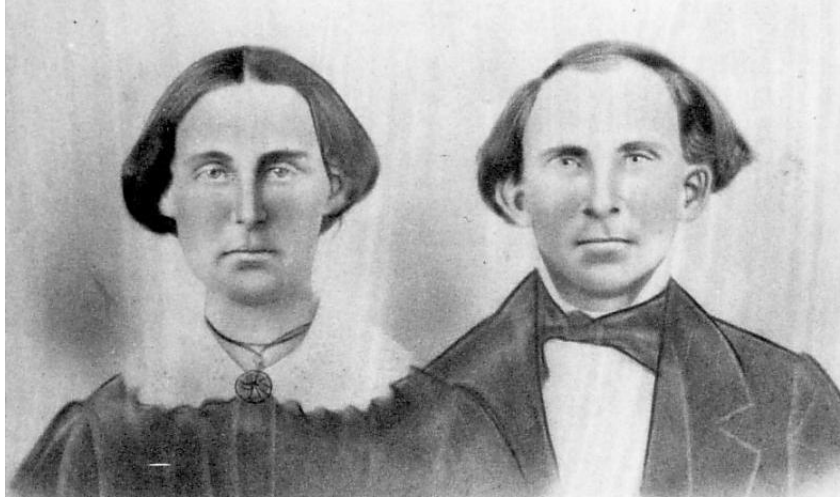


STORY OF JAMES HILL

Pioneer of 1847

by Mary Loualla Hill Stephen



James and Jane (Small) Hill

Submitted to oregonpioneers.com by Jennie Hill Cobb, great-granddaughter of James Hill

Father and Mother were married February 4th, 1849. They came to Father's sister's home, Elizabeth Duty, near Athens, Missouri, now called Revere, Missouri, as that is our R.R. Station and Post Office. They accompanied his three brothers, Isaac, Russell, and George, and his mother, Elizabeth Lane Hill, and his sister Louise Kelly and three nephews of whom he was very fond, LaGrand Hill, Isham P. Keith, and Sterling Hill. They with many other crossed the plains. Father brought a horse for mother to ride and when she became tired she would ride in the wagon. My father drove cows for teams rather than oxen as he said he would have milk when he got there. [Note: This is the first group of the family that went to Oregon, before the Isaac and Claiborne Hill wagon train in the previous section.]

I remember hearing Father tell of his experience crossing the Snake River. It was up and the cattle refused to cross. They would start in only to turn back so Father went with them to drive them across. He was a good swimmer, but took the cramps just before reaching the bank on his return. The men helped him out and there happened to be a horse near with a blanket on it and the men wrapped this warm blanket around him. Father said it saved his life. Mother said she did not know of it until he was better. I wondered how many girls of today would like such a wedding trip. Mother said they suffered greatly for fresh water crossing Idaho. The water had so much alkali in it that they could not drink it. They came to a place where the willows looked green down a draw and the men ran down the dry branch hoping to find water but found none. Father took a spade with him and commenced digging in the sand and it kept getting more moist. They put this sand on their dry tongues and it was a big help to them. Finally Father saw a little water seep in the place he was digging. They dug other places and they all got a little water. On their return to the wagons, they found Uncle Russell Hill under a sage brush with his tongue swollen. He had given out and had not reached the dry stream, so they took care of him.

When I was in Idaho in 1890 with Aunt Louisa Kelly Wilson and Uncle George Hill, I learned much about my Father's people and the things that Father had done.

Uncle George said they lost a team that Father felt sure the Indians had stolen. He was out looking for the team and came to the Indian Camp and captured the Indian chief and took him back to camp with him, telling the Indians that when they brought the team back he would let the chief go. When the women saw the Indian in camp, they became frightened--they screamed and pulled their hair and made such a disturbance that Father let the Indian go. He was very much provoked though as he was sure the horses would have been returned.

Aunt Elizabeth Duty said her brother, James Hill, was at his brother's place and he told him to get a gun to kill a beef. James said, "I can kill it with a rock much quicker," which he did. He could throw so hard and so straight.

One of Uncle Clayborn Hill's little girls had been very sick and was nervous. The school teacher (Mr. Cassidy) was very cross and threatened to whip her if she did not have her lesson. James helped her and she knew it, but, when she went to class, she was so frightened she would fail and then he would whip her. James said he could not see her whipped any more and told the teacher so, said she knew her lesson and for him to be more patient with her. Mr. Cassidy flew mad and said, "Take my seat, Sir." James said, "No, Mr. Cassidy, I do not want your seat, but you can't whip her any more." Mr. Cassidy then took hold of James and said, "Then I'll give the whipping to you." James was too much for him, but what a scuffle they had! The teacher tried to put James out of the school house. James went out and whipped him but by throwing a rock that splintered the door casing. Mr. Cassidy told him to leave. James said, "No, Mr. Cassidy, my father has paid for me to go to this school, and I'm coming." In the afternoon he went up to him for some help on his lesson, the teacher smiled and helped him and James went on through school, but Uncle Clayborn Hill took his children out of school.

I remember hearing my father say his mother, Elizabeth Lane Hill, and his sister, Elizabeth Hill Duty, went back to Tennessee to visit in 1842. They went in what they called a "carry all," sometimes Father called it a buckboard, but later a covered spring wagon. When they reached a place where there were orchards, Father said, "Mother, I believe I will get out and get some of those apples. They have been frozen and the people won't care." Grandmother replied, "Son, anything that is worth having is worth asking for." They stopped at the house and the good lady said, "Those apples have been frozen. They are not good, but I will get some good ones." And she brought out a handful of apples. Oh! How they enjoyed them. They had no orchards old enough to bear and were hungry for fruit. And the lesson that his mother taught him that day was handed down to her grandchildren: "A thing worth having is worth asking for."

Grandmother Hill lived with Father and Mother a while. Father kept a hotel and rooming house in the mines. He had men hired to work in the mines. One day when father paid his men, one man said, "Mr. Hill, I could have kept this," and took the gold nugget out of his pocket and gave it to Father. They said it was worth about five hundred dollars. The men gave Mother small nuggets until she had enough to make a watch chain with gold links. It was stolen before my time and I never got to see it. I have the gold scales Father and Uncle George Hill used to weigh their gold on in California. I treasure them. Uncle gave them to me when I returned home from Idaho in the fall of 1891. Aunt Lou gave me her onyx and pearl pin and earrings. I treasure them also.

In 1852 Father and Mother with Shasta Ruby returned to Missouri. Father had promised Mother's father, Rev. James Small, that he would bring Mother back when he made enough money to start in business. However, it would have been better had he not made that promise. They would have escaped living in the midst of the war and have been saved many hardships, depriving us children of

an education and he talked of going back to Oregon as long as he lived. Father had a belt of gold he exchanged for money in New York City. Mother took very sick upon their arrival in New York. The doctors called it Isthmus fever. She came near losing her life and she was under the care of trained nurses for eight weeks.

Father and Mother located ten miles southwest of Springfield, Missouri, in Greene County on Grand Prairie in the beautiful Ozark country. Father built a large store and house combined in a little town one-quarter mile from Father's farm on the Springfield and Carthage Road called Little York.

Our father went to Pike's Peak the summer of 1854. Three men accompanied him. They took pack horses and burros on a gold prospecting trip. However, they found no gold. The Indians would run the horses from the camp at night and steal them. Father ran a dangerous risk of losing his life in recovering them. One morning some of the horses were missing and Father went to look for them and became lost. It was some days before he found his way back to camp, only to find that he had been deserted. The men had left for their homes in Missouri thinking the Indians had killed my father. He walked until his shoes were worn out, his ammunition all used up and he was hungry and worn out. He took some of his clothing and wrapped around his feet and started for a settlement and home. On the way he saw a jack rabbit and killed it with a rock. With this for food he reached a settlement. The first man he saw he called to bring him some clothing saying he was not presentable. When he reached a restaurant, the man was busy. Father saw some bread on the counter and he took some saying to the man that he would explain later as he devoured the bread since he was so hungry. He wrote to Mother and she sent him money to get home. This was his only prospecting trip away from home. He devoted his time to the store and did well until 1851 when war broke out. The battle of Wilson Creek was fought a few miles from Little York. Father moved to Texas for the sake of peace, leaving his store with the goods on the shelves, and Mother's beautiful furniture, her fan poster bedsteads, many things that were dear to them. They stayed in Texas until the war ended. In the summer of 1866 my mother accompanied by her sister, Elizabeth Small Arthur, her Cousin Mary A. Small and myself, a baby, came back to visit my Grandmother, Mary A. Wallus Small, who lived in Dade County, Missouri.

I remember hearing my mother say they had camped near a pond of water. After cleaning me up from the days' drive, they were getting supper when they saw me wading in the pond. Mother called to me to come back but I went on. Aunt wanted to go in after me but mother said, "No, she went in and let her come out." When I was nearing the bank on the opposite side, I tripped on some brush and fell down. Mother said I got up turned around and waded back the way I had gone through. My head was all that could be seen above the water.

This is all that I remember of hearing about that trip. I suppose it was the most exciting thing that happened to them.

In the spring of 1868 Father and Mother returned to Missouri, leaving our home on the Braseses River. The stream made one string of fence of the farm. The house was a two-story log house. The lower story faced the valley and the upper story came up to the top of the cliff or hill. They could walk out on the ground from the upper story. Sister Theo remembered the trip home. As they were on a Ferry crossing the Red River, a calf horned her overboard into the river. She says she has been to the bottom of one river. Father soon recovered her. When they arrived at Baxter Springs, Kansas, Mother received word that her mother had died and she was glad that she had made the trip to see her in 1866 with a team and wagon although it had not been an easy trip. Father stopped for a time in Wenton County. In the fall of 1868 Father and Mother moved to Uncle John Small's in Dade County, 25 miles from Little York, Greene County, Missouri. Sister Jennie [Nancy Jane] was born there.

Father wrote to Mr. Charles McClure, who lived near Little York and learned our house was vacant. Mrs. Conley had taken possession of our store building and everything they had left in it. Early in the spring of 1869, we drove up to our home to find the doors locked. Father set up our cook stove, put four joints of pipe in place and Mother got us some supper. In the meantime Mrs. Conley sent two men with revolvers to keep Father out of the house. They stood in the large door of the shed room to keep us from getting in there. Father had made one window on the north that he could unlock from the outside. This he did telling brother Henry [Grandpa James Henry Hill] to climb in and when his mother knocked on the small door for him to push the bolt and let her in the house. That was all Father had to do. Mother told us small children to keep hold of her dress which we did. She got our big iron shovel filled it with coals and started for the shed door. When she reached the door she said very politely, "Gentlemen, please let me pass." They stormed around and threatened to shoot her, but Mother kept saying, "Gentlemen, please let me pass, or I will scorch your trousers." She was getting too near to them and they jumped out of the door and ran to the hotel. By the time they got to the hotel, Father had a straw tick and many things in the house. Mother had a fire in the fireplace and placed the tick in front of it and had we children sit on it to get warm. By this time Mrs. Conley arrived very angry. Ordering Mother out of the house, she grabbed hold of the tick and started for the small door with us on it, but she could not get us out as the door was too small. She worked until she gave out. Mother said to her, "Old Lady, you are stalled." I was so frightened; she was so angry.

She left us on the run, saying, "I will get help to put you out." But she never returned and we were at home from that time on. But, oh! the destruction that had taken place. The buildings were destroyed; the fences around the place gone.

After two years of hard work the farm was fenced and put in successful operation. A man who owned the land on the east refused to allow Father to join his fence. That would allow the stock from the prairie to go in on our crop unless we guarded the place all the time. Father took some of his store counters of solid walnut and set it out there to be some protection from the hot sun and rain. We children would stay there in the day time and Father and the boys at night. If we would put up the fence and leave, they would throw the fence down. Father told the boys he was going to play a joke on Mr. Ragsdale. We put the fence up and all went home for supper. They crawled back so the folks could not see them return and filled their guns with blank cartridges. Brother Joe [Arthur Joab] had the tin dinner horn and they were all ready for action. It was a beautiful moonlight night. About midnight Father heard cowbells of all descriptions and sizes. They were all wide awake to see what it all meant. They finally heard people driving cows, horses, sheep and hogs; all that they could gather from the range. When Mr. Jordan Ragsdale commenced throwing down the fence, Father and Henry commenced firing their blank cartridges at them and Joe blew his horn. This frightened the cattle, Mr. Ragsdale's horse, and all the stock that they immediately stampeded. Mr. Ragsdale's horse whirled knocking him to the ground. Such a noise and such a movie picture. I wish I could tell about it as Father told us. I do not remember that we had any more trouble about the fence.

However, we were on guard most of the time. This man a few years later asked Father to go his security for a large sum of money and he did. Mother said, "Mr. Hill, why did you do it?" Father replied, "Oh, just keeping coals of fire on his head."

In 1872 Father discovered a zinc and lead mine near Brookline on the Frisco RR. Little York was moved to Brookline. This mine was operated for two years with some profit and then sold. There was a smelter erected at this mine.

Father lived a useful life, fraught with many privations and hardships.

He died January 20, 1882, and was laid to rest in Dade County on Grandfather Small's farm where Mother and her parents were laid to rest, about three miles from Ash Grove, Missouri, over the line in Dade County.

– Mary Hill Stephen –