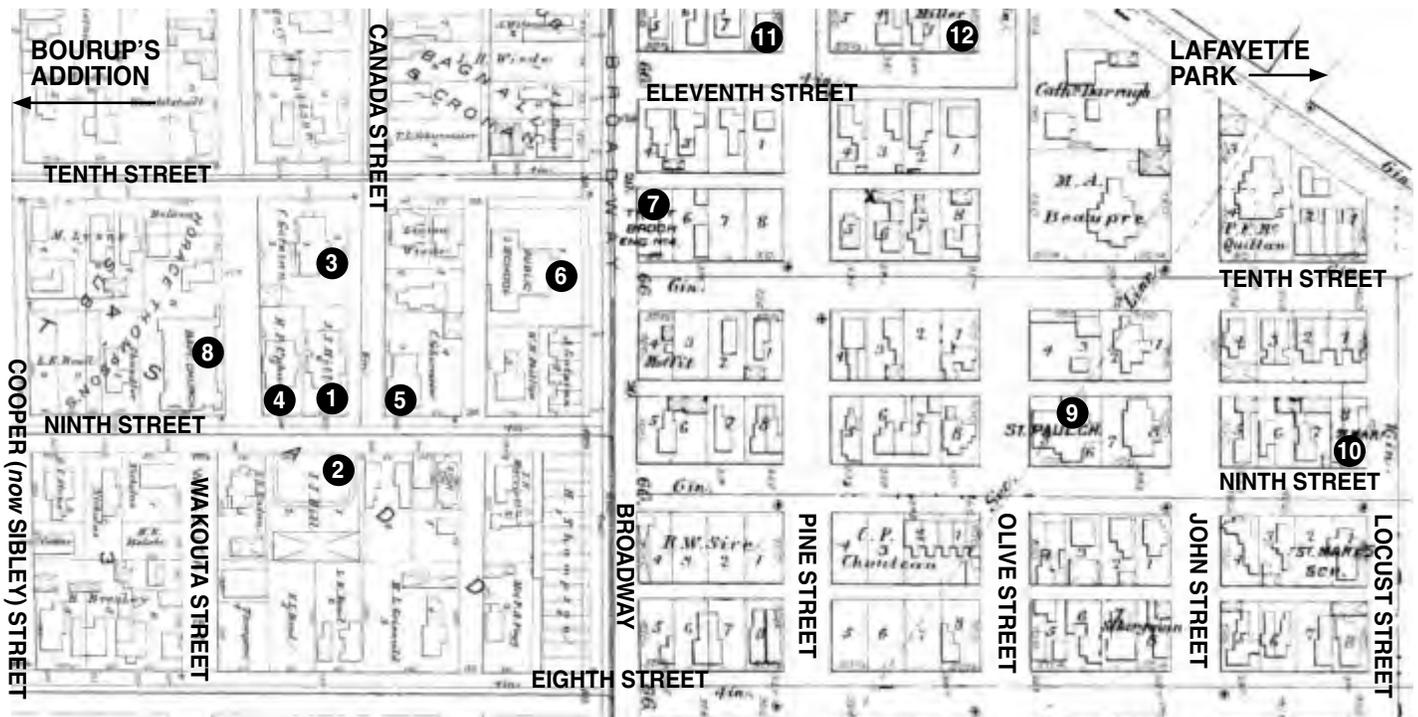
clerk there before his arrival in St. Paul in 1857. He speculated in land, and was in the lumber business for the first few years after his arrival, until 1863 when he became a clerk at the First National Bank. By 1880 Upham was president of the bank and very active in community and financial affairs in St. Paul. In 1869 he was living on Ninth and Wacouta streets, and his occupation is listed as “Bank Cashier.” Henry and his wife, Gertrude, had three children, Gertrude, Grace, and John. The census records indicate three domestics residing with the family in 1880. By 1891, the Uphams were living at 476 Summit Avenue.

James Hill was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1838 and came to St. Paul in 1856. He worked for packet agents in the shipping business on the Mississippi River and boarded at the Merchants’ Hotel at Third and Jackson. In 1866 he opened his own

warehouse, James J. Hill & Company, on the lower levee. Between 1866 and 1879 he operated this business, as well as a fuel business, and a shipping concern on the Red River. By 1879 he and four partners had control of the Saint Paul & Pacific Railway, and in 1893 Hill’s Great Northern Railway (renamed in 1890) steamed into depots across the northwestern states all the way to Seattle, Washington. James Hill married Mary Mehegan in 1867, and they purchased a home on Canada and Pearl (later Grove) streets. Four years later, the Hill family moved a few blocks to Ninth and Canada streets. The Hills had ten children, Mamie, James, Louis, Clara, Katherine, Charlotte, Ruth, Rachel, Gertrude, and Walter. The 1870 census showed three domestics in their home, and by the Minnesota State Census of 1885, the number of domestics had increased to ten. The Hill family moved

to 240 Summit Avenue in 1891. After the family’s move, Hill demolished their Lowertown home, and in 1906, donated the land to Bethesda Hospital.

By the time of James and Mary Hill’s marriage in 1867, all of our participants in this Lowertown neighborhood were in place, always within a short stroll from one another’s homes. Within St. Paul’s Lowertown of the 1867–1891 period, a small group of homes existed where the inhabitants became very close friends. This was certainly a rapidly changing time in St. Paul’s history, a time of beginnings and of great expansion. The majority of St. Paul’s residents in these years had left their families thousands of miles away to travel to this town on the frontier. They had settled in an area where they were close to others and to their places of work and worship. Shopping, social, and cultural amenities for themselves and their families were all



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hill Residence—Ninth &amp; Canada streets</li> <li>2. Hill Barn</li> <li>3. Gotzian Residence</li> <li>4. Upham Residence</li> <li>5. Schurmeier Residence</li> <li>6. Franklin School—Broadway &amp; Tenth streets</li> <li>7. Fire House #4—Broadway &amp; Tenth streets</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. First Baptist Church—Wacouta &amp; Ninth streets</li> <li>9. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church—Ninth &amp; Olive streets</li> <li>10. St. Mary’s Catholic Church—Ninth &amp; Locust streets</li> <li>11. Emanuel German Evangelical Church—Pine &amp; Eleventh streets</li> <li>12. First German Methodist Episcopal Church—East Eleventh &amp; Olive streets</li> </ol> |
|---|--|

Source: *Atlas of the City of St. Paul 1884*, G.M. Hopkins Philadelphia

nearby. Thus the bonds that were formed between the Gotzians, Schurmeiers, Uphams, and Hills were strengthened by the things they had in common in their Lower-town neighborhood.

In addition to living in close proximity, the men in these four families had many common economic and civic interests. The 1886 membership listing for the Minnesota Club shows James Hill, Conrad Gotzian, Henry Upham, and Casper Schurmeier's son Theodore (Casper died in 1873), all present and accounted for. The women had common interests in their homes, children, and social lives. Woven through Mary Hill's diaries, there is a constant thread of social intercourse with these neighborhood friends.<sup>6</sup>

From financial information contained in the James J. Hill Papers, a clear picture emerges of the growth of retail shops in St. Paul. In the 1860s it would not have been unusual for a family within this neighborhood to keep a cow in the barn behind their home and to grow much of their own fruits and vegetables for summer eating and fall canning to take them through the winter months. Prior to adequate rail connections with the East, once the Mississippi River froze in late fall or early winter, there were no shipments of goods or supplies until the spring thaw. By 1867 there was a rail link from St. Paul to Chicago, and after that time the railroad was the prime mover of raw materials and consumer goods in and out of the city. These improved transportation links led to the opening of a greater number of retail shops in the city and more and varied choices for the consumer.

Much of the shopping was done by the "lady of the house," even when domestics were employed. In the days prior to telephones, Mary Hill, Caroline Schurmeier, Gertrude Upham, and Caroline Gotzian would all have had a "standing order" with several nearby merchants for routine grocery purchases to be delivered to their homes, perhaps weekly. Any perishable commodity, such as dairy products, produce, or meat, however, would be purchased more often. Use of the family carriage for these shopping trips would perhaps have depended on whether the shops on the Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) bluff were the destination,



*Voucher from Andrew Schoch Grocery Co. (8/31/1888). Courtesy of James J. Hill Papers, James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.*

eight or nine blocks from home, or if the shops were within walking distance.

The grocery stores that these Lower-town families used most often were located within a few blocks of their homes. The shops the Hills patronized and their specialties as advertised, included, among others: Griggs & Co., *Staples & Fancy Groceries*; Andrew Schoch Grocery Co., *Foreign & Domestic Table Luxuries*; M. A. Coulter & Co., *Fresh, Salt and Smoked Meats, Poultry, Game, Etc*; W. H. Lyon, *Provisions, Groceries, Wines and Liquors*. They purchased clothing for men and boys at Boston *One Price Clothing House* and R. A. Lanpher & Co., *Hatters and Gents' Furnishers, Traveling Bags, Umbrellas, Canes—Shirts to Order*, or had items custom-made at a tailor such as George Palmes, *Draper and Tailor*. Dressmakers such as Mrs. F. E. Elwell, whose *Dress Making Rooms*, were in her home at 142 East 10th Street, produced much of the feminine fashions of the day. Dry Goods (fabric, sewing notions, undergarments, hose, lace and trim, etc) necessitated a trip to Mannheimer Brothers, *Foreign and Domestic Dry Goods*, at the corner of Minnesota and Third Streets, a bumpy ride for sure!

Household goods were all readily available from the numerous hardware (Mayo & Clark), appliance (J. H. Breidert), druggists (Allen & Dorsey), stationary (White, Stone & Co.), books (D. D. Merrill & Co.), and other specialty stores that filled the blocks from Eighth Street to the river. The horses' needs and feeds were purchased at any number of merchants, many situated on the edges of the Lowertown neighborhood.

The children of these four families had the same type of constant contact as their mothers and fathers. They played together as youngsters in Lafayette Square (or Park, which the city built in 1886) at Tenth and Grove streets, or in the yard in front of the Hill carriage house, across Ninth Street, where in the winter, "the toboggan slide was put up." Vacations were sometimes shared, whether at the Hills' North Oaks Farm or the Gotzians' home at White Bear Lake. In one documented instance in 1889, the whole lot of mothers and children went to Maine for two weeks to vacation and attend the wedding of Florence Manvel, the daughter of another close neighbor in Lowertown.<sup>7</sup>

The children of these prosperous families were taught at home during their early years. The Hill daughters all attended Visitation Academy, located at 318 Somerset Street, before moving to the Litchfield mansion at Robert Street and Aurora (now University Avenue) in 1881. The girls, other than the Hill's first child, Mamie, who married in 1888, completed their education in New York City. The older Hill boys went east to Exeter Academy before attending Yale University. Public and private education in St. Paul was, like the city itself, in its infancy, and established eastern preparatory and finishing schools were thought to better prepare students for their future life.

The Lowertown neighborhood had many places of worship: First Baptist Church, German Lutheran Church, First Methodist Evangelical Church and a Swedish Lutheran Church, in addition to the Catholic Church of St. Mary, which the Hill family attended. Mary Hill was Catholic and although James Hill was not, he was among a group of subscribers to the 1865 building fund. St. Mary's Church, located on



St. Mary's Church, 9th and Locust, St. Paul in about 1870 with a partially completed bell tower. Photographed by William Henry Illingworth. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

the corner of Ninth and Locust streets, was dedicated in 1867. In 1923 a new church was built, within two blocks of the Lowertown block the Hills lived on, at Rosabel and Eighth streets. Even after her move to Summit Avenue, Mary Hill was very active in the religious life of the parish as well as its charitable activities, especially the St. Mary's Home for Girls and the Catholic Orphan Asylum. The women Mary Hill worshipped and worked with at St. Mary's also remained friends. Mesdames McQuillen, Kelly, Allan, Beaupre, and Prince, among others who served in the Rosary Society and on the boards of St. Mary's charitable institutions with Mary Hill, are mentioned often in her diary entries long after the Hills moved from Lowertown. The Hills' friends worshipped at other nearby Protestant churches. The Conrad Gotzian and Casper Schumeier families

### The Church of St. Mary of St. Paul

In 1865, the downtown area of St. Paul had two Catholic parishes, the Cathedral, at Sixth and St. Peter Streets, and Assumption, built in 1856 to serve the city's German Catholic members. As the residential area in St. Paul's Lowertown grew, its Catholic inhabitants asked for a new parish. Bishop Thomas L. Grace agreed, and plans went forward for a new church, to be called St. Mary's, to be built at the northeast corner of Ninth and Locust Streets. At that time the majority of the Lowertown Catholic families were members of the Cathedral parish, which primarily served the Irish and French Catholics of St. Paul.

The cornerstone of St. Mary's, blessed on May 20, 1866, was an important event in the city. The procession from the Cathedral to the Lowertown site was led by the Great Western Band, and the ceremony was attended by most of St. Paul's 7,000 Catholics. Contributions to St. Mary's building fund came from Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and included a number of the city's most prominent citizens; Rice, Sibley, Prince, McQuillan, Merriam, Borup, Davidson, Thompson, Wilder, Sheehy, Markoe, and Hill.

Construction of the church was completed in 1867, the same year James and Mary Hill married and moved to their first home in Lowertown. Father Louis Cail-

let, Mary Hill's old friend, was named the pastor of St. Mary's, and the first Mass was said on July 28, 1867.

St. Mary's was a very active community from its inception, and the women of the parish were involved in not only the usual social activities, but also in raising funds and administering some of the institutions associated with the church. In addition to a parish school, St. Mary's Home for Girls provided lodging and industrial classes, such as sewing instruction, for young women who came to the city to work. St. Mary's Home also had a day nursery to care for the children of working mothers. An Institute for Deaf-Mutes and the first Visitation Convent school were both located in the parish as well.

In 1922, the same factors that had precipitated the move of many of Lowertown's original residents more than twenty years earlier, now necessitated the move of St. Mary's Church itself. Although the old church property was sold to the Great Northern Railway Company, the parish remained in Lowertown. A new church was built at Eighth and Rosabel Streets, across Ninth Street from where the Hill home had stood. St. Mary's remains in that location today, and is serving a reemerging residential area once more.

To see an almost exact replica of the

original St. Mary's Church, travel to White Bear Lake, where in 1926 three of Mary Hill's daughters financed the construction of that town's new St. Mary's Catholic Church. It was dedicated, "In Memory of a Beloved Mother Mary Theresa Hill . . ."

**Source:** Rev. James M. Reardon, *The Church of St. Mary of Saint Paul: The Story of a Pioneer Parish* (1935).



St. Mary's Church. Pen-and-ink drawing from about 1886 by Frances James. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

attended the First German Methodist Church and the Henry Upham family went to St. Paul's Episcopal Church.<sup>8</sup>

As the wealth of these four families increased and their children began leaving home for schooling and marriage, the relationships that the Hills formed with their neighbors continued to be very important. The private letters in the Louis W. Hill Papers repeatedly mention the Gotzians, Uphams and Schurmeiers. Mary Hill's diaries are filled with references to her friends from these three families, and later with entries on visits received or made, and receptions, dinners, or other entertainments enjoyed with them and their now-adult children. The children also remained close as is evidenced by the members of the wedding party when Vallie Gotzian married Samuel Hutchinson in 1901. Louis Hill was the best man, Clara, Charlotte, and Ruth Hill, and Conradine Gotzian Schurmeier, a niece of the bride, were bridesmaids, and John Upham served as an usher.<sup>9</sup>

Today, there are no homes, or any structures, on the block where these families lived, Canada Street is gone entirely, and Wacouta stands on the edge of a tangle of freeway entrance and exit ramps. The Upham lot and the lot where Hill's stable sat are parking lots. A small, overgrown corner above the freeway is part of the Hill property; the remainder of that lot and those owned by Gotzian and Schurmeier are now part of Interstate 35E. The First Baptist Church, across Wacouta from the original Upham home, remains from the residential Lowertown of 1867–1891. Bethesda Hospital, opened in 1892 where the former neighborhood homes of our families stood, has also disappeared. The hospital used the Upham home for the main hospital building, later adding two stories, and the Gotzian home became the Deaconess Home. In 1909 the hospital erected an additional building, connected to the Upham house, where the Hill home had stood.<sup>10</sup>

During the seventy-one years Mary Hill was a St. Paul resident, she saw many changes. In 1917 she wrote, "... we drove through the district that is being demolished for Railway improvements. Such is progress! Old St. Paul is pretty



*Clara Hill, Conradine Gotzian Schurmeier, unknown, Charlotte Hill standing; Ruth Hill, Roberta Gotzian, unknown, middle row sitting; Helena Gotzian Driscoll sitting in front (unknowns are Grace Hutchinson and Frances Tarbox), in 1901. Photo courtesy of Accession from private collection, James J. Hill Papers, James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.*

well eradicated. From Jackson Street to Broadway and all back from 9th Street, looks as if a cyclone struck it." Today *Lowertown* points to an area nearer the river, nearer Hill's depot, Upham's bank, and Gotzian's shoe factory. The area is undergoing rehabilitation and renewal, and the warehouses and factories and retail stores are now being turned into restaurants, small businesses, community service centers, and residential units. A neighborhood can have a great number of defining characteristics or only a very few, however, the one thing it needs is

people who connect with each other in some way. The residents of Lowertown in St. Paul's early years, as well as the residents of today, seem to share the experience of being part of a grand neighborhood. I wonder what Mary Hill would write in her diary about the Lowertown of today?<sup>11</sup>

*Eileen McCormack is Associate Curator, Hill Manuscript Services, at the James J. Hill Reference Library in St. Paul. Her history of the Louis Hill house in St. Paul was published in this magazine in 2003.*

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## Notes

1. Mary T. Hill to Louis W. Hill, July 22, 1891. Louis W. Hill Papers (LWHP), James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.

2. Sources for this narrative are primarily St. Paul City Directories, published maps, and financial information in the James J. Hill Papers, and Mary Hill letters and diaries in the Louis Hill Papers. All are held at the James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, Minnesota. For general information on business and society in early St. Paul see: Jocelyn Wills, *Boosters, Hustlers, and Speculators: Entrepreneurial Culture and the Rise of Minneapolis and St. Paul 1849-1883* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005) and Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

3. Virginia Brainard Kunz, *Saint Paul—The First 150 Years* (St. Paul: The Saint Paul Foundation, 1991), pp 34-35.

4. Census records, both United States and Minnesota State, held at Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

5. “The Gotzian Footprint” (Saint Paul: Rice & Bell Pub., 1915). Gotzian and Schurmeier family information courtesy of Geoffrey Brewster.

6. *Organization and Governance of the Minnesota Club* (St. Paul: The Minnesota Club, 1886), p. 29. Mary T. Hill Diaries, LWHP.

7. Mary T. Hill Diaries, February 2, 1891; June 20–27, 1889, LWHP.

8. Rev. James M. Reardon, *The Church of St.*

*Mary of Saint Paul* (St. Paul: Saint Paul Archdiocese, 1935). Information on the Gotzians and the Schurmeiers is from Helen Miller Dickison, “Roots in the English John Wesley: St. Paul’s First German Methodist Church,” *Ramsey County History* 38 (Spring 2003): 19–24. Henry Upham’s obituary (he died May 1, 1909) states that funeral services were conducted by the Rev. John Wright, who was the rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church.

9. *The Duluth Evening Herald*, (Duluth, Minnesota), April 27, 1901.

10. Bill Hakala and Nancy Skaran, *Bethesda, A Century of Caring: 1883-1983* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 16–22.

11. Mary T. Hill Diary, June 20, 1917, LWHP.

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# Lowertown: Another Perspective

## David Riehle

The fire insurance maps compiled in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for the information of insurers are an invaluable resource for historians. The mapmakers needed to provide their customers with crucial information on the materials used in buildings, especially their combustible potential. Accordingly their maps were color coded to distinguish stone and brick buildings from wood construction, houses and industrial structures from stables, as well as supplementary information on access to fire hydrants, internal sprinkling systems, and so on.

While it was certainly not the purpose of the mapmakers, we can readily deduce patterns of social differentiation among the multicolored records they have left us. In general, relative positions on the ladder of economic class in the city were marked by the materials used to construct private homes, as well as, inevitably, their dimensions. Brick and stone houses were, of course, for the most part more expensive than those of wood-frame material, and generally bigger. And, conveniently for historians, they were indicated by dif-

ferent colors on the insurance maps. The homes of James J. Hill, Conrad Gotzian, and Henry Upham on the block bounded by Ninth, Tenth, Wacouta and Canada streets, whose residents are the focus of Eileen McCormack’s article elsewhere in this magazine, are tinted pink in the 1884 edition of the *G.M. Hopkins Real Estate Atlas* for the city of St. Paul, indicating they were constructed of stone or brick.

And they were bigger. Looking at the formidable pink footprints of these three structures on the Hopkins map of the Lowertown area, for this writer at least, an irresistible image arises of an area where elephants have recently trod. Of course the Empire Builder was, beyond the possibility of dispute, the alpha-elephant in the world of the Great Northwest in his time.

Zooming out, however, many other footprints come into view. This watering hole, to continue the metaphor, clearly was not frequented by only one species. Almost all the buildings in the surrounding blocks are wooden structures, and smaller. Those that are not are, with very

few exceptions, either churches or apartment buildings. The numerous structures marked with interior “x’s” are stables, surely redolent of olfactory signatures we rarely encounter in our present urban life. Thus Jim Hill had his personal horse barn right across Ninth Street from the family home, although, being Jim Hill, his was built of brick.

This commingling of the classes, evident in Lowertown’s jumble of buildings depicted in the Hopkins map, was not limited to proximity of homes. In those days people walked to work, and to just about every other location with which they were concerned in their personal lives. The overwhelming majority of retail and working destinations of people in Lowertown were only a few blocks from their homes, as well as their churches, fraternal lodges, union halls, and venues for drinking, gambling, and prostitution.<sup>1</sup> Leon Trotsky, the Russian communist leader who helped organize the 1917 revolution, once said that one of the crucial historic social distinctions was between the equestrian and the pedestrian,



*The Stahlmann Cave Brewery as depicted on the company letterhead. Courtesy of Paul Clifford Larson. See article beginning on page 12.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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