

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

*Louis and Maybelle:*

*Somewhere Out  
in the West*

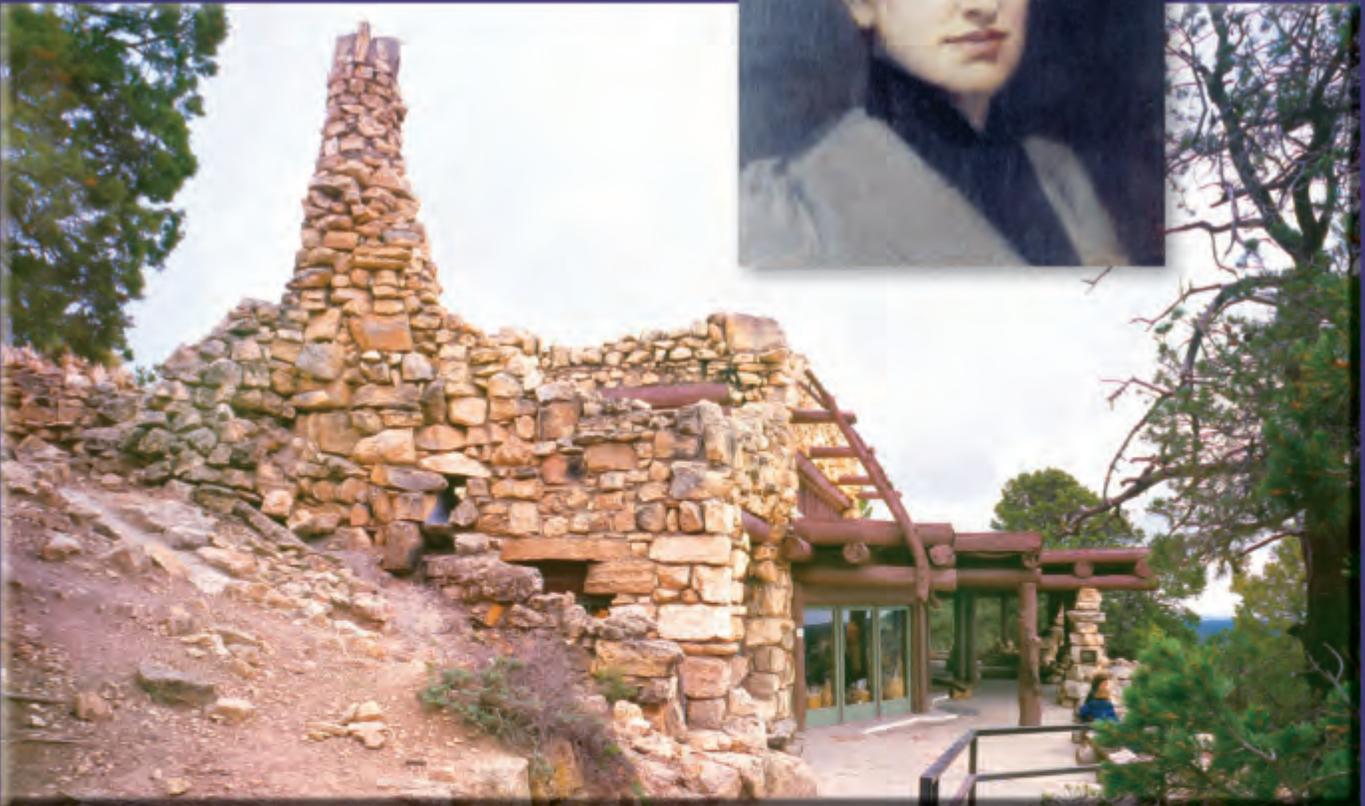
John W. Larson

—page 13

**Winter 2011**

Volume 45, Number 4

*“We Can Do Better with a Chisel or a Hammer”  
Appreciating Mary Colter and Her Roots in St. Paul  
Diane Trout-Oertel, page 3*



Artist Arthur F. Matthews painted the portrait of Mary Jane Elizabeth Colter seen above in about 1890, when she graduated from the California School of Design. Colter subsequently taught art for many years at Mechanic Arts High School in St. Paul and later designed eight buildings at the Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona. Shown here is Hermit's Rest, located at the westernmost stop on the south rim, a building that Colter designed in 1914. The Colter portrait is reproduced courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Flagstaff, Ariz. Photograph of Hermit's Rest courtesy of Alexander Vertikoff. Hermit's Rest copyright © Alexander Vertikoff.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 45, Number 4

Winter 2011

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

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

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Sometimes Ramsey County is a jumping-off point. In this issue, Diane Trout-Oertel examines the career of Mary Colter, a St. Paul-born designer and architect who learned her craft here, taught at Mechanic Arts High School, and later moved west to design buildings and interiors for the Fred Harvey Company at the Grand Canyon. The article traces Colter’s ties with the Arts and Crafts movement and the integration of Native American traditions in her designs. On another level, John Larson portrays an evocative view of his aunt and her husband, who also “take off” for the West as proprietors of a nightclub hotel in a Montana boom town, which flourished during the construction of the Fort Peck Dam. And the use of the mail to move substantial goods became prevalent in the early twentieth century, as shown in Janice Quick’s sketch of the process of buying a tombstone from none other than Sears, Roebuck. Finally, we share a book review and some new perspectives relating to the life of Louis W. Hill Sr., as shown in Biloine Young and Eileen McCormack’s recent book, *The Dutiful Son*. Happy winter reading.

*Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board*

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## What Readers Are Saying about

# The Dutiful Son, Louis W. Hill, and Glacier National Park

**I**n September 2010 the Ramsey County Historical Society published *The Dutiful Son: Louis W. Hill; Life in the Shadow of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill, the first book-length biography of Louis Hill (1872–1948), the second son of St. Paul railroad builder, James J. Hill and his wife, Mary T. Hill. Author Biloine W. (Billie) Young and researcher Eileen R. McCormack collaborated skillfully in preparing this in-depth examination of the life and career of Louis Hill, his relations with his parents and his eight siblings, and his accomplishments over a long and productive life. In addition to their book, Young and McCormack also contributed an article about Louis and his role in the development of Glacier National Park in Montana that appeared in the Summer 2010 issue of Ramsey County History. Since the publication of *The Dutiful Son* and this article on Glacier Park, the Ramsey County Historical Society and collaborators Young and McCormack have received a number of written comments in letters and emails about the book or article. Consequently we decided to share some excerpts from these communications along with a formal book review of *The Dutiful Son* by renowned railroad historian H. Roger Grant that follows in our regular Book Reviews section of this issue.*

“It is far more important that they graduate from Yale than what they may have learned there.”—James J Hill regarding his sons.

I have recently had the opportunity to read the biography of Louis Warren Hill, titled *The Dutiful Son*, and published by the Ramsey County Historical Society. The book was written by Biloine Young and Eileen McCormack, both of St. Paul, and is substantially based on the massive and hitherto unpublicized personal records of Hill (son of James J., the Empire Builder). Young has written several interesting and readable volumes about a variety of topics centered on Minnesota, and McCormack is a diligent research librarian who has spent most of her recent career working with the James Hill and related family papers, originally as employee of the James J. Hill Reference Library and more recently as a free lance research editor — specializing as an expert on the several collections of Hill Family papers. The James J. Hill personal papers have been accessible to students and other researchers for decades

(under the care of the Hill Library), but the Louis Hill papers have been far less explored — although theoretically accessible. Lack of budget support from the Library for an electronic catalog, meant that even if a scholar were aware of the collection, it would have been hard to access and use. The recent transfer of the papers from the Library to the Minnesota Historical Society created an improved access to the voluminous Louis files for research and further publication. Thus, this book presents much new information about the James J. and Louis W. Hill families; much of which will be new to the public (as well as to current generations of the Hill family).

Louis Warren was the third child and second son of James J. and Mary Hill. He lived his entire life in his parent’s homes or next door to the Summit Avenue “big house” at 260 Summit Avenue in St. Paul. This does not imply parochialism; Hill had a second home in California; summered at North Oaks; and travelled globally. His energy levels rivaled those of his workaholic father, but his focus was

broader and his concentration may have been less intense. The life described in the subject volume was certainly that of a human whirlwind living a life of many business explorations, unmatched civic involvements, and a *joie de vivre* approaching manic levels. Along the way, assisted by proximity, he accumulated a fortune that matched and exceeded that of his father and that served as a source of three great foundations that continue to serve their community, their country, and the world. The Northwest Area Foundation is the residue of Louis and his wife Maud’s estates, the Grotto Foundation was a legacy of Louis’s eldest son — Louis W. Junior—and the Jerome Foundation was the namesake of his youngest son. Louis Senior did very well for himself; the community in which we live perceives that James J. Hill generated and accumulated great wealth in his day, but the larger fortune the one that has benefitted Saint Paul, the Northwest, and substantially the Arts was that of Louis Warren Hill. There is no James J. Hill Foundation.

It would appear that the J.J. Hill children were raised in a strongly cloistered household in a neighborhood with next to no social contact, with education of sorts in a third floor school room, and with a dominating mother and a driven, distracted father. The girls had no college level education but were schooled in traditional manners and domestic skills and buffed up by the Visitation sisters. It’s no wonder that they were shy and uncertain (for example, Mary) and married, often young and often to a member of a small pool of potentials—men working at the railroad who may have come home for dinner (Sam Hill, George Slade, and Erasmus “Ras” Lindley) or from families wintering at Jekyll Island [South Carolina]. All but Rachel (who married a wonderful Norwegian doctor and Minnesota football hero [Egil

Boeckmann] and thus had her own support system) would flee the coop as soon as they could, generally to New York where brother Jim provided a modicum of family connection and shelter.

The three boys were a different matter—as youngsters they had the same puppy-litter household as the rest of the family, schooled at home, etc. Father Hill probably thought he was a descendant of Joan of Arc and thus invincible/invulnerable until he got the railroad to Seattle; nonetheless, there were twinges of successor leadership issues impacting his sons. Hill strongly believed in education, both formal and practical. He felt that a Yale University degree was symptomatic of mental competency and that would be a prerequisite for both a Hill son and/or a railroad manager.

It turned out that this was not a simple goal. To get into Yale required a level of academic accomplishment not attainable in the 3rd floor study hall, and thus it was imperative to get the progeny into and through Phillips Exeter Academy, the “right” gateway to Yale. This too was not easy, but was accomplished by two years of effort and with creation of an off campus residence where Jim and Louis could be both monitored and tutored. The process was enhanced by gifts to the school and “kindnesses” to faculty and administration. Jim was 1-1/2 years older than Louis, was smarter and more gregarious, and when pushed, could pass entrance exams. Louis lagged some of these skills, and could not obtain simultaneous admission to Yale with his brother.

“Aha” said someone. “The Yale establishment includes a scientific academy, Sheffield Scientific, which offers a diploma after a three year program. Give Louis another year at Exeter and we can surely get him into Sheff!” So done; two sons through college with diplomas issued in New Haven. After graduation they went to work for the railroad—positions were available both in the Great Northern or the Northern Pacific. Hill bragged about both sons—he favored Jim at the time as being smarter and quicker and more gregarious. Jim, however, had discovered the bright lights of New York, and he found frequent reason to visit and later to establish a *piéd-à-terre* where he

could enjoy the bright lights and charming women.

Then I was struck by the adjective selected for the title of the new book. The choice of “dutiful” seems to me to be ingenuous, when so many other adjectives might have been substituted. Among those would have been kinetic, impatient, self-centered, artistic, perhaps selfish, certainly self-assured. One by one, Louis’ family siblings—possible claimants to be the senior Hill’s successor—had wilted away. No one ever expected that one of the six Hill daughters would be a contestant—they had been bred and educated to be members of an upper class society and to serve as wives, mothers, and good company. None of their spouses, some of whom were experienced railroad men, were ever really considered in the running for a top position at the Great Northern—that choice had to be a namesake. Sam Hill, the non-related energetic and confident lawyer who had married Mamie, the Hill’s eldest daughter was allowed to resign when he became too presumptuous. The Hill sons were reduced by circumstances: James Norman, the eldest of the three and an early favorite son, took himself out of the running by (1) an arthritic disability; and (2) marriage to a woman unacceptable to mother Mary (and thus to James J.). James Norman moved to New York and took on the (successful) life of a dilettante capitalist, never to return. Walter, the youngest, was happily engaged in a free-wheeling playboy/cowboy existence in Montana. The throne was there whether Louis was dutiful or not. There was no question but that he wanted the position—his particular wisdom was in not making a critical error that would have blown him out of the catbird seat.

What this all comes down to is that there is a real challenge to biographers in using material that was accumulated and filtered through a single perspective, and thus these authors have taken the risk of presenting it not only in a consistently single flavored voice, but also pretty baldly without third party evaluation or critique. The whirlwind was a very successful man, but did everything that engaged him always turn out well or were there flaws? Were his sisters as niggling as described or would they have told a

different story? (Why was their nickname for him “Pooch”?) Unfortunately, lacking more diversified information, the Louis papers may never be tested or comprehensively challenged.

Make no mistake: L.W. Hill was a remarkable man—imaginative, energetic, open minded, and extraordinarily successful using native skill and the assets of position to “make” far more money than his celebrated father. His is a real story. . . and we can’t tell from here—from the assembled facts from a singular and monocular source—whether there are more comprehensive records available.

I have also just read the very good article in the Summer 2010 issue of *Ramsey County History* entitled “‘He Had a Great Flair for the Colorful:’ Louis W Hill and Glacier National Park,” which is an excellent example of a more narrow topic researched and written well and supported by numerous other sources that fully describes one of Louis W. Senior’s long-time enthusiasms. I think this is an excellent essay by the authors and one that reflects well on their partnership.

*G. Richard Slade, Minneapolis*

*In response to this letter from Mr. Slade, Anne Cowie, the chair of the RCHS Editorial Board, prepared the response that follows:*

Dear Dick,

Thanks for taking the time to write a thoughtful response after reading our latest book, *The Dutiful Son*.

As you noted, Eileen McCormack carefully combed through the Louis Hill papers to get a thorough picture of Hill as memorialized there. Billie Young worked with the material to attempt to gain an understanding of Hill as he stood, framed by the times. For instance, Hill’s activities with Glacier Park translated his boundless energy into civic involvement—and, not coincidentally, also into more business for the Great Northern railroad! At the same time, as you point out, women during that era were expected to tend the home front, and the story of the “family business” might have been quite different had James J.’s daughters been encouraged to participate more fully.

We see this book as a starting point for analyzing Hill's public and private life as a major figure of this region. We recognize that any historical work represents an interaction between available source material and the author's perceptions. This biography reflects those sources, but does not, of course, present viewpoints from associates or family members if they were not shared.

Your letter illuminates some cogent points. We have also received some other comments about the book and are considering publishing some of them in *Ramsey County History*. If you feel comfortable, we would be pleased to publish portions of your letter in that vein. And if you have the time or inclination to write more, we would welcome the opportunity to publish an article that draws on different sources and expands on some of your observations. A historical dialogue creates great history!

Thanks again for your response and for your continuing support.

Sincerely,  
*Anne Cowie*  
 Chair, Editorial Board

\* \* \*

Re: Louis W. Hill article, Summer edition of *Ramsey County History*.

This note is written to add a local credit for the graphic design of the original mountain goat logo first used by the Great Northern Railway in 1921. According to our family lore, Louis W. Hill Sr. stopped by my Uncle's (Theodore A. Pederson) Graphic Art office (Pederson & Adamson, Engravers, 665 Gilfillan Block, Fourth and Jackson) circa 1920-21 and had him design a Great Northern logo using the mountain goat as a symbol.

Subsequently, beginning with Hill's "See America First" promotion in 1922, variations evolved of the goat logo. By 1936, the goat was facing sideways and was perched majestically on a mountain peak. These logos, used nationally on all the train cars, have been credited to Joe Scheuerle, part of the Glacier National Park artist group as reported in the new Louis Hill, Sr. biography

just published by the Ramsey County Historical Society.

*Jeanne J. Cummings, Edina, Minn.*

*Editor's Note: Ms. Cummings attached to her letter the various GN Railway logos reproduced above. She pointed to the 1921 logo as the one her uncle designed with the original usage of the mountain goat. Artist Joseph Scheuerle is credited with having designed the more familiar logo of 1936. These GN logos are reproduced here from [www.gngoat.org/paint\\_schemes.htm](http://www.gngoat.org/paint_schemes.htm) by courtesy of Mr. Lindsay Korst, Great Northern Railway Historical Society, webmaster.*

\* \* \*

I just finished reading your book on Louis Hill and really enjoyed it. . . . The dynamics of the Hills family were fascinating. I also gleaned a possible new connection to my family. I had not realized that Louis Hill had the controlling shares of the First National Bank of St. Paul. [Young and McCormack] write how generous he was to those less fortunate than he during the Great Depression. When my grandfather was starting his law practice in 1931, in the depths of the Great Depression, his office was on the 14th floor of the 1st National Bank of St. Paul. Since he had such a small income the bank allowed him to use the space, rent free, until such time as his income increased. I don't know if this was approved by Louis Hill, but it certainly must have been approved by someone fairly high up in the bank. I also don't know if any other tenant was ever allowed free space in the bank. My grandfather and Louis Jr. were both elected to the State Legislature the same year and served on some of the same committees throughout the years. Both he and my grandmother were friends with Louis Hill Jr. . . . , but I don't know if they ever met Louis Sr. After reading your book, I would like to think that they did at some point meet him.

*Kathy Castillo, St. Paul*

\* \* \*

I have just finished your book on Louis W. Hill and am writing to thank you for



your efforts and tell you how much I enjoyed reading it.

I grew up hearing stories about Mr. Hill and other members of the Hill family from my mother, then Marian Youngren, who served as a personal assistant to him from the mid-1930s until the mid-1940s. I am not precisely certain of those dates, but Mother probably left his employ just

before I was born in early 1945. Close to the end of his life, she and I visited Mr. Hill at his home on Summit Avenue. I remember that he visited our home shortly before he died. I have some memory of his limousine and am told his chauffeur, William, tolerated me while I asked questions.

Mother died in 1997, but the stories she told me will always be a part of my life. I thought you might like to hear some of them. . . .

There is a photo on page 29 [of *The Dutiful Son*] of LW's and James Norman's room at Exeter that shows a shotgun. I wonder if that is the shotgun that James J. gave to Louis for Christmas. LW told my Mother that in his excitement, he picked up the shotgun, aimed it at the ceiling and pulled the trigger. It was not loaded, but his father was so angry at his rashness that he took the gun away from him for a year.

Mother traveled on LW's private rail car. LW told her a story that occurred well before Mother knew him. The family would travel with his mother-in-law. Apparently she was rather dramatic and often feigned illness at night and asked for a glass of champagne. LW complied until one of the children came down from an upper berth and stepped on the glass, and sustained a serious cut. LW's car steward was named Bill. Once when he was throwing ice off the back of the car, Mother asked him why. He replied that the "cold had gone out of it." When you see how ice looks after it has been unrefrigerated for a while, you understand what Bill meant.

I am not sure why Mother spent so much time with the family away from the office, at the farm, on car rides, etc. She routinely referred to his sons as "the boys." One time Mother, Cortlandt, and LW were in a car; and Mr. Hill said something like, "Corty, why don't you give Miss Marian a kiss." According to Mother, Corty replied, "I don't think she'd like that very well." Mother seemed to think that Mr. Hill promoted a relationship with Corty, but I don't think she took it very seriously.

Another time she, LW, and others were driving and stopped for lunch. A group of young people kept playing the jukebox, which irritated LW. As he left the diner, he put money in the machine

and told them that they had made it noisy for him; now he was going to make it noisy for them. Another time, they stopped for lunch, and when LW learned the only thing served was hamburgers, he turned to leave. The man behind counter asked him, "What's wrong with my hamburgers?"

[The book] mentioned that Maud once complained that LW argued with priests. According to Mother, LW was once at confession and the priest told him he should give more to the church. He asked how the priest knew who he was, and priest said he could see his red beard through the screen. Mother said he never went back to a Catholic church until his funeral. Mother said bought Mr. Hill's ties at Walgreen's because he did not want to spend more than \$.49 a tie. During WWII, LW, like a lot of people, sent small monthly stipends to soldiers in combat, perhaps \$10 or \$15. When one of the recipients received a promotion, Mother said Mr. Hill cut him back \$5 a month.

Interestingly, she never mentioned LW's drinking, though Louis Fors Hill did in an article in Corporate Report magazine some years ago. She never mentioned that LW and Maud separated, though she never mentioned Maud either. Mother related something LW told her that would dispute the account that he willingly gave up control of the Great Northern. He told her that they (the board, I assume) waited till he was out of town before they ousted him.

I wish [author Biloine Young] could have had the chance to interview my Mother. Her time with the Hills transported her from a world of Depression poverty in St. Paul and introduced her to a whole new world. She even lived at Hill's Pebble Beach home for a brief period. That is particularly relevant because that started a lifelong affair with the Monterey Peninsula. She visited there almost to the end of her life and passed her love of the area along to me. My wife and I moved from Saint Paul to live on the Monterey Bay and frequently make the drive past the Hill house on the Seventeen Mile Drive. [*The Dutiful Son*] has brought back lots of memories and prompted lots of questions. . . .

Thank you again for [the] excellent book. I am glad to see the Ramsey County Historical Society continues to sponsor such worthy efforts. . . . Hope it sparks lots of interest.

*Chuck Carlson,  
Monterey Bay, Calif.*

\* \* \*

I have just finished reading your very good book which the authors have chosen to call DUTIFUL SON, thereby reducing its subject several notches. The man appears to have been outstanding in every way, on his own and not as an offspring of his father.

Please tell your authors that on page 47 they have struck a blow to the heart of a Duluthian who used to go to dances in its ballroom: the Spalding Hotel was once the pride of Duluth (not Superior) and in its last days still had the cachet of luxury in its gallery of paintings and a survivor from the past with its round plush common seat in the lobby.

To get back to criticism. This volume, while doubtless researched to a fare-thee-well, gives us darned little of what Louis Hill was like. It is more a record of his acts, travels, and to some extent his affinities.

"For such a careful financial genius, he was fond of practical jokes and roared through his beard when a friend played one on even himself ..." would be a welcome way to get to know the guy. Even his quoted letters reveal little of [the] man's inner personality. Maybe the evidence isn't there, but in the umpteen millions of Hill papers there ought to be something more personal, more revealing.

*Walter Trenerry,  
West St. Paul*

\* \* \*

The [Summer] issue of *Ramsey County History Magazine* is quite wonderful. Glacier N[ational] P[ark] has a special place in my heart as my parents met there in 1938 or 1939, when they were both employed for the summer.

As a young adult, I had my own July 4th Glacier NP adventure, which included the full drive across the Going to the Sun Highway, a barbecue cowboy-style, and a horse race.

*Susanne Heimbuch,  
Los Angeles, Calif.*

# Book Review

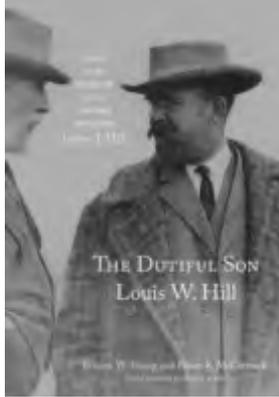
## *The Dutiful Son: Louis W. Hill; Life in the Shadow of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill*

Biloine W. (Billie) Young and Eileen R. McCormack

St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society, 2010

365 pages; cloth, notes, appendix, index; \$36.95.

Reviewed by H. Roger Grant



The nine surviving children of James J. Hill (1838–1916), builder of the mighty Great Northern Railway, and his wife Mary Theresa Mehegan (1846–1921), experienced varying degrees of success and happiness. Some wealthy self-made business tycoons have had unpleasant experiences with their offspring, who might become involved in adultery, lawsuits and fierce intra-family squabbles and suffer from alcoholism, chronic illness or some other affliction. Other men have had a least one child, inevitably a male, who carried on successfully the family business. Take Ford Harvey, who expanded profitably the hospitality enterprise established by his father Fred Harvey, and William Henry Vanderbilt, son of Cornelius Vanderbilt who consolidated and strengthened his father's growing railroad empire.

The life story of Louis Warren Hill Sr. (1872–1948) largely parallels that of Ford Harvey and William Henry Vanderbilt. This second son of James J. Hill revealed the positive traits of his famous father, including dedication to hard work, attention to details, ability to pick expert managers, and an uncanny business sense. But the remarkable accomplishments of his father have always overshadowed the son, yet Louis Hill deserves proper recognition.

Yale educated (but who struggled academically), Louis became the eye of his father, at least from a business per-

spective. Once Louis joined the Great Northern, he accomplished much. He left his mark on the Pacific Northwest and the nation by spearheading creation of Glacier National Park, bringing about its development and promoting this national treasure through an aggressive "See America First" publicity campaign. Growth of the park not only bolstered the railroad's passenger revenues, it also reflected the naturalist side of the younger Hill. And it was Louis who early on grasped the importance of the developing Iron Range in northeastern Minnesota. His involvement benefitted him personally and also the Great Northern.

But Louis, differing from his father, expressed an interest in a variety of largely non-business activities. The most apparent was his love of art and his skill as a painter. In some ways, too, he became a more sophisticated philanthropist, although he personally wanted to assist only the truly needy. Yet the establishment of his well-funded foundation did much to aid his hometown of St. Paul and the service territory along the Great Northern. Unlike other members of the immediate Hill family, Louis became a dedicated St. Paul booster, helping to energize the St. Paul Winter Carnival and other community activities. And he doted on his parents, especially his mother after the senior

Hill's death. Moreover, Louis struggled to settle his father's complicated estate, who had died without leaving a will. Unfortunately, his siblings for years failed to realize their brother's hard work and honesty.

Louis Hill was not without his weaknesses. He may have consumed too much alcohol, and somehow his once happy marriage ended in an informal separation. Louis was also a hypochondriac. He might have had a more fulfilling life if he would have abandoned his Roman Catholic faith for Christian Science. And Louis possessed a controlling personality, which produced both good and bad results.

Researcher Eileen McCormack and author Biloine (Billie) Young have produced a magnificent biography. The research is impeccable and the narrative is crisply presented. A major contribution of their work is their description and explanation of the complex family relationships, both among Louis Hill and his siblings and his own children. Yet the authors have avoided excessive detail. And they have succeeded in placing Hill in the context of St. Paul, Minnesota, and the nation. The study, too, complements nicely the Ralph and Muriel Hidy et al. history of the Great Northern and the Albro Martin and the Michael Malone biographies of James J. Hill. Outstanding illustrations, a useable index, and an appendix, which includes a valuable family genealogy, add to the worth of this attractively designed and manufactured hardcover book.

*H. Roger Grant, Kathryn and Calhoun Lemon Professor of History at Clemson University, is the author or editor of more than 20 books on railroad and transportation history. His most recent work is Twilight Rails: The Final Era of Railroad Building in the Midwest, published in 2010 by the University of Minnesota Press.*

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*Mary Colter designed Hopi House at the Grand Canyon National Park in 1905. It is one of the eight buildings at the Grand Canyon that Colter designed over a period of about thirty years. For more on Mary Colter and her connection to St. Paul, see page 3. Photograph of Hopi House courtesy of Alexander Vertikoff. Hopi House © Alexander Vertikoff.*