

James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1998 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest." *The Annals of Iowa* 57 (1998), 83-84.

Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10137>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

In Nauvoo she had married Samuel Richards, the handsome son of a well-established Mormon family. Samuel had been called to mission in Great Britain, so Mary made the journey across Iowa without Samuel, living with his parents until his return in 1848. Mary kept her journals faithfully and wrote letters as often as she could find paper. These closely written daily journals and letters give a candid account of her life. She sometimes suffered from typhoid, malaria, or depression as she cared for sick friends and family. She reports on the joy of friendships and social life. Through it all she is cheerful, optimistic, devoted to her church, and in love with her husband. Between the lines we begin to see how the community supports her through this difficult time, how she starts to react to the new discipline of plural marriage, and how her faith sustains her.

Her story is expertly told in the book. The editors of the series have observed rigid standards of documentary editing. The volume editor has provided explanation, commentary, documentation, maps, and photographs. We know the context of her life, the meaning of her allusions, the people in her friendship circle. The resulting text is the best of its kind yet produced. It is fascinating reading and at the same time primary material that scholars in all disciplines will find useful.

James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest, by Michael P. Malone. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. xiv, 306 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY H. ROGER GRANT, CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest offers concise coverage of one of America's greatest business leaders. Michael Malone traces James Jerome Hill (1838–1916) from his birth in Ontario until his death in St. Paul, Minnesota, arguing that Hill tirelessly and intelligently worked in whatever position he occupied. Best remembered for creating the Great Northern Railway, part of today's Burlington Northern–Santa Fe system, this uprooted Canadian became involved in a variety of jobs, including warehousing, fuel, and ultimately transportation. Although Hill might be viewed as a typical businessman of the Age of Industry, he really possessed atypical characteristics, at least when it involved his career as a railroader. Unlike most contemporaries, Hill correctly concluded that a prosperous railroad needed to be interregional in scope, to employ the best technology, and to emphasize efficiency. If these objectives were achieved, patrons would receive the best service at the most attractive rates. In a

revealing letter to copper czar Marcus Daly, Hill wrote in 1886, "When our lines are completed through to your place [Butte, Montana], we hope to be able to furnish you all the transportation you want, at rates as will enable you to largely increase your business." He added, "What we want over our low grades is heavy tonnage, and the heavier it is *the lower we can make rates*" (126, his emphasis).

James J. Hill did possess characteristics that made him almost indistinguishable from other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century business leaders. He was a builder and not a wrecker of railroads. Although Hill took advantage of public largesse, including some substantial federal land grants to a Great Northern predecessor road, he did not loot state and national coffers, nor did he manipulate stock prices. The "Empire Builder," moreover, showed concern for the people and communities his carrier served; for example, he generously supported a variety of public and private educational institutions. And Hill was a family man. He doted on his wife and their brood of children, especially Louis, his successor on the Great Northern.

Michael Malone has written a fine study of Hill. Although Albro Martin penned a more comprehensive book, *James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest* (1976), Malone offers a more balanced treatment. He views Hill as a business genius who also possessed some less-than-attractive qualities. This hard-nosed pragmatist willingly employed tactics that he felt were necessary to accomplish his agenda, although he fell far short of entering the "robber baron" category. Like Martin, Malone has done an excellent job of research, incorporating an array of secondary sources. He has crafted a biography that deserves a wide readership.

My Ever Dear Daughter, My Own Dear Mother: The Correspondence of Julia Stone Towne and Mary Julia Towne, 1868-1882, edited by Katherine Redington Morgan. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996. xi, 316 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY KATHY PENNINGROTH, A & P HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Correspondence exchanged by Julia Stone Towne and Mary Julia Towne, mother and daughter, between 1868 and 1882 affords a window on the day-to-day lives and concerns of these nineteenth-century women. Katherine Redington Morgan, great-great-granddaughter of the first and great-granddaughter of the second, both

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.