

SAMUEL HILL:

His life, his friends, and his accomplishments

“We have found the Garden of Eden. It is the garden spot of the world — the most beautiful country I have ever seen. I took Mary up on top of the mountain and showed her the kingdom of the earth. Just think of a place where you can raise apples, peaches, quinces, corn, potatoes, watermelons, nineteen varieties of grapes, plums, apricots, strawberries, walnuts, almonds and everything except oranges . . . I am going to incorporate a company called ‘The Promised Land Company’.” (October 18, 1907, from a letter sent by Samuel Hill to his brother, Dr. Richard Junius Hill.)

The Promised Land Company, later known as Maryhill, Washington, eventually failed due to irrigation difficulties and a world war. Left in this wake was a huge Grecian-doric castle museum, dedicated to international art; a replica of England’s Stonehenge, dedicated to peace; and a colorful history of our people: a queen, a Folies Bergere denseuse, a sugar heiress, and an empire builder.

The story of the castle begins in 1913 and continues today. Samuel Hill executed plans for the building of a castle on a rocky promontory high above the second largest river in the United States. Mr. Hill, a strange mixture of cosmopolite and farmer, intended to use his castle as a residence for entertaining illustrious friends and royalty. He was anxious to show them the beauties of the West and to return, in a good manner, the hospitality that had been extended to him. For his good friend, King Albert, Samuel had the Belgian crest engraved above the doors.

When World War I erupted in Europe, all plans were set aside, and Sam joined his friend, Loie Fuller, in Red Cross efforts across the European front. Out of the need to aid war torn countries, this unique friendship developed.

Loie Fuller, founder of the “serpentine” or “skirt dance” and darling of the Folies Bergere, was born in Illinois in 1862. Since her creativity was not popular in the Victorian atmosphere of the United States, she sought another audience. In the Parisian dem-monds of opius dens and symbolist poetry, she became an overnight success. With voluminous skirts and colored lights, she could metamorphose herself into anything . . . a butterfly, a flower.

Loie was a experimenter not only in dance, but also in chemistry and film as well. She would spend hours in the lab working on chemicals to light up her costumes. When she discovered the ethereal glow of radium she had the audacity to ask the Curies if she could try it! In the 1920’s she experimented with movement in film which led to the making of a move with Queen Marie of Romania. A friendship of great importance to Maryhill Museum was one with Augusta Rodin, sculptor, who had fallen in love with Loie’s new dance form. From him Loie obtained many statues and sketches, most of which can be seen in the museum today.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Isadora Duncan took Loie's place as the darling of Paris. World War I came along, and Loie turned to a new adventure, the Red Cross. With her usual fervor and off times her own money, she gained many supporters. When she wired Sam Hill begging him to go with her to Romania, he readily accepted.

Queen Marie of Romania was one of the most beautiful women in Europe and one of the most royal. On her father's side she was the granddaughter of Queen Victoria, and her mother's, the granddaughter of Czar Alexander II. Raised in England, she became the crown princess of Romania at age 17. In 1893 Romania was an infant nation, having gained its independence a few short years before. The country was so unknown, in fact, that one of Marie's English cousins thought it was the capital of Hungary! Her early years in Romania were lonely ones, and the German King thought the 17-year old beauty somewhat frivolous. However, Marie was a warm, creative, and industrious person. She learned to cope with the Hohenzollern family, to love the Latin people, and to love their countryside, full of wooden churches and medieval castles. The Romanian fairy tales, for which she is well known, are filled with the folklore of these people, and, in many of the photographs she has given to Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts, she is dressed in the traditional Romanian folk costume.

By the time she became queen in 1914, she was often consulted in matters of government and was adored by her people. During the war she became known as "Momma Regina" and spent almost every day among "her" soldiers at the front, exposing herself to disease. Late every evening she would step into a tub of hot water, fully clothed, to kill the typhus that clung to her robes. With the Red Cross and the Hoover Relief Commission, Loie Fuller and Samuel Hill brought aid and hope to her country.

Queen Marie was to repay them years later by dedicating Sam's castle.

Alma Spreckels, sugar heiress, plays a different role in Maryhill Museums' history. Although all four of these people became acquainted at the same time, Mrs. Spreckels was destined to play her part after the dedication of the museum and the death of her friends: Loie Fuller, 1928; Samuel Hill, 1931; and Queen Marie, 1938.

Loie Fuller suggested in 1917 that Sam make his residence into a museum: "After the eloquent pleading of today, I have decided to dedicate my new chateau at Maryhill, Washington, to a museum for the public good and the betterment of French art in the far Northwest of America. Your hopes and ideals shall be fulfilled, my dear little artist woman." (July 24, 1917, letter from Samuel Hill to Loie Fuller.) This museum was to help compensate for the atrocities the war had brought and to give both nations some degree of hope, friendship, and beauty. More important matters took precedence, and it wasn't until 1926 that Queen Marie came to dedicate the museum.

The Queen arrived at Maryhill, in all her splendor, with Prince Nicholas and Princess Ileana. The trip across the United States had proved harrowing, not at all what she had planned — too many people with too many ideas of royal protocol. When she arrived at the castle on a wintry November day, it was still a hulk without windows. Remembrance of what Samuel Hill and Loie Fuller had done prompted her to deliver a speech in defense of her friends and turn an awkward situation into a victory, "Samuel Hill is building not only for today, but for tomorrow. There is much more in

this house made of concrete than we see. There is a dream built into this place. Some may scoff and smile for they do not understand, I understand. And, so I came here, and some wondered why. But Samuel Hill knows why I came and that is enough. I came in love and understanding of his dream, for I too, am a dreamer and also a worker for these dreams. I would say good things are not only for his life, but far beyond.”

Even after this eloquent speech, the castle museum was desolate and unused for 14 more years. There was no easy access to it; the highway on the Washington side of the Columbia River was unfinished and, though Sam had bought a piece of land on the Oregon side for a bridge, the span of the Columbia was not accomplished until 1962.

After Samuel Hill’s death, his work was carried on by Zola Brooks and E. N. Hill: “The success of the museum depends entirely on you and myself and I do not want to make a failure of it.” (January 30, 1932, letter from Edgar Newlin Hill to Zola Brooks.) Zola O. Brooks, Samuel Hill’s lawyer at Maryhill, and Ed Hill, cousin and president of the Seattle Trust, worked many years trying to realize Samuel’s dream. Mr. Brook’s daughter, Jerrine May, of Goldendale, Washington, remembers when she and her brother spent all their free time at the museum, helping to rebuild the castle, put up displays and work on the grounds. One of brother Jim’s chores was to haul water in a wagon up a steep embankment for the grapes that covered the hillside. During that period, Zola’s wife, Muriel, referred to herself as a museum widow.

Alma Spreckels, founder of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, made her contributions at this time. The original intention of Loie was to have three related museums for the betterment of international art, beauty, and friendship: one in California, one in France, and one in Washington. From a letter Alma Spreckels wrote to Clifford R. Dolph on September 2, 1948, she says, “At least Mr. Hill’s dream will and is being realized — it was Loie Fuller who inspired me to build the California Palace of the Legion of Honor and helped me. I know how she inspired Sam Hill and helped him to do and give Maryhill and got Queen Marie and her family to help.” Mrs. Spreckels carried on the work that Loie and Sam had begun, and Maryhill Museum of Fine Arts is indebted to her for many fine collections as the Romanian Room, the Icon Room, and the Calle Glass.

Maryhill Museum opened to the public in 1940 with Clifford Dolph as first curator. On the Board of Trustees, Alma Spreckels offered and withdrew gifts according to her whim. Mr. Dolph’s ability to relate to her saved many a collection.

Today, seventy years after the funding of the “Promised Land”, Samuel Hill and his friends would be able to see the dream materialized. The museum overlooks the magnificent Columbia River, Oregon’s wheat fields, and snow-capped Mt. Hood. In the spring, sunflowers and lupine carpet the Klickitat Hills while tamerisk and lilacs surround the grounds at the castle. There are plans for a Queen Marie garden, iris, daffodils, lilies, all the flowers of which she was so fond and which grew in profusion around her castles in Romania. There’s a lovely picnic area where peacocks roam. Inside the museum houses 25 collections.

There is a link missing in this story: who was this Samuel Hill, a man who bought a 7,000 acre dream, built a castle, had a queen dedicate it, and then gave it to the people?

Samuel Hill was born May 3, 1857 in Deep River, North Dakota. When the Civil

War broke out his Quaker family immigrated northward and settled in Minneapolis. Dr. Nathan Hill became an active citizen there, and the oldest son, Dr. Richard Junius Hill, followed his father's pattern. Young Dr. Hill was later to become friends with Dr. William Mayo and his brother. Samuel was quite young when his father died and was forced to work hard as he had aspirations to Harvard. He attended Haverford, then Harvard (he became the overseer at Harvard from 1900-1906, and Penn College and was admitted to the Minneapolis Bar around 1880.

James Jerome Hill, railroad builder, shipping magnate, miner and banker, came into Samuel's life in the 1880's. Mr. J. J. Hill came from the Catholic Hills of St. Paul, while Samuel came from the Quaker Hills of Minneapolis. They happened to meet while involved in railroad litigations. A mutual respect grew out of their meeting, and Sam was soon following in the railroad magnate's footsteps. He learned the railroad business and became the president of the Minneapolis Trust Company.

IT seemed quite natural for Samuel to marry Mr. J. J. Hill's oldest daughter, Mary, in 1888. For about 10 years they lived in Minneapolis where two children were born: Mary Mendenhall, 1889, and James Nathan, 1893.

Around the turn of the century, Sam decided to go West and take over the presidency of the Seattle Gas and Light Company. He soon fell in love with the Northwest, convinced that Seattle would become the center of trade for the West Coast. When he arrived, however, it was nothing more than a mining and lumber town. Successful in business, he didn't fare so well with his marriage. In 1903 Mrs. Hill took the children to the East coast to "educate" them.

When he came to Seattle at the turn of the century, Sam Hill was already 40 years old. His charming personality and his "presence" when he walked into a room, gained him many supporters for his endless causes. "Hill's personality was overwhelming. He was extremely well educated. His characteristic costume was a frock coat, top hat, stand-up wind collar, and a cravat so large that it filled the whole of the 'V' in his vest. No matter what he did it was correct." Mrs. Z. O. Brooks remembers the first time she met Samuel Hill: "Zola and I were recently engaged and had been invited to Mr. Hill's house in Seattle for dinner. We took the street car from the University. When we arrived, sopping wet, the maid answered the door with Mr. Hill right behind her. He gave me a big hug, even though I was dripping and expressed his best wishes. I liked him!"

Among other things, Samuel Hill loved houses and traveling. At one time he owned seven houses, but it was in Seattle that he entertained his most illustrious friends, Marechal Coffre of France and Queen Marie of Romania. An inveterate traveler, Sam "circled the globe seven times and made fifty one trips across the Atlantic." He was constantly on the go. In one letter he says, "Just got back from a trip to Europe Saturday evening, delivered two lectures that same evening, and went to a Quaker meeting on Sunday." He belongs to approximately 50 clubs throughout the world.

Samuel Hill's contributions to the Northwest were numerous: banking, mining, good roads, and trans-Pacific trade with Russia (at the University of Washington, he set up the first chair of the Russian language), Japan and China. He brought several companies out of bankruptcy and made them into profitable businesses, including the

Seattle Gas and Light, and the Home Telegraph and Telephone in Portland. He founded the Seattle Trust Company. He built monuments to peace: the Peace Arch in Blaine, Washington on the Canadian-U. S. border; and Stonehenge at Maryhill, Washington. He promoted golf and even wrote a patent for drive-in restaurants.

International contributions were equally as impressive. For the Allied Powers during World War I, he surveyed 7,000 miles of Trans-Siberian track, devising a plan to carry munitions and supplies to the Russian Front. For the Hoover Relief Commission and Red Cross war efforts, he was decorated by Belgium, France and Romania. In Japan, he was honored for the development of good roads.

Perhaps his appointment as honorary Consul-General of Belgium for Oregon, Washington and Idaho was the one that pleased him most: "On the occasion of this appointment he had efficient cards printed: Samuel Hill, Belgian Consul, Maryhill, Washington." Those who knew him say it was all done in the spirit of fun.

Why, on this particular occasion, Sam Hill should have been watching the tennis matches at Nice, is anybody's guess, for he wasn't particularly fond of sports. During the play he spotted a stately elderly gentleman to whom he took an immediate liking. They struck up a conversation in French, and the distinguished stranger introduced himself. His name was long and Frenchy and it wafted airily over Hill's head.

"Well," said Hill, proffering his card, "I should like to see you again."

"Mm," said the gentleman, "Belgian consul, Maryhill, Washington. Quite an important post, isn't it?"

Sam Hill thought he detected a note of pleasantry in the man's voice and answered in kind: "Yes, a very important post. Your card?"

"Oh," the bright blue eyes twinkled, "I never carry a card. I'm only the king of Sweden." (Ellen Ewing, *Oregonian*, July 7, 1940.)

The list of Sam's contributions and honors is long, but his greatest service was the Good Roads Movement, which originated at the turn of the century. "It required Samuel Hill and men of his aspiration to see what good roads would do for our population. No other part of the world is so well supplied with good arterial highways as this part of the country." (Judge Charles H. Carey, *Oregonian*, Mar. 14, 1932.) This movement was the beginning of state highway systems for Washington and Oregon. Samuel Hill predicted the growing need of the car: to haul the farmer's produce to market, to go into places where trains could not venture, and to have the pleasure of a Sunday afternoon drive. Once, when asked why he built his castle in such a remote spot, he replied: "More people will come to see it than if it were right in the center of Seattle. This is the automobile age."

Samuel Hill studied road building on the French and Italian Riviera; he experimented with pavement techniques and set up the first department of road building at the University of Washington. The beautiful Columbia River Scenic Highway was one result of his research. By the time of his death he had been the president of four Good Roads Associations and he traveled as far as Mississippi and Alabama to work on highway systems. Even in 1931, when he succumbed to an "infection of the pancreas," he was on his way to the Salem legislature to promote one of his most important undertakings, the Pacific Coast Highway.

“Time is valuable if you will make the most of it, for it gives you opportunity to serve humanity. The longer you live the more fully you will appreciate that the only permanent satisfaction you will get out of life is in making the world a better place to live.”
—Samuel Hill (1857-1931)

(Sources from the Archives of Maryhill Museum.)

An answer to “What the Sam Hill?”

First of all, it's time to get one thing straight. The old American expletive

“What the Sam Hill?” has nothing to do with

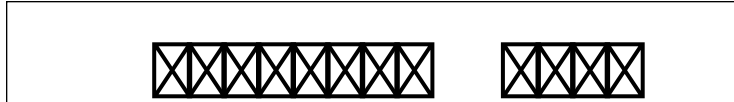
Sam Hill, the Northwest financier, road builder and dreamer responsible for creating Maryhill Castle, the eerie and enigmatic landmark perched above the Columbia River in Central Washington.

Dr. John Tuhy, a retired Pacific Northwest physician, says he has traced the “What the . . .” phrase to 1937, and found it to be a minced oath — “A polite way of saying ‘What the hell?’ Nothing to do with this Sam at all.”

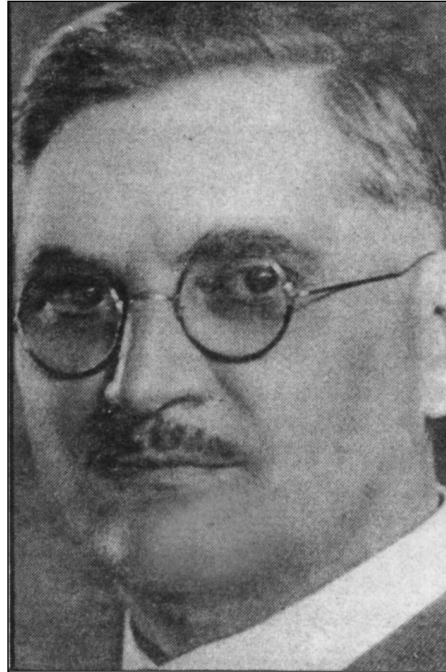
Another misconception in Pacific Northwest mythology is that the magnate of Maryhill — a place never completed in his lifetime by the way — was the builder of the Great Northern Railroad. Before becoming the Burlington Northern, the line did snake its way through the north side of the Gorge.

The railroad was in fact built by Sam's father-in-law, James J. Hill, whose daughter Mamie, married Sam in 1888 — two years after Sam, a sharp Minneapolis lawyer, was hired by the railroad. Sam, it seemed, had been winning cases against the firm, apparently impressing the old man, who figured that if they keep licking you, have them join you.

Tuhy, 68 and a native Oregon-ian, became fascinated with the mystery, beginning his research in 1979 after being encouraged by a friend one night at a dinner party.



By Paul Pintarich



Maryhill's founder, Sam Hill.

Tuhy is perhaps the first definitive biographer of Sam Hill. His book, “*Sam Hill:*

The Prince of Castle Nowhere,” will be published in October by Richard Abel's Timber Press.

Some 300 pages long, the book has a light style appropriate to its subject, yet has been researched completely and has a full bibliography and index, photos, maps and a most helpful chronology of Hill's life, which spanned the years from 1857 to 1931.

Tuhy's revelations present Hill as a fascinating, optimistic and indomitable man — characteristic of the types who spearheaded America's development at the turn of the century.

Sam was a funny man, and there may have been some mild mental disturbances in the family, though none that indomitable Sam — except for a nervous spate of letter writing, and some mild paranoia over “Soviets” later in life. But mental problems were revealed more seriously in his daughter, Mary, who was psychologically retarded, and his son, James, who became a recluse.

Sam was born in North Carolina, the son of a Quaker family, though he never practiced the religion. He grew up in Minneapolis and had some college, including a year at Harvard Law School. He read for the law before being accepted into the Minnesota BAR, where he soon gained some notoriety in confrontations with his future son-in-law.

“One thing I really didn’t determine,” Tuhy says, “is why Sam suddenly resigned from his railroad job in 1901 and came to Seattle. He was vice-president, president or board member of virtually every one of the Great Northern subsidiaries, yet he chucked it all.”

Tuhy, with access to 5,000 of Hill’s personal letters, said he found one to the elder Hill that expressed regret and an implied apology, and the biographer thinks this parting may have been a result of Hill’s womanizing.

Hill’s wife left him in Seattle in 1903, “and never returned,” Tuhy says. Hill subsequently sired three children by three different mothers, including his secretary, and set up sizeable trust funds for two illegitimate sons and a daughter.

Tuhy traced one son, Sam B. Hill, to Santa Monica, Calif., where he is a psychologist and counselor. The boy was Sam’s son by Mona Bell Hill, his mistress in the early 1920s, and the woman whom Hill built a house, later destroyed during construction of Bonneville Dam. A second son was traced to British Columbia, but refused to cooperate with the author.

Hill’s illegitimate daughter, Elizabeth Wade, a resident of Arizona, was most pleased, however, when Tuhy informed her that Hill was her father.

“I was the one who told her,” Tuhy says, “and when she came to visit and my wife and I took her on a tour of Maryhill Museum, you should have seen the expression on her face when she looked at a portrait of her father.”

Publicly, Hill was a big frog in the Pacific Northwest pond, and he left few lily pads unturned. Supported by magnificent earnings in the stock market, he once owned the Seattle Gas and Power Co.; he began the Home Telephone Co. in Portland; and at Maryhill, located where he thought the climate was perfect — his promotional slogan was “Where the Rain and Sunshine Meet” — he attempted to establish an agricultural empire on 7,000 hillside acres.

He began the project in 1907 at the site of

the old town of Columbus, Wash., anticipating the Great Northern’s arrival by two years. There was a hotel, a Quaker meeting house, shops, stables, office buildings and orchards. He began building his “castle” in 1914.

Tuhy writes that Hill overestimated Maryhill’s agricultural potential, and the potential “fruit bowl” languished in favor of more appropriate cattle ranching.

When the unfinished castle was dedicated by old friend Queen Marie of Rumania, who arrived by special train in 1926, the \$75,000 reinforced concrete structure was an unfinished, windowless hulk that had never been lived in. Hill kept a huge stone house in Seattle, or lived at Portland’s prestigious Arlington club.

According to Tuhy, Hill “rarely threw money around,” which probably explained his popularity with European royalty. He began getting acquainted with the great royal houses in the 1890s, when he traveled to Europe to sell bonds, principally to King Leopold of Belgium. Through the Belgian Court he was introduced to Queen Victoria, whose daughter was Marie of Rumania. He also met Loie Fuller, expatriate American exotic dancer and contemporary of Isadora Duncan, who was a close friend of French sculpture Auguste Rodin. Hence, the Rodin collection at Maryhill.

Sam got around in more ways than one. He visited Europe 50 times, helping with post-World War I relief, although Tuhy said his accounts of his efforts were exaggerated. He visited Russia three times between 1899 and 1916, once aboard the unfinished Trans-Siberian Railroad, and took several trips to Japan, once on a round-the-world jaunt with old friend Marshall Joseph Joffre of France, commander of the country’s forces during World War I.

It goes on, and Tuhy, a shy but

