



Hello, I'm Jillian Odland, cataloger for the Hill papers project. Most of the approximately 1600 cubic feet of material in the Hill Family Collection are the letters, financial records, and other papers of James J. Hill, his family members, and their various business concerns. Among these historically valuable papers there are numerous items in the collection that are particularly unique, interesting, or beautiful, and we'd like to share some of these with you.

A small number of three dimensional objects came to the Historical Society along with the collection. Notable among these are personal items, like these two pairs of eyeglasses which belonged to Louis W. Hill. You can see Louis wearing these glasses in many of the photographs in his papers.

Louis Hill was a big booster for the St. Paul Winter Carnival in the 1910s, 20s, 30s and 40s, and his papers include promotional material for the carnival along with these buttons and patches, and even a rubber stamp featuring a polar bear with a hockey stick. Also in the Hill collection is a pair of wooden snowshoes used by "Iron Fred" Hartman, the American favorite in the 1917 Winnipeg-to-St. Paul Dog Derby; Hartman later gave the shoes to Louis W. Hill, Jr.

James J. Hill's death in 1916 led to innumerable memorials, including articles published in newspapers across the country and worldwide. The Great Northern Railway Company ordered medals stamped with Hill's likeness to give to employees as mementoes, and major companies affiliated with Hill ordered engraved memorial books, in some cases from Tiffany's, which were given to Hill's family members.

Another attractive Tiffany's item is this certificate commemorating the marriage of Louis W. Hill and Maud Van Cortland Taylor in 1901, signed by St. Paul Archbishop John Ireland. Other wedding related items in the collection include these invitations to the weddings of Louis and Maud and of Louis's sister Ruth to Anson Beard. This photo documents the entire Hill clan at the wedding of Charlotte Hill to G. Norman Slade, the first family wedding held in the James J. Hill house on Summit Avenue. These calling cards were almost certainly printed up just prior to the marriage of James J. Hill to Mary Theresa Mehegan; it was customary then to distribute cards with the bride's maiden name and with the couple's married names as an announcement of the upcoming nuptials.

There are other calling cards in the collection as well, some of which are printed with the Hills' names, which they gave away to friends and callers, and some of which are printed with the names of other individuals, which the Hills picked up at one time or another. A few of these cards were found in James J. Hill's wallet after he died, along with his eyeglasses prescription and New York driver's license.

Of course, the majority of the collection is composed of documents, particularly correspondence to and from James J. Hill or other Hill family members. Many of these letters deal with routine business matters; however, there are a few items of correspondence that stand out.

This letter was written by James J. Hill to his grandmother in Canada shortly after his arrival in St. Paul in 1856, when he was just 17 years old. He tells her of his travels from Guelph, Ontario, to New York, Pittsburg, and Chicago, after which, he writes, "I took a notion to go and see St. Paul."

James Hill also received many letters from strangers, some soliciting money, some offering just a hello, and some, like this one, asking for advice. It's from a 10 year old lad from British Columbia, dated May 1908. He tells Hill that "Mother has often told me how you had made your money when you were young," and asks "so would you tell me how to earn money so that I can help Mother and Dad when I grow up."

These are just a few of the items found among the papers, photographs, maps, and objects which comprise the Hill Family Collection. The entire collection, including the James J. Hill, Louis W. Hill, Mary T. Hill, Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor Hill, and Lawrence Dorcy papers, is available for use to researchers in the Minnesota Historical Society Library. Come and have a look; maybe you can find some unique pieces of your own.

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