

JAMES JEROME HILL

1838 - 1916

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At the age of 18, Hill left work and school in Guelph to go to St. Paul, Minnesota, seeking fortune in the American East. He found work at the Dubuque Packet Co., working on steamships. For over seven years he worked his way through jobs at railway firms, eventually founding the James J. Hill Co. which owned both St. Paul railway and a small steamship line. His fortune quickly grew.

After taking ownership of the railway system around Saint Paul, Hill took a job with the Great Northern Railway, joining such industry names as J.P. Morgan and Cornelious Van Horne (who later became his bitter rival). Together, these men worked on expanding the railway westward, a very difficult task.

Also known as a very wealthy man, Hill had some expensive tastes. He vacationed on Jekyll Island, Georgia, owned at least five estates, and had a vast art collection. He was also a lover of books, and fully funded St. Paul's first public library. These luxuries were a far cry from the hard work of the farm life that he had left behind.

As one of his numerous contributions to the prosperity of the United States of America, Hill made the barren prairies of the Mid-West arable by experimenting with irrigation methods. He also delivered motivational talks to farmers and helped them to create a very rich agricultural area along the railway.

By the time of Hill's death in 1916, the railway had expanded all the way to Puget Sound, Oregon and stretched across almost the entire country. Industries popped up all along this stretch, and American times seemed better than ever. One of Hill's greatest accomplishments was that the railroad he created never went bankrupt, which was certainly not true for the other railroads of the time.

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