Hello, I'm Jillian Odland, project cataloger for the Hill Family Collection. This collection, comprised of the papers of St. Paul railroad baron James J. Hill, his wife Mary T. Hill, their son Louis W. Hill, his wife, Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor Hill, and their daughter, Maud Hill Schroll, includes over 8,000 individual visual resources, primarily photographs, but also posters and other graphic material.

The earliest images date to the 1850s and the latest to the 1950s, a wide time frame, but many of the photos feature subject matter that falls into one of a handful of well-represented topics.

The Louis W. Hill papers are full of documents and images related to one of Louis's great loves in life: Glacier National Park in Montana. Louis helped to develop and promote the park in the 1910s, 20s and 30s, and he and his family were frequent visitors. Louis Hill also took a particular interest in the Blackfeet Indians who lived in the area. He became a collector of Blackfeet and other Indian cultural artifacts and used American Indian imagery to promote both Glacier National Park and the Great Northern Railway.

Another of Louis Hill's interests was the St. Paul Winter Carnival; he played a major part in the festival's rebirth in 1916 and was an active participant until the 1940s. Among his papers are albums filled with photos of frost-nipped skiers, tobogganers, hockey players, sleigh riders, and blanket tossers, as well as King Boreas and a plethora of hopeful snow princesses.

The photos aren't all play; the Hills, especially James J. Hill, documented their work as well. James's photos illustrate the growth and history of the Great Northern Railroad, from its construction across North Dakota, Montana, and Washington and celebrations of the completion of its transcontinental line, to later ceremonies organized in honor of Hill's long service as manager, president and chairman. Other business ventures like logging are equally well illustrated.

James J. Hill never kept his opinions to himself and he practically had a second career publishing and pontificating his ideas at fairs and exhibitions across the Northwest; you can see his verve in the photos documenting these orations.

Jim Hill combined business and pleasure at his farm, North Oaks, 10 miles north of St. Paul. Photos document the agricultural experiments he undertook here. Many of them feature his prized imported livestock, which he crossbred to suit conditions in the American Northwest.

The photograph collections of Louis Hill and his daughter Maud Hill Scholl also extensively illustrate the family life of the very wealthy and globetrotting clan. You can see Louis' mansion on Summit Ave. in St. Paul decked out for the holidays, the Hill grandchildren cavorting on the expansive lawn of the James J.
Hill house, and revelers at lavish parties thrown by Louis for his family and their friends, some with inventive themes.

The Hills took many snapshots on their innumerable holidays to their vacation home in Pebble Beach, California, to Europe, to the Caribbean, and on fishing trips to Quebec, where James had a lodge, and on hunting trips to the Dakotas.

Many of the images in the collection are not family photographs, but are reproductions of artwork once owned by James J. Hill. Hill was an avid collector, with an art gallery in his home on Summit Ave, and most of his pieces were mid-19th century works of the Barbizon school of French painting. Most of the works were dispersed after Hill's death in 1916; this collection of reproduced images is the only way to see them all together again.

You can find digital versions of the Hill family photographs in the Minnesota Historical Society's photo and art database, reachable through a link on the Society homepage. You are welcome to view the original photographs in the library at the Minnesota History Center as well.