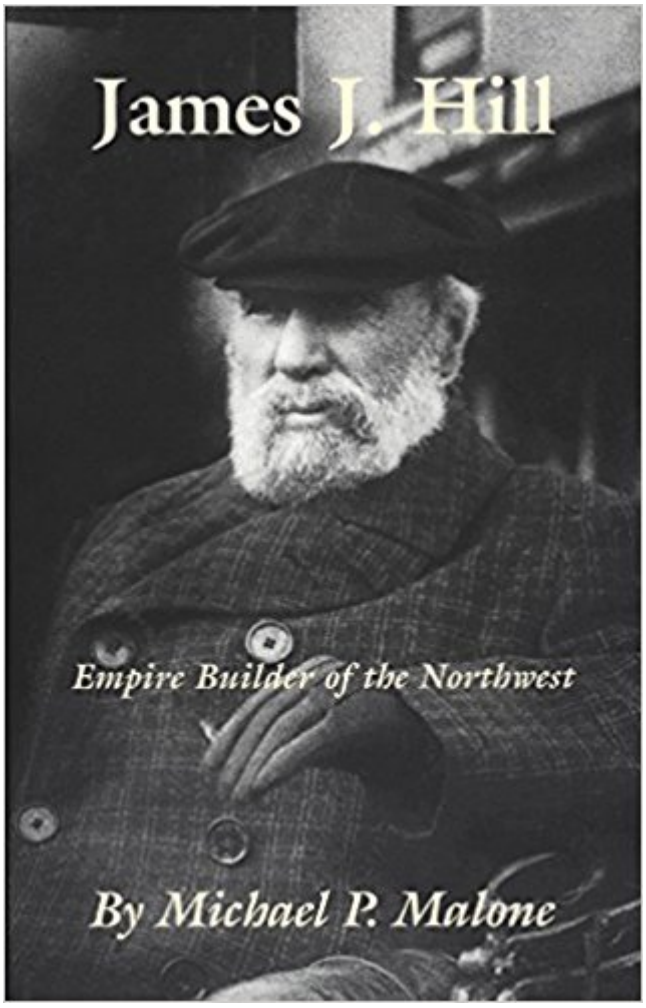
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James J. Hill: Empire Builder Of The Northwest (The Oklahoma Western Biographies)



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Synopsis

In this volume, Michael P. Malone provides a succinct interpretive biography of James J. Hill, the "Empire Builder"-so called for his work in developing the region of the United States between the Great Lakes and the Pacific Northwest.Malone explores HillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s complex life and personality, his activities and interests, and recreates both the story of the railroad race to the Pacific and the complex interactions involved in the development of the region."Michael Malone has written a model. . . .interpretative biography of James J. Hill. He has drawn on the research of others, published and unpublished, as he says, but also on his own knowledge of American economic development in HillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s time as a leading historian of mining and of a state in whose development HillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s railroads were major factors." -Earl Pomeroy, Professor of History, Retired, University of Oregon and University of California, San Diego

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Customer Reviews

Michael P. MaloneÃ Â was president of Montana State University, Bozeman.

A lovely and thorough treatise oh how the barons of old devoted their energies to build the infra structure of this nation

Good history

The information presented was very interesting, even inspiring. It was presented in adequate, but not too much, detail. I now understand what he did, and how he accomplished it.

Top notch book. Tghat is all that I have to say about this book. I read it straight trough. thanks

Definitely worth the read. I knew nothing about James J Hill even though I am born and raised in MN. Had no clue he had such and influence on the nation. I was surprised that it stayed as interesting as it did and there were only a few places where it got a little slow. Especially enjoyed the story because he started from nothing.

Malone's book is a good introduction for people interested in the early history of the Northwest, the Great Northern Railway, and the man who greatly influenced both. While not as detailed as Martin's 1976 bio, Martin's is at least twice as long and too tedious for many readers.Both Martin and Malone had access to the James J. Hill papers, a collection of almost every business paper Hill ever handled that is located in the Hill Reference Library in St. Paul, MN. Except for Pyle, previous Hill biographers and railroad historians did not see those papers, such much of what they say is more rumor than fact. Malone (and Martin) set the stories straight.Contrary to 's claim, this book is not out of print. It was just published over a year ago and can be found in many stores. must have miskeyed the entry.

Ãƒâ Ã Â«The wealth of the country, its capital, its credit, must be saved from the predatory poor as well as the predatory rich, but above all from the predatory politicianÃƒâ Ã Â» - James J. Hill.In her 1962 lecture, Ãƒâ Ã Â«America's Persecuted Minority : Big BusinessÃƒâ Ã Â», Ayn Rand distinguished two types of entrepreneurs, whom Burton Folsom Jr. was later to label Ãƒâ Ã Â«economicÃƒâ Ã Â» and Ãƒâ Ã Â«politicalÃƒâ Ã Â»: Ãƒâ Ã Â«self-made men who earned their fortunes by personal ability, by free trade on a free marketÃƒâ Ã Â» and Ãƒâ Ã Â«men with political pull, who made fortunes by means of special privileges granted to them by the government.Ãƒâ Ã Â» And according to her, James Jerome Hill was an arch-representative of the former group, because he built his transcontinental railroad, the Great Northern, Ãƒâ Ã Â«without any federal help whatever.Ãƒâ Ã Â»Michael P. Malone's admiration for Hill, on the other hand, is much more moderate (and for those who think such moderation unjust, he is kind enough to direct us to Albro Martin's Ãƒâ Ã Â«highly laudatoryÃƒâ Ã Â» two-volume biography of Hill, *James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest*)For instance, he puts the phrase

Ãƒâ Ã Â«self-made manÃƒâ Ã Â» in quotation marks when applying it to Hill, for, he says, Hill's fortune Ãƒâ Ã Â«sprout... from the rich seedbed of federal subsidyÃƒâ Ã Â»: by completing his first large scale project in time (the Manitoba railroad), Hill managed to reap the Ãƒâ Ã Â«seventh largest of the original seventy-five railroad grantsÃƒâ Ã Â», located mostly in the fertile Red River valley. Therefore, Malone says, we should forget the Ãƒâ Ã Â«hoariest, and most mischievous, of all the many legends surrounding HillÃƒâ Ã Â»- the one perpetrated by Ayn Rand and, after her, Burton Folsom Jr.- which Ãƒâ Ã Â«rhapsodizes about how he built a great transcontinental line without the benefit of a federal land grant.Ãƒâ Ã Â»Was Hill therefore just another political entrepreneur? I don't think so.First, Malone here seems to be conflating federal subsidies and land grants. A federal subsidy, in my understanding, is a transfer of money or produced goods, which by its very essence involves a forced redistribution and is therefore immoral. A land grant, on the other hand, consists in the granting of a non-improved natural resource to its actual developer, in a good approximation of the Lockean ideal of acquisition through labour. What makes it a form of Ãƒâ Ã Â«federal aidÃƒâ Ã Â» is only the government's assumption of the power to acquire land by some non-Lockean process (i.e. by fiat, or in this case, purchase from another government that had acquired the land by fiat.)Second, the lands granted to the railroads actually owed most of their value to the building of the roads. As Clarence Carson explains in *Throttling the Railroads* : Ãƒâ Ã Â«the lands granted [however fertile] were worth little to nothing on the market at the time they were granted.Ãƒâ Ã Â» This was so because cultivating those lands would have been economically hopeless without the cheap transportation to population centers provided by the railroads.And third, Malone's metaphor makes it sound as though Hill's fortune merely grew out of the Ãƒâ Ã Â«soilÃƒâ Ã Â» of federal subsidy by some natural, automatic process or, to mix metaphors, a snowball effect. Actually, the building of the Manitoba railroad is only chapter 2 of the biography, and there are 6 more chapters to go in which Malone himself offers ample illustration that the building of Great Northern and the rest of Hill's achievements did not simply Ãƒâ Ã Â«sproutÃƒâ Ã Â» from the government's bounty.Whatever the motivations for Malone's very mixed final estimate of Hill, he does grant his subject a certain number of admirable character traits, which confirm Edwin Locke's conclusions in *The Prime Movers*. For instance, Malone singles out the following as Hill's distinctive traits in chapter 4: Ãƒâ Ã Â«his remarkable mastery over every detail of what was now a far-flung operation, his vision of the inevitable triumph of transcontinental through-carriers [together forming Locke's virtue of Ãƒâ Ã Â«independent visionÃƒâ Ã Â»], his insufferable [Malone again...] iron will and work ethic [Locke's Ãƒâ Ã Â«drive to actionÃƒâ Ã Â»], and his recruitment of an able coterie of men [Locke's

Ãƒâ Ã Â«love of ability in othersÃƒâ Ã Â»].Ãƒâ Ã Â» And this is only Malone himself trying to summarize Hill's virtues : the book offers much more concrete material for you to make your own identifications and corroborate Locke's analysis.The flaw of *Empire Builder of the Northwest*, in my opinion, is that it is merely interesting and informative where, given its subject, it could have been epic. Malone himself is no great enthusiast of economic freedom: at one point, he refers to Ãƒâ Ã Â«the simplistic bromides of laissez-faireÃƒâ Ã Â». Moreover, the book only offers two maps, which makes following some of the descriptions rather difficult. However, if you do not have the time for Albro Martin's longer work and are frustrated by the mere 22 pages in Folsom's *The Myth of the Robber Barons*, Malone's book remains a good introduction to the life of an immensely productive and hardworking man, who was also a voracious reader, a faithful husband and- as the opening quote reveals- a Ãƒâ Ã Â«true believer in the virtues of unfettered capitalismÃƒâ Ã Â».

Malone's book is a good introduction for people interested in the early history of the Northwest, the Great Northern Railway, and the man who greatly influenced both. While not as detailed as Martin's 1976 bio, Martin's is at least twice as long and too tedious for many readers.Both Martin and Malone had access to the James J. Hill papers, a collection of almost every business paper Hill ever handled that is located in the Hill Reference Library in St. Paul, MN. Except for Pyle, previous Hill biographers and railroad historians did not see those papers, such much of what they say is more rumor than fact. Malone (and Martin) set the stories straight.

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