



Louis W. Hill, Sr.

1872-1948

Visitors to the Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation offices are usually surprised to learn that the original oil paintings gracing the walls are the work of Louis W. Hill, Sr. Even more surprising is that Mr. Hill, who inherited the virile personality and business sagacity of his father James Jerome Hill, could have found the time to paint, for his days were filled with railroading, banking, mining and expeditions to the West.

Louis Warren Hill was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on May 19, 1872, the son of James Jerome and Mary Theresa (Mehegan) Hill. He was educated at Phillips Exeter Academy and graduated from Yale University in 1893.

His father, James J. Hill, of Scotch-Irish descent, was born near Guelph, Ontario, on September 16, 1838. He settled in St. Paul, Minnesota and soon became a successful businessman, developing the railroad that later was known as Great Northern and today is a part of the Burlington Northern.

Upon receiving his Bachelor of Philosophy degree from Yale, Louis W. Hill went to work for his father. His apprenticeship included service in a number of Great Northern Railway departments.

In 1895 Hill became a billing clerk at Duluth, Minnesota. His engineering and geological training at Yale enabled him to see northeastern Minnesota's great iron ore potential, not only as railroad freight, but to

the total national economy. His initial purchase of 25,000 acres of land in Michigan in 1898 was followed by additional purchases and leases, culminating in the creation of the Great Northern Iron Ore Properties Trust in 1906. He was its founding president and board chairman until 1945, remaining as a trustee until his death.

By 1898 Mr. Hill was an executive in the railroad and became president of the Great Northern in 1907 upon his father's retirement, succeeding him as Chairman of the Board in 1912. He served as president and board chairman from 1914-1919, and as board chairman until his retirement on October 10, 1929.

Under Louis W. Hill's direction, the Great Northern system's main tract mileage expanded from 6,498 miles to 8,387 miles. In 1908 he transformed the Great Northern from a large number of independent lines operated under lease into one great system by purchasing and consolidating the many subsidiaries.

During his regime, a new line to Vancouver, British Columbia was constructed; track rights between Portland and Seattle were acquired; the Spokane, Portland & Seattle line, in which Great Northern had a half-interest, was completed in 1908; the 226-mile Fargo Surrey cut-off in North Dakota was completed in 1913; a new route across the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains was constructed and electrified from 1926-1929; a through-route from Bend, Oregon to San Francisco was established by connecting with the Western Pacific at Bieber, California, for entry into the California market in 1928-1931; various short branch lines were purchased or built in North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Hill had a great love for the West and he explored it on horseback, by wagon and automobile, sleeping on the prairies, in ranch houses, and primitive communities; studying the land; and talking and listening to the people. It was said that he knew more people west of the Mississippi than any other man. He believed that the wealth and prosperity of the nation came from the soil, and his business sense was keen enough not only to encourage the development of mining and agriculture, but to carry it as freight on the railroad.

Hill was especially interested in Montana's farming potential. At first, people laughed at his dream of turning 93 million acres of semi-arid land into wheat-producing country. But in seven years, under his leadership in irrigation and reclamation, Montana was shipping 25 million bushels of wheat instead of two and a half million, and it was being shipped via the Great Northern.

He knew the lands through which the tracks were laid. He studied its history, the flora and fauna, and especially the Indian legends. He appreciated the natural splendor of Glacier Park, working to preserve it, designing and constructing hotels and chalets so that visitors could enjoy its beauty. These facilities were organized into the Glacier Park Hotel Company in 1914.

Mr. Hill's power to achieve success was amply demonstrated. To illustrate, three years after his father purchased the First National Bank of St. Paul, Louis W. had made it the second largest bank west of the Mississippi. He was a trustee of the Great Northern Iron Ore Properties, St. Paul; chairman of the board and director of the First National Bank of St. Paul; a director in more than a score of other mining and

financial concerns. These included many large and small iron ore companies on the Mesabi Range; the Glacier Park Hotel Company, Canadian Rockies Hotel Company, Merchants Trust Company of St. Paul, Northwestern Trust Company, St. Paul; First and American National Bank of Duluth, Minnesota; United Securities Corporation, St. Paul; First National Bank and National Surety Company of New York, Petroleum Corporation of America, Jersey City, New Jersey; the Mesabi Range Townsite Company and the Minnesota Colonization Company.

Railroads, banking and mining were Mr. Hill's prime interests, but this energetic man also found time for many other activities. He realized that railroads needed good access roads for shipping freight, and this led to his interest in automobiles and road building. He served as chairman of the Minnesota State Highway Commission from 1917 to 1920. In addition to being an accomplished painter and art collector, he also had a great love for music, and for a number of years he was president of the St. Paul Orchestral Association.

Mr. Hill was married on June 5, 1901, to Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor, daughter of Cortlandt M. Taylor, in New York City. They had four children: Louis Warren, Jr., Maud Van Cortlandt, James Jerome II and Cortlandt Taylor Hill.