

## **Sam Hill's Adventures in Russia, 1899-1916: In His Own Words**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the travel writings of Sam Hill, an American entrepreneur, during his three trips to Russia from 1899 to 1916. Hill's observations, drawn from diaries, memoirs, articles, and letters, provide a unique perspective on Russian society, culture, and infrastructure in the late imperial era. His experiences, including encounters with Russian bureaucracy, pogroms, and social norms, reflect his outsider's perspective shaped by American values. The authors argue that Hill's narratives, housed in largely overlooked archives, offer significant historical insights into Russo-American relations, travel, and the cultural exchanges of the period.

# Sam Hill's Adventures in Russia, 1899-1916: In His Own Words

**Donald W. Whisenhunt  
and William Benton Whisenhunt**

Sam Hill wrote that St. Petersburg “is a city unlike any other in the world and in every way unique.” He went even further to claim that “the city of St. Petersburg, or the city of Moscow, offers more of interest to people than any city of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Hill wrote these effusive comments about Russia’s two major cities not long after his first visit to Russia in 1899. Travel accounts of Russia by foreigners at the turn of the century offer a wide range of views, and Hill’s depictions about his three trips to Russia in 1899, 1901, and 1916 follow that pattern. From the 1880s to the 1920s, there were many more travelers both directions and an explosion of travel writing, memoirs, letters and more, both published and unpublished.<sup>2</sup>

Sam Hill left behind three recollections of his trips through diaries, memoirs, letters, and articles. The bulk of this material has been housed in the Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts in Washington State and the authors of this article believe that few, if any, scholars have seen this material or studied Hill’s adventures in Russia. Hill, though, is not unique in that regard either. Many travelers left fragments or even whole narratives of their experiences. Sam Hill was a well-known figure in American history, especially in his work related to the railroad and mining industry in the upper Midwest. He also became a leader in the movement to build good roads for the expanding use of automobiles in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>3</sup>

When one crosses the Canadian border on Interstate 5 in Washington State, the traveler must pass the Peace Arch in Blaine, Washington. How many people stop to examine the arch in any detail? Not very many probably. The arch is a magnificent structure that celebrates 100 years of peace (1815-1915) between

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Hill’s material at the Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts did not have precise cataloging nor titles most of the time. The authors have assigned numbers to each fragment in order to organize them for these footnotes. Sam Hill, “Paper II, (1899),” Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Norman E. Saul, *Concord and Conflict: The United States and Russia, 1867-1914* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 160-167; Margarita D. Marinova, *Transnational Russian-American Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> The authors of this article have searched for secondary confirmation of Hill’s accounts for many years and consulted with many scholars in the field. This search proved to be mostly fruitless. So, we have approached this article as one that will expose Hill’s writings to a new audience in the hope that more information will be available at some point to confirm his observations.

Canada and the United States. It is surrounded by beautiful gardens on both sides of the border.

The Peace Arch was built by Samuel Hill (1857-1931), a resident of Washington state, but this was not his only achievement. He built a replica of Stonehenge in England on the bank of the Columbia River in Washington State. He built a magnificent house—a “castle”—north of the Columbia on the east side of the Cascade Mountains. Today the “castle” is an eclectic museum dedicated partly to the natural environment and to the unusual collecting habits of Sam Hill. It cannot claim to have a theme, but it is a very interesting museum. Its collection reflects Hill’s eclectic interests throughout his life. He attempted, but failed, to build a model community called Maryhill in honor of his daughter. He was especially dedicated to building good roads in the early days of automobiles in the United States. In addition, he was heavily involved in various business ventures in Washington and Oregon.<sup>4</sup>

Sam Hill was born in Deep River, North Carolina, in 1857. As Quakers his family was deeply opposed to war. In addition, the Hills were anti-slavery and had a difficult time during the Civil War. In 1865, seeking a more comfortable life and to be out of the South, the family moved to Minneapolis where they flourished. Young Sam was admitted to Cornell University, but because of illness, he dropped out. Later he attended Haverford College, a Quaker college for men in Pennsylvania, where he earned a B.A. degree in 1878. In 1879, he spent another year at Harvard College where he received another B.A. degree. In 1880, he was admitted to the bar in Minnesota.<sup>5</sup>

Hill spent a fair amount of time in Europe throughout his life. While in school in Europe, he met Albert, the heir apparent to the throne of Belgium. He was also a friend of Marie, the Queen of Romania. Throughout his whole life, he would associate with many famous people note those associations often. He was employed by several banks and railroads in the early 1880s before he took a position in the legal department of James J. Hill’s (no relation) Great Northern Railroad in 1886. In 1888, he married James J. Hill’s oldest daughter, Mary. In 1889, his daughter, Mary Mendenhall Hill, was born and later their son, James Nathan B. Hill, was born in 1893. During this time Sam was involved in several businesses owned by his father-in-law. In 1895, Sam was made president of the Seattle Gas and Electric Company. This was the beginning of his life-long activities in the Pacific Northwest. In 1900, he resigned from his various railroad positions in Minnesota and announced his intention to live in Seattle permanently. He had already become the first president of the Washington Good Roads Association when in 1899, Sam took his first short trip to Russia, although this was not his first trip to Europe.<sup>6</sup> All of this semi-spontaneous movement illuminated Hill’s adventurous nature.

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<sup>4</sup> *Brief History of the Washington State Good Roads Association: Prepared Pursuant to a Resolution of the 1938 Convention at Seattle and Particularly Emphasizing the Work of Honorable Samuel Hill, The Founder* (Seattle, 1938), 2-8; John E. Tuhy, *Sam Hill: The Prince of Castle Nowhere* (Beaverton, OR: Timber Press, 1983), 21-46.

<sup>5</sup> *Brief History*, 6-9; Tuhy, *Sam Hill*, 30-51.

<sup>6</sup> *Brief History*, 7-10; Tuhy, *Sam Hill*, 44-54.

Over the next several years Hill was involved in many activities in the Northwest. Included in these were the gas business in Seattle and a phone company in Portland, Oregon. He also built a large house in Seattle. Mary, his wife, did not like Seattle or the Northwest. They never lived together very much in the Seattle house. He later constructed his mansion at Maryhill. His wife did not like the semi-arid climate where the house was located east of the Cascade Mountains. Once she moved back to Minneapolis, she never returned to the Pacific Northwest. Sam tried to interest his daughter, Mary, in the Pacific Northwest, but she never took to the region either. She suffered from mental health issues and favored her mother. Since Sam and his wife, Mary, were estranged, their daughter never stayed in the West. Hill was also not successful in the beginning convincing his son, James Nathan, to live in the West. James Nathan did poorly in prep school, but he eventually attended Harvard College. He fought in World War I and had little contact with his father after that.<sup>7</sup>

Hill spent much of his time running a large estate and farm in Washington state. He endowed chairs of road building and Russian language at the University of Washington, and remained very active in road building, including an experimental and demonstration road on his estate. However, Hill's personal life was very messy. He had several mistresses and some (unknown how many) illegitimate children. His most lasting relationship was with Mona Bell. She was from Minnesota and had a colorful background, including working for a time for "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West Show. She attended college for a year and later worked for a newspaper in North Dakota. When Sam Hill came through town promoting good roads, she interviewed him. From this first meeting, a relationship developed. She eventually moved to Washington state and she and Sam had a son, Sam B. Hill, in 1928. Sam built a twenty-two room house for Mona on the bank of the Columbia River near Bonneville. After Sam's death in 1931, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal took the house by condemnation for the building of Bonneville Dam. Mona eventually received a satisfactory settlement through the courts.<sup>8</sup>

Hill's first trip to Russia was in the spring of 1899. While working in Paris on one of his many trips to Europe, the opportunity arose to take a trip to Russia. This trip to Russia seemed to be a spur of the moment opportunity since he did not have a ticket for the train nor did he have a passport to enter Russia. Even without the passport, he boarded a train in Belgium after he sent a telegram to the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Charlemagne Tower. Once on the train he discovered that Grand Duke Leuchtenberg, the uncle of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, was on the same train. At the border of Russia, the Grand Duke and his entourage were greeted warmly. When Hill revealed that he did not have a passport, he presented his "carte visite" from Tower and it prompted a grand reception from the custom office officials. Hill recalled "as soon as he [custom officer] saw the card he arose, summoned five soldiers who marched over in goosestep style toward me. Unpleasant thoughts passed through my mind and it occurred to me that I could not

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<sup>7</sup> *Good Roads*, 7-11; Tuhy, *Sam Hill*, 45-62.

<sup>8</sup> Tuhy, *Sam Hill*, 47-60.

enter Russia. However, I lighted a cigar and I looked as composed as possible. As soon as the officer approached me he and the men all bowed low.”<sup>9</sup>

Hill’s experience entering the country was obviously eased by his friendship with Charlemagne Tower. Tower had been a leading mining businessman in northern Minnesota where the two men had invariably met. Interestingly, though, as Hill tried to get a hotel room, he could not get a room without a proper passport. So, the ordeal continued. He had to respond to an inquiry by the Chief of Police. He noted that

I was handed a slip of paper to which I was requested to sign my name, the place from whence I came, where I was going, and my age and religion. As soon as I had written my name, the Chief of Police looking at my first name said ‘You are a Jew.’ As that nationality were not popular in Russia I assured him that I did not have the honor to belong to that distinguished race, but he would not believe me. Opposite the religion I had written the word ‘Quaker.’ At this he took fresh offense and wanted to know what the Quakers believed. I gave him a short resume of the history of the Society of Friends, which added further to his wrath and indignation. As matters were getting pretty warm and I was wondering just what would happen to me, the cry was raised ‘Make way for the Ambassador, United States!’<sup>10</sup>

Once the Russian realized that Hill was associated with Tower, they did not cause him any more difficulty. Hill recognized that Jews were not popular in Russia, but of course, during this period many regions of Russia were experiencing pogroms. These attacks were much more severe than Russians’ simply not liking Jews; they often resulted in severe violence and death while being condoned by the Russian government. As Hill was traveling in Russia in 1899 and 1901, pogroms were occurring in Odessa, Warsaw, Kiev and Kishinev.<sup>11</sup>

This first trip to Russia was spontaneous and mostly impressionistic. Hill retold an interesting story about a woman who was traveling alone. He wrote

One fortunate lady on the train was bathed in tears and when I asked the cause I was told by one of my many travelling companions that the laws of Russia required that no one could enter the country without a passport and in the event of such person being a woman she must if married have written consent of her husband; if she were unmarried, the written consent of some male relative. It seems that this lady has been telegraphed that her husband was ill and going to join him at St. Petersburg, but,

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<sup>9</sup> Hill, “Paper II (1899),” 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> John D. Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 58-85.

of course, did not have his written consent. I was also told that it was necessary for a lady to have the written consent to go from one city in Russia to another city.<sup>12</sup>

This was a standard practice at this time. Hill took it further with a comment about how this might work well in America. He stated “that system struck me as having some advantages and I wondered whether it could be applied successfully in America. It certainly would tend to interfere with interurban travel between St. Paul and Minneapolis.” This clearly reflected Hill’s view of the independence of women in American society at the turn of the twentieth century, but it also reflected how he thought it would be impractical in a “twin city” situation like existed in Minnesota.

Hill concluded his thoughts on Russians on this first trip with a comparison of regional characteristics of Americans. He wrote “the Russians are to me a very religious people, a very quiet, deferential people. In their characteristics they seem to have all of the fire of a Southerner, all of the politeness of the South with all of the determination, ambition, cleverness and intelligence of the Americans in the northern portion of the United States.” Hill was born in North Carolina, but he had spent a good part of his life in Minnesota and Washington state. His comparisons, while somewhat contradictory, of Russians to Americans perpetuated regional stereotypes of Americans.<sup>13</sup>

Sam Hill found himself in Paris once again in the spring of 1901 on business. He met Robert Lebaudy, a famous French horse-racing magnate. The two speculated on the feasibility of a trip across Russia and around the world. Having little knowledge of how to cross Russia, the pair sought advice from train officials in Paris and London. All advice was the same—do not attempt it. Hill and Lebaudy had been enticed by an exhibit on the “Trans-Siberian Express” at the recent Paris Exposition. The exhibit advertised a trip that would be easy and luxurious.

Despite the warnings, Hill and Lebaudy left Paris on the Northern Express for St. Petersburg. They were hosted by the U.S. Ambassador, Tower. Hill was presented letters from the president of the Russo-Chinese Bank that helped him advance all the way to Asia. In Moscow, Hill was exposed to the best of the city—from cobble-stone streets to fancy hotels that rivaled Europe, and fabulous meals that were “washed down with the inevitable vodka.”<sup>14</sup> On the train leaving Moscow, Hill met an old acquaintance, James Dietrick, who owned a gold mine south of Irkutsk in Mongolia. Hill wrote

There are forty American miners with him. One of the party—his brother-in-law is Will Henley of North Carolina, a distant cousin of mine. He has telegraphed the Governor of Irkoutz [Irkutsk] to take us on the Government steamer and show us Lake Baikal. He confirms the story about seals being in plenty; says

<sup>12</sup> Hill, “Paper II (1899),” 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Sam Hill, “Paper III (1901),” Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, 4.

they came down the river which is a tributary of the Lena. The boxers tried to scare him out but he told the head boxer 'to git'; that he was a North dog, and East dog, and a South dog, and a West dog, and if he did not leave they would cut him in bits and fish with the pieces. So the Chinese left. His wife was born in Minneapolis and he keeps his bank account in Seattle with my classmate Chapin. He wants me to go and see his friend the Grand Llama, but I am afraid we wont have time,—and I am not good at camel riding.<sup>15</sup>

Hill experienced some unusual coincidences on this journey by meeting his distant cousin from North Carolina and someone whom he knew from Seattle. He was clearly traveling in luxury with the ability to send letters and have a tour of Lake Baikal. His reference to boxers is most likely connected to the Boxer Rebellion in China spreading northward into Manchuria and Siberia. There had been recent attacks on Russian cities like Blagoveshchenk and they would continue until the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905.<sup>16</sup>

As the train continued further east, Hill observed that general conditions of the land and people. He applauded the fertility of the soil and the “beautiful lilies of the valley and forget-me-nots and for sale for 5 kopecks per bunch, and bunches as big as an ordinary boy’s cap.”<sup>17</sup> His view of the peasants he passed along the way produced these observations: “The clothes of the peasants grows worse—many of them are barefoot, some wear shoes made of strips of bark-wicker ware, and strips of cloth in place of stockings.”<sup>18</sup>

By late May of 1901, Hill was crossing from Penza further east across the Volga and through Samara. They passed a load of convicts on their way east. Hill noted that they look “just like ordinary riff-raff. I gave my letter to the officer in charge and asked where they were going. He replied to Sagahlin [Sakhalin] Island, by way of the Black Sea and it would take 2 ½ months to get there.”<sup>19</sup> Hill did not expand further on this observation, but these convicts would be taken by the Black Sea by water and not by rail because the Trans-Siberian Railroad was not completed yet to the Pacific Ocean. He concluded this observation with an encounter “with a Russian Scientist who is going after a mammoth, the largest ever found. It is perfect with hair and tusks but it is in the ice 3,000 versts, say 2,000 miles, from Kolynisk. He will be gone 1 ½ years and come out by the sea. He takes 30 Cossaks [Cossacks] from Irkutz [Irkutsk].”<sup>20</sup> Hill’s experiences on the rails were many and eclectic as he saw a progression of people eastward.

<sup>15</sup> Sam Hill, “Letter to Mary Hill,” (May 18, 1901), Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Bickers and R.G. Tiedemann, eds., *The Boxers, China, and the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 66-88.

<sup>17</sup> Sam Hill, “Letter to Mary Hill,” (May 19, 1901), Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Sam Hill, “Letter to Mary Hill,” (May 20-27, 1901), Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

He continued to offer observations of the Russian landscape as it passed by on the train.

The country now looks like Montana, but the soil is better. Fields of wheat near at hand and several large straw-stacks indicating good crops...looking across, say four miles, I can see cliffs eroded Dakota bad-lands. I am sure the formation is similar and distinguish red and blue colors on the cliff.<sup>21</sup>

Hill found many similarities between Russia and the United States and continued to find comparisons between the Volga and Mississippi Rivers and some of the farmland near his home in Minnesota. Yet, he made a rather notable conclusion about Russia when he stated

To be appreciated this country must be seen. As I write I can see three villages, each numbering 1,000 people, all built with straw roofs and in each a great church with two spires and always painted that indescribable green. I came near saying Paris green. And yet at a Junction quite a few miles back was a restaurant better than I have seen in America since Fox and Johnson died.<sup>22</sup>

As his train stopped at a small station near Irkutsk, Hill made two interesting observations of Russian people. He recalled as the train stopped at the station "I never saw such patient people as these. There they stood and now that the train steps uncover their wares, expose bread and meat and set of bottles of milk. No shouting, no begging you to buy." He continued his observation back on the train by writing that

I have now found that it is necessary to put an Ikon in this right corner from the door of the entrance of every room in every house. There is a church in the station and an altar of rather elaborate size, and before the work train went out to repair the bridge the railway men went in a said their prayers.<sup>23</sup>

Once Hill reached Irkutsk, he switched trains to one owned by the Siberian Railway Company and found it to be much nicer. He retold an episode about drinking in a dining car with an eclectic group of travelers. He noted that

In the dining car of our new train was a piano and it had side lights of electricity and a Jewish girl played and sang very well

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>23</sup> Sam Hill, "Letter to Mary Hill," (May 24, 1901), Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts,

and the diamond breast-plate of her father, who turned the caves, lighted the rest of the car. The gathering was rather international, besides the race I mentioned were England (Clifton), France (Lebaudy), Americanski (Hill), Russians, Germans. Then there was a Pole who played the flute and who I was told had been banished to Kamchatka. I don't know why. I think it was because he played the flute. And I don't know why he did not get a life sentence... Then my friend doctor-professor Herz and I took Vodka: Then I did cry but the professor assured me it was the only pure drink in Siberia and that where he went north of Yakutz [Yakutsk] it was so cold that he could not take Vodka but took pure alcohol after having it tested in his laboratory. He regretted that he did not have some with him, but his baggage had not been packed in time by his wife, but would be on the next train. I was secretly glad he could not give me any but assured him I would take his word for it. If he ever visits me in Amerika I shall never give him some of that North Carolina 'moonshine' whiskey. I don't know but it will remind him of his alcohol and Tungesses [Tungus]. He assures me they are a fine people, not cannibal, at all and won't do you any harm if you take plenty of armed Cossacks with you. I am glad to know this. I told him I thought in this request they resembled the boxers, but he says not – they are entirely a different family related to the Buriats who in turn are related to the North Japanese and to our Siwash Indians. It occurs to me now that he and I had different points of resemblance in mind.<sup>24</sup>

Hill's recollections were riddled with stereotypes and misconceptions. Many travel accounts from this era follow similar patterns and are filled with tropes. It was common through all of his writing to note the ethnicity of the people he encountered. He tended to focus on the exotic reputations of many different Siberian groups that he knew little or nothing about and often confused them with other groups of people simply on the basis of appearance. The Tungus people are native people of central Siberia from as far north as Norilsk to the south along a broad swath of the Yenesei River, surrounded Lake Baikal and in parts of Northern Mongolia. Buriats are a Siberian group located primarily on the east side of Lake Baikal around the city of Ulan-Ude. By far, the group he mentioned the most in his letters and memoirs were Jews. He concluded this particular long letter recalling a Jew on the train

The Jew on the train was great fun and a very shrewd man. He agrees with me this country is very rich but he thinks it will take a hundred years to make 'good business men' of the people...

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<sup>24</sup> Sam Hill, "Letter to Mary Hill," (May 28, 1901), Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, 1-2.

He observed my name 'Samuel' and asked we belonged to the same race, and I told him: 'Yes, further back'.<sup>25</sup>

As the journey continued further East, Hill retold a story of meeting the Belgian consul to Japan, Mr. Bure. They traveled for a bit, but his young daughter fell ill and had to be taken to a local hospital noted by Hill as "the best in the world" to provide the young girl with a treatment. Within a few days, the young girl recovered to the relief of all on board the train.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout much of his trip, Hill offered comparisons to American and Canadian terrain. A recurring comparison began as he reached and went beyond Lake Baikal on their way to Chita. Hill was reminded of Montana and other western American locations as he crossed the far eastern edge of Siberia. He noted "the country is so much like Montana. I cannot help speaking of it. This morning as last night we were in the midst of yellow pine trees and we seem to go from one valley to another..."<sup>27</sup>

Over the next several years, Hill returned to his work in the Pacific Northwest and his efforts at developing good roads across the U.S. However, in 1916, he returned to Russia on a different sort of mission. While his first two visits were focused on tourism, this last trip will be to survey the rails in Siberia to test their ability to handle arms shipments from the Western allies during World War I. Early in 1916, the French government and bondholders asked James J. Hill to conduct the survey in Siberia, but he turned down the offer due to advanced age and poor health. He recommended his son-in-law, Sam Hill, to do the study in his place. The concern of France, Britain and others in the West was that if Russia's war effort failed, then the Germans and Austrians could turn all of their forces to face the West. They thought if they could help the Russians by sending in supplies and war material to the port at Vladivostok and use the rail system to transport it over five thousand miles to the front that Russia's front would be fortified.<sup>28</sup>

Sam Hill was in Liverpool, England at the time his father-in-law requested he return to undertake this mission. On his way back to the United States, he stopped in Belgium and London and concluded that the Germans could not hold out much longer and that the war would be nearing its end soon.<sup>29</sup> It was Hill's association with King Albert of Belgium and his work with Belgian refugees during the war that brought this invitation. He returned to New York and traveled across the United States in order to depart across the Pacific to Vladivostok so he could avoid the war zone in Europe. Upon his arrival in the United States, though, the *New York Times* noted that Hill's efforts to go to Russia were not at the request of

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>26</sup> Sam Hill, "Letter to Mary Hill," (May 31, 1901), Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1; For an interesting comparison of Montana and Kazakhstan, see Kate Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (February 2001): 17-48.

<sup>28</sup> *Brief History*, 12; "Ocean Travelers," *New York Times*, May 16, 1916, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> "Hill's Trip Not Official," *New York Times*, May 16, 1916, p. 2; "End of War Near, Says Samuel Hill," *New York Times*, May 15, 1916, p. 1.

the U.S. government. Hill was travelling as a private U.S. citizen under the direction of the French since the U.S. was still officially neutral in the war. Despite this reality, Hill persisted and continued the journey.

Hill realized the journey would be very dangerous. His journey was interrupted by his father-in-law's death in late May of 1916. By early June, though, he was on his way to Vladivostok via Yokohama. Hill recorded that the American railroad engineer, John F. Stevens, accompanied him on this journey as his technical advisor. Stevens was famous for his earlier work on the Panama Canal. He also worked for James J. Hill's Great Northern Railroad at different times. Even though Stevens' service as an occasional consultant on Russian railroads from 1917 to 1924 was better known, this earlier trip with Hill is primarily recorded only in Hill's writings.<sup>30</sup>

Once he arrived in Vladivostok, Hill entered the country in disguise and secured passage on the Imperial Limited to St. Petersburg. The story of what happens next is most intriguing but lacks any proof. It seems useful, though, to cite this story as printed in a history by the Good Roads Association of Washington state to tell the tale as Hill told it. However, nearly none of this can be confirmed in other sources in the Hoover Presidential Library, or any number of other archives. The story goes

It seemed to Mr. Hill that one of the passengers in a car at the rear end of the train, was hunting for somebody and appeared to be a detective of some sort. But Mr. Hill kept close to his compartment, having his meals served therein. When he arrived at Lake Baikal on the second day, at about five in the afternoon, the train was there broken up, placed on the transfer boats and then for five hours being ferried across to the west shore of the lake. While on the boat Mr. Hill left his compartment and walked around the deck, particularly so as to get some exercise, and standing in the lee of a stairway which went to the deck above, and somewhat in the dark, for it was night and the lights were on, a gentleman who evidently was a German, as he could see, and whom he had spotted once before, stopped in front of Mr. Hill, and in an agitated way said, 'Have you seen him? Have you seen him?' in faultless German. And immediately Mr. Hill answered, 'I do not know anything about him. I haven't found him.' And then the gentlemen said, 'Very well.' And then the German pulled out of his pocket a perfect picture of our good friend Samuel Hill, who was always close shaven, but because of his mustache and beard, the detective did not recognize that he was talking to the man he was looking for. And then the detective said, 'I take it you know that the price on his head, dead or alive, is two thousand pounds British gold, and I want

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony Heywood, *Modernizing Lenin's Russia: Economic Reconstruction, Foreign Trade and the Railways* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40-44.

to know if you find him will you divide with me, and if I find him I'll divide with you?' The answer was in the affirmative.<sup>31</sup>

The story does not end here, though. Hill, knowing he is being hunted for 2,000 pounds (even though other sources note it was 40,000 pounds), he tried to bribe a railroad conductor to detach the last car of the train, where the German was, after they reached the other side of Lake Baikal. Initially, the official was offended, but at the last moment the Russian took Hill's money and left the car behind, helping Hill escape. This is the tale Hill retold many times as part of this harrowing adventure in Siberia.

Hill would reach Petrograd and then traveled on to Oslo before dodging German U-boats on his way to Paris to report his results to American officials. He found the rails in Siberia to be in generally good shape except the ties were laid out with thirty-inch centers while the standard in the United States was twenty-four-inch centers. He believed the rails could handle the weight and volume of the arms, equipment, food, and men proposed to be brought into the country through Vladivostok, but he recommended that additional ties be laid in order to be certain of the safety. Hill's plan was praised, but it was never used. Stevens' ongoing evaluation of rails from 1917 to 1924, though, were far more condemning. Eventually the United States will enter Russia at the end of the war through Vladivostok. This effort was not to aid the new Bolshevik government, but rather to aid, unofficially, the White movement in the Russian Civil War.<sup>32</sup>

Hill eventually returned to Seattle by late spring of 1917. He believed, though, that the United States was woefully underprepared for the war. He stated that "It's hard to tell which is the weaker nation, China or the United States. We wouldn't last five minutes with any other nation." He also confided to two friends in Seattle that "The Russian Nation is doomed. Anarchy will have control of everything therein within six months."<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, Hill's writings offer the reader an insight into his thinking and views of Russia during this crucial time for Russia and in Russian-American relations. He illuminated many similarities between the large expanse of Russia and the American West. Hill characterized the many peoples of the Russian Empire in a similar fashion to other travel accounts of this era. In the end, Hill's writings are another small part of a giant mosaic of impressions of Russians and Americans about the other. Even though many of his claims are hard to confirm, his impressions offer much more to the connections between Russia and the United States.

### **About the Authors**

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<sup>31</sup> *Good Roads*, 16-17

<sup>32</sup> *Good Roads*, 13-19; Heywood, *Modernizing Lenin's Russia*, 42-48.

<sup>33</sup> Tuhy, *Sam Hill*, 185; *Good Roads*, 19.

trating on the era of Great Depression in the 1930s. He has held three J. William Fulbright grants: China in 1995, South Korea in 1999, and Belarus in 2004.

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