

Who's Who In Wisconsin Rapids

The Who's Who column will be run each Saturday in the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune. It will include a brief sketch of the life of citizens who have helped make history for Wisconsin Rapids.

George M. Hill



GEORGE M. HILL

George H. Hill, son of Stephen and Ascha (Berry) Hill, was born on a farm in Allamakee county, Iowa, near the town of Wankow, on February 28, 1857, and on the day following George's birth, his mother passed away, leaving him in the care of his father. The same year his father rented the farm to a family, with the provision that they would care for his little son. His father died October 29, 1859.

The tenants claimed possession of the infant, declaring it to be a part of the agreement between Mr. Hill's father and themselves. His grandparents contested the claim and in the legal action which followed, won the suit, and George was added to their family of ten. Pending action, and upon the advice of the attorneys, he was kidnapped by his aunt, Ann Hill, who took him to Winnebago county.

Came To Wisconsin

When he was ten years old, his uncle Manley Hill, who will be remembered by the older citizens of Wisconsin Rapids, left the state of Iowa, and came to Wisconsin, bringing George with him. The trip was made from Iowa to LaCrosse by sleigh and from there to New Lisbon by rail, from where the journey was finished to Centralia by stage. When they came to Frenchtown, (Port Edwards) the long row of piers in the river was a novel curiosity to them, and on asking what they were, the driver told them they were pig pens.

The first wooden bridge over the Wisconsin river had just been finished and there was also a long line of piers from the bridge to what is now Belle Isle to hold a boom and guide the logs to the Reeves mill opposite the foot of Belle Isle. A charge of two and one-half cents was paid by pedestrians and fifteen cents for teams and other conveyances.

The first school George attended was taught by H. H. Hecox of Rudolph in a little frame school house located on the premises of the present West Side market square. Among other teachers who contributed to his store of knowledge, were Pat Cassidy, Michael Rourke and Herbert and Clarence Hamilton. The only one surviving, as far as Mr. Hill knows, is Clarence Hamilton who lives with his son, James G. Hamilton and family at their home on 758 Third street south.

Sunday school was held every Sunday in the little school house. The superintendent was the late Frank Palmatier.

Among the lumber kings in those days was John Edwards, who owned a mill at Frenchtown. He was the owner of three big boats called ball-boats. These boats were forty feet in length, painted at either end, and would carry twenty men each. They were named "John Edwards," "Alf. Lust" and "Bill Quinn."

Indian Commits Suicide

In relating early incidents, here Mr. Hill tells of an Indian who had an oversupply of fire-water, and in trying to escape arrested into a water hole in the ice below the bridge. His body was found the following spring in the river at Nekoosa.

The inhabitants of the village were composed of Americans, Frenchmen, Indians and half-breeds.

At the age of seventeen years young Hill entered the employ of H. T. Paider and Co., as clerk in their drug store, located directly back of the Mackinnon block at the west end of the bridge, and was later moved on the opposite side of the street where it still remains. He continued in this store for about a year.

Clerks in Drug Store

Phileo and Ingraham owned and operated the Wood County Reporter besides owning drug stores on each side of the river. The Reporter had their printing office on the second floor of their east side store. Besides his duties in the drug store, Mr. Hill operated the Armstrong Press and man-

aged the papers on publishing day. He was with this firm about eighteen months and after a year's time was transferred as manager of the west side branch store. This store was later sold to H. W. Jackson who was then post-master of Centralia. Mr. Hill continued in the type and also became assistant post-master.

After a short time Mr. Jackson sold the stock to J. B. Mitchell who formed a partnership with Frank Garrison under the firm name of J. B. Mitchell & Company, and moved the goods to a building across the street. Mr. Hill continued as clerk with the new firm and at the end of two years, Garrison bought Mitchell's interest and formed a partnership with Archie Weaver, a Garrison & Weaver. Garrison later bought Weaver's interest which he resold to S. N. Whittlesey, changing the firm name to Garrison & Whittlesey. The stock was then moved to a lot just east of the bank of Grand Rapids.

Johnson & Hill Co. Formed

Under the new management the business was greatly increased and a dry goods department was added, in which both Mrs. Garrison and Mrs. Whittlesey served the customers. Mr. Hill was with this company for eleven years, when they sold the business to J. D. Witter, who conveyed a half interest to Mr. Hill. The new firm was organized under the name of G. M. Hill & Company, and in the year 1887 was consolidated with N. Johnson who conducted a dry goods and grocery store near the Lefebvre building. The new partners organized under the firm name of Johnson, Hill & Company. They greatly enlarged the stock and increased the business and in 1898 a stock company was duly incorporated under the name of The Johnson & Hill Company. Other owners of stock in the new firm were Charles F. Kruger, A. C. Otto and Daniel McKeicher, all three having since withdrawn from the company and are engaged in other businesses in this city.

During the year 1902, both N. Johnson and J. D. Witter passed away.