



Peopling the Empire: The Great Northern Railroad and the Recruitment of Immigrant Settlers to North Dakota

By Robert F. Zeidel

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the settlement of such places as Sarles, Cando, Maxbass, and St. John, North Dakota, began in earnest, partly as a result of the efforts of the **Great Northern Railway** (GN) to encourage immigration to its tributary lands. For James J. Hill, the president of the Great Northern, this colonization brought to fruition his dreams of peopling the largely vacant lands served by his railroad, and of bringing settlement to the northern Great Plains.¹

The GN's efforts to attract homesteaders coincided with the peak of European immigration to the United States, setting up a classic example of **"push-pull" migration**. Changing conditions in Europe "pushed" literally millions of Europeans to consider

immigration to the United States, and transportation innovations made the journey more feasible. Between 1880 and 1921 (the year strict immigrant quotas were begun), more than twenty-five million men, women, and children came to the United States. Concurrently, the Great Northern hoped to "pull" a significant portion of these **immigrants** to its territories with the promise of economic opportunity, particularly the availability of land along its lines.²

In the 1880s, new milling techniques increased the demand for wheat, which in turn stimulated a Dakota **"land boom."** A concurrent rise in national immigration, from 2.8 million during the 1870s to 5.2 million in the 1880s, provided a host of potential settlers. The Dakota boom subsided during the 1890s, while immigration declined nationally in response to the nation-wide economic depression. Immigration again picked up after 1900 and continued strong until disrupted by the onset of World War I in 1914. This influx of people contributed to North Dakota's **"second boom,"** brought on partly because of increased demands for food production. Considerable lands, especially in the western part of the state, remained unsettled during this period. Throughout these years, from the 1880s to 1914 and beyond, the GN tailored its colonization program to meet these changing circumstances.³

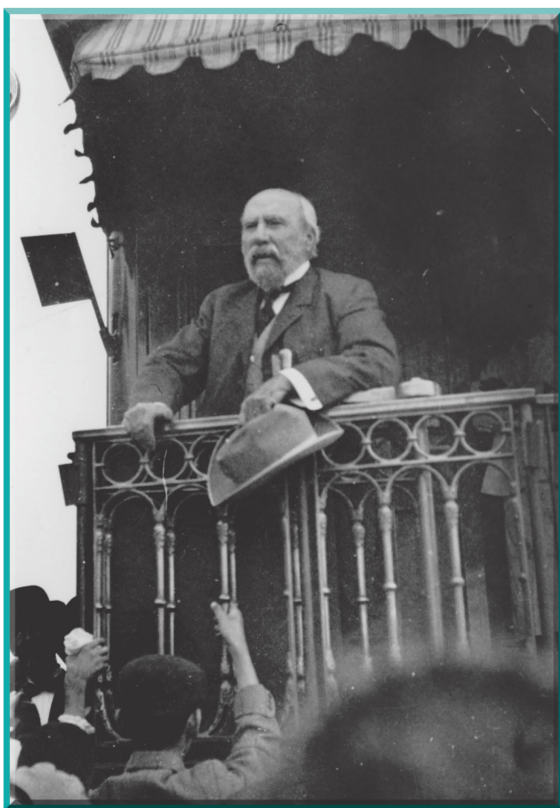


Figure 1. James J. Hill speaking from the back of a railroad car, at a gathering in Williston, North Dakota, September 23, 1909. (SHSND A3616)

James J. Hill directed the Great Northern's operations from 1878 until his death in 1916, with the



Figure 2. A train, consisting of a 4-4-0 locomotive, a baggage car, and two passenger cars, belonging to the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway, stopped at the passenger platform at the station in Arvilla, North Dakota, ca. 1882. This railway later became the Great Northern. (SHSND B0060)

help of his son Louis who succeeded him at the helm. Both Hills enthusiastically supported colonization. James J., himself an immigrant from Rockford, Ontario, Canada, came to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1856 and launched his railroad. Louis became assistant to the president in 1898, assumed the Great Northern's presidency in 1907, and moved up to chairman of the board in 1912.⁴

The **St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway**, forerunner to the Great Northern, entered northern Dakota Territory, at Grand Forks in 1879. Expansion west of the Red River continued in the early 1880s. As lines branched out from Fargo to Neche, the Manitoba prepared to launch a “vigorous campaign” to promote immigration. General Manager James J. Hill took a particular interest in the project, especially in securing more settlement in the Red River Valley. Towards this end, agents distributed literature in Europe, and the railroad made plans to run **Immigrant Excursion Trains**. The latter involved taking foreign-language newspaper editors and other immigrant leaders on tours of regions where the railroad hoped to settle their countrymen. Targeted groups included British Islanders and Scandinavians.⁵

Because most immigrants sought to homestead but at the same time needed income, the Manitoba offered employment as maintenance and construction laborers on schedules designed so as not to

interfere with planting and harvesting. An existing Great Northern Index to Personnel Files contains literally thousands of foreign-sounding surnames, and it denotes “section laborer” as their most commonly held job classification. The scant preserved records from 1890 through 1919 include German and Norwegian-born section foremen. Louis Hill asked General Manager F. E. Ward in June 1904 to let him know how much it would cost to build “houses for foreign section laborers” along the line from Grand Forks to Minot.⁶

During the 1890s, the Great Northern pursued a variety of strategies in its effort to encourage colonization, and at times individuals approached railroad officials, proffering their services in attracting new settlers. For example, James J. Hill told the Northwestern Immigration Conference, held in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1895, that there needed to be wider support of immigration, especially by state governments. Thereafter, the Minnesota State Immigration Society printed 10,000 copies of his speech to use for publicity purposes. The GN also used the Chicago Columbian Exposition, 1892–1893, to facilitate contact with representatives of foreign governments, some of whom toured on U.S. railroads. Dissatisfied with the results of its previous endeavors, the GN hired Bohemian-born **Max Bass** in 1890 to take over colonization and immigrant recruitment. Bass proved to be a valuable asset, and after his death in 1909, in

recognition of his many successful colonizations, Louis Hill named the town of Maxbass in north-central North Dakota in his honor.⁷

In 1896, New York *Mercury* editor W. C. Plummer could speak of an immigration boom in North Dakota. Some came as part of the GN's accelerated colonization program, which included attempts to solicit Canadians, Europeans, and "thoroughbred Americans." Agents reported an unprecedented rush to the Red River Valley and a high demand for descriptive literature about the region. The Great Northern also contributed, in the form of transportation, to the work of the **North Dakota Immigration Association** which was organized in 1895 to attract homeseekers to the state. The GN issued one pass for use by an Association representative and offered free passage for delegates to its inaugural meeting at Fargo. In another gesture, though less expensive, the railroad agreed to quit burning old ties and instead give them to farmers for whom wood was a scarce and needed commodity.⁸

The **Dunkers**, or **Dunkards**, German-Americans who were German Baptist Brethren and who drew

their name from their practice of immersion during baptism, are an illustration of the Great Northern's success in colonizing along its North Dakota lines. In 1894–1895, the railroad settled 145 families, 1,500 people with 95 rail cars of belongings, in the area around Cando, and in 1895, it hauled out some 400,000 bushels of their crops. The GN could thank Immigration Agent Max Bass for this positive turn of events. He induced the first Dunkers to move from Indiana to North Dakota, accompanied them on the journey, and thereafter maintained close ties with the growing community.⁹

To keep the lucrative Dunker business away from competitors, the GN employed several of these settlers during the winter months. Elders and other prominent men worked "to induce immigration" among their adherents in Indiana, Illinois, and other midwestern states. Hill sought to terminate this practice in 1896 because he did not want to oversolicit the group or offend those not hired. When agents protested and questioned the wisdom of such termination, Hill explained that he meant his remarks as a general guide for the future, not as an order to end the Dunker arrangements.¹⁰

The advent of a new century did not slacken the GN's enthusiasm for colonization. The Western Passenger Association's Immigration Bureau reported that among immigrants arriving in 1902–1903, more than seven thousand gave North Dakota as their intended destination. More than five thousand more came in 1904. Although many of these likely traveled on the Great Northern and settled on adjoining lands, Vice President J.W. Blabon nonetheless hoped that the railroad's agents could expand their operations in Europe and New York City. The agents could supply information about western lands, transportation schedules, and employment opportunities.¹¹

Nationally, calls for immigrant exclusion increased in volume and intensity after 1910. The U.S. Immigration Commission reported in favor of more restrictive legislation and specifically endorsed the enactment of a **literacy test**, which would require that most immigrants be able to read or write some language.



Figure 3. Max Bass served as the chief of colonization and immigration recruitment for the Great Northern Railway from 1892 until his death in 1909. He was recognized for his successful efforts by Louis Hill, president of the Great Northern, who named one of the new North Dakota towns after him. (SHSND A1430)

F. L. Thompson, Max Bass, and the “Dunkers”

Fountain Land Thompson, a native of Illinois, first saw Towner County in 1884 when he visited friends there. He liked the place and returned in 1887 to claim land. By that time, the Great Northern Railroad had begun to build toward Cando. He returned to Illinois to gather up a group of settlers who made the journey to Cando by emigrant train.

Thompson farmed and ran a store, but eventually he became U. S. Land Commissioner and real estate businessman. He sent many letters to potential settlers in the Midwest “telling them of the wonderful opportunity this country offered.”

Max Bass originally thought to lure Amish farmers to the Cando area, but Thompson convinced him that Dunkers, members of the Church of the Brethren, were excellent prospects for resettlement. The church was founded in Germany in 1708, but members began immigrating to America as early as 1719, and became successful farmers in Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. Both Bass and Thompson visited congregations and invited leaders to visit Towner County. At first doubtful of the agricultural potential, the Brethren finally found land they liked in Coolin Township.

In March 1894 a train carrying 350 passengers and thirty emigrant cars headed for Cando. Max Bass traveled with them, considering it his “duty to look out for the interest of those people.” Only the women and children could sleep in beds on the four-day journey; men endured the trip in coach seats. In St. Paul, the GN provided them with a lunch of coffee and buns and took a photograph of the entire group standing outside the station next to their train. Bass did not miss an opportunity to advertise western lands along the GN line. The train was draped throughout the journey with banners proclaiming “Free Government Lands in North Dakota.”

Cando welcomed the new settlers, opening the town hall and private homes to give them shelter. Over the next six years, more than 26,600 people from Midwestern states, including many Dunkers, relocated to North Dakota via the GN railroad. Of these, Bass estimated that 95 percent remained on their North Dakota land in 1902.

-WPA Pioneer Biography Interview with F. L. Thompson

-Roy Thompson, “The First Dunker Colony of North Dakota,” *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, Vol IV, 1913.

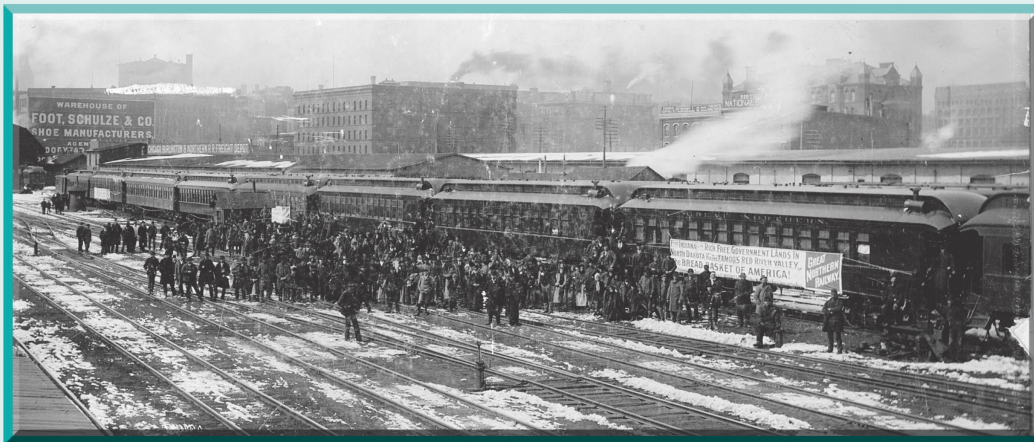


Figure 4. A special Great Northern train at Union Station, St. Paul, Minnesota, March 29, 1894, with Dunker settlers enroute from Indiana to North Dakota. The banner on the train reads, “From Indiana, to the Rich Free Government Lands in North Dakota, via the Famous Red River Valley, the Bread Basket of America!” (SHSND C1423)

One of those who disagreed was Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard College and spokesman for the National Liberal Immigration League. Eliot prepared a memorandum that outlined the arguments against any further immigration restriction, and a copy found its way to Louis Hill's desk.¹²

In February 1911, **E.C. Leedy**, the GN's Immigration Agent, who had recently taken over for the deceased Max Bass, wrote to Hill regarding the Eliot memorandum. Leedy contended that the pursuit of a liberal immigration policy was in the railroad's best interest and, given the labor shortage in the West, that distribution was more desirable than exclusion. Hill concurred and suggested that the company put together a booklet that would attract "some of the immigrants from Northern Europe" to the American Northwest. He also suggested that the Great Northern's Immigration Department work with the National Liberal Immigration League.¹³

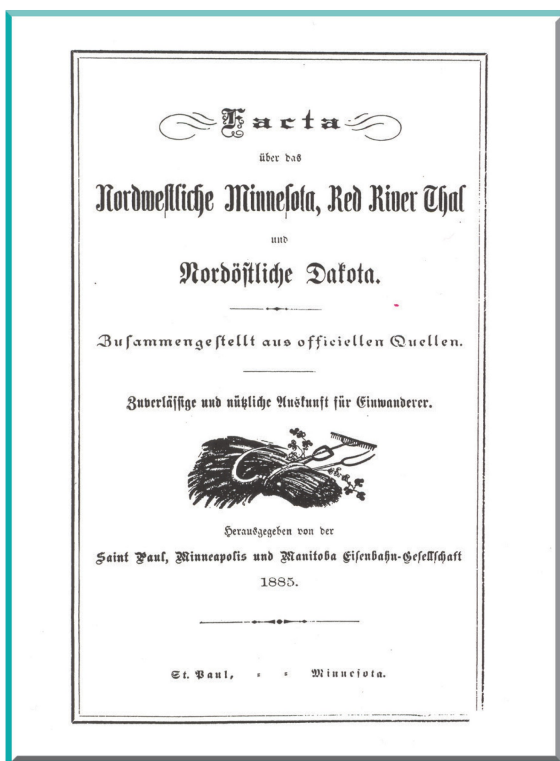


Figure 5. A pamphlet from the Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway Land Department describing the Red River Valley of northwestern Minnesota and northeastern North Dakota, ca. 1879–1890. (Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society)

The Great Northern subsequently accelerated its campaign to settle immigrants on tributary lands. Even though it did not have large government land grants as did the Union Pacific and Northern Pacific railroads, Vice President of Traffic William P. Kenney still hoped to secure "a larger share of the emigration from the old countries than we have been getting." The railroad only needed to attract a few immigrant settlers, he wrote President Carl R. Gray, because they in turn would send for family and friends. The GN hoped to play out this scenario many times over.¹⁴

Kenney's notion that effective recruitment would soon produce a sizable, homogeneous ethnic community, conflicted with a prevalent American attitude. Americans typically welcomed newcomers as individuals, not groups, and sought immigrant assimilation, not segregation. As proof of the dangers posed by sustained ethnic cohesion, many Americans pointed to the growing number of urban ghettos, which became home to more than 70 percent of new arrivals. Such enclaves allegedly retarded assimilation and allowed foreign governments to retain control over their nationals. The West, however, seemed to offer an alternative. Its inherent nature seemed well suited to the advancement of independence and Americanization.¹⁵

The U.S. government sought to direct immigrants away from cities and toward sparsely populated areas. In 1907 Congress created a Division of Information in the Bureau of Immigration. Headed by Terence V. Powderly, former head of the Knights of Labor and Commissioner-General of Immigration, the Division made a concerted effort, but it had little success in distributing immigrants to America's interior. It directed only 23,000 people out of a total immigration of more than five million to new jobs, primarily in the West and South, between 1908 and 1913.¹⁶ Perhaps the railroads had a better strategy.

The Great Northern concentrated on **group colonization**, and many North Dakota communities attest to the success of this approach.

One of Hill's Farmers: Joanna Randolph Kelley

North Dakota teacher Joanna Randolph married Clark W. Kelley in 1897. Kelley was a banker and farmer, but his farm on the shores of Devils Lake was in poor condition. Joanna took over management of the farm and made it into an agricultural showplace.

She raised alfalfa, corn, beans, wheat, and barley. She often submitted her crops for judging at crop shows, and won cash prizes for the quality of her seed stock. She also raised Yorkshire pigs, Holland turkeys, Peking ducks, and Leghorn chickens. All of these animals are usually white in color. Her cattle were of the Shorthorn breed which are white, red, or mixed. To finish off her color scheme, she built a modern house and painted it white.

Joanna Kelley was well known for her skills in agriculture and served as an officer of several agricultural organizations. People all over the world read about Mrs. Kelley and asked to buy stock from her. A typical letter, dated April 8, 1913, read:

Mrs. Kelley I read about you having white Holland turkeys in the Farmer's Wife and I thought I would like to find out what you sell a setting at and also what you sell your white China goose eggs at I think I would like them so please let me know soon and oblige Sarah J Mulbrooks

It is not surprising that Kelley was chosen by James J. Hill to receive a purebred Shorthorn bull from his own breeding stock, with which she was to improve her own cattle and that of her neighbors. This gift was one of the ways in which Hill sought to ensure the success of farmers who lived along the GN line. Successful farmers would be shipping crops and other farm products on his freight trains.

Hill acknowledged Mrs. Kelley's correspondence concerning the bull with this letter dated July 13, 1915:

*Mrs. C.W. Kelley,
Devils Lake, North Dakota*

Dear Madam,

Your postal of recent date received. I am glad to learn that the bull is doing so well and I feel sure that from his breeding he will lay a good foundation of better stock in your district.

*Yours very truly,
Jas. J. Hill*

*-Joanna Randolph Kelley Hollister Manuscript 4,
NDIRS*



Figure 6. This purebred Shorthorn bull was given to Joanna Randolph Kelley, Devils Lake, by James J. Hill. (Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo, Joanna Randolph Kelley Hollister Manuscript 4)

James J. Hill believed that people of similar religious or cultural background would help each other through the resettlement process and during later times of trouble. After Louis Hill took over the reigns of power, he variously directed the Immigration Department to look into a Russian party's interest in land for colonization, a French group's plan for settlement, and a Hungarian's scheme to inform his countrymen of conditions in America. He also suggested that E.C. Leedy do more to increase the recruitment of Swiss immigrants. Twenty thousand arrived annually, and Louis Hill wanted to "get after this crowd," to furnish them with literature and other information about lands served by the GN.¹⁷

The GN often coordinated its colonization work with that of religious groups. Railroads could issue free passes to clergy, who often acted as front men for various emigrant aid companies. The GN exploited the situation, working with such organizations as the **Catholic Colonization Society**, and this approach seemed to pay dividends. Several clergy led parishioners to settle

in Great Northern-served territories, and others promised to call attention to the region during trips to Europe.¹⁸

Louis Hill's suggestion to Agent Leedy that the Great Northern redouble its efforts to recruit northern Europeans should not imply a policy of selectivity. To many at that time, such a practice would have made perfect sense. Between 1900 and 1917, some nativists centered their attention on southern and eastern Europeans, whose numbers were rapidly increasing, both literally and relative to the numbers of immigrants from England, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries. These "new" immigrants quickly gained the designation "**undesirable**," but those who formulated and implemented the GN's immigration policy did not adhere to such xenophobia (fear of strangers). Although Louis Hill did postulate that northern Europeans could best adapt to the climate of the northern Great Plains, additional factors influenced his directive to Leedy. One possible stimulus was that railroads in the southern United States were already advertising for Italians.¹⁹

Figure 7. Great Northern Railway depot in Devils Lake. Many immigrants to North Dakota during the "land boom" and "second boom" came through depots like this one in Devils Lake. (SHSND A0934)



Settling North Dakota: The Pioneer Experience

"No wonder they give this land away to the settlers for surely no one would ever buy it." Anna Skorick, Russia to McLean County in 1903.

There was "freedom of thought and plenty of room for action." Peter and Monika Schnell, Russia to Adams County, 1892.

"When August came we saw the splendid fields of wheat, No. 1 Hard." Elizabeth Maguire, Ireland to Grand Forks County, 1880.

Most ND pioneers came by rail—at least to the end of the line. Emigrant cars allowed them to bring "clothes, a baby crib, seed, pillows, whiskey . . . , dried bread and dishes," farm implements, and livestock. How they felt about their new home varied with conditions and expectations. Johanna Kildahl felt "real joy that . . . I looked upon a small frame house and a tent, as home. . . ." Lily Kritsky, coming all the way from Russia, "sat on the [train] platform and cried, we wanted to go back but didn't have enough money."

Many men found temporary work on the railroad line working for fifteen cents an hour (about \$7.20 per week). Freighting was also a good job. If the tracks ended before the pioneers came to available land, they might have hired a freighter to carry their belongings to their claim. "The price of hauling a load of lumber from Barlett to Grand Harbor, a distance of twenty-seven miles, was \$14."

For all pioneers, the time from arrival until the harvest of the first crop was long and worrisome. Crops might be damaged by hail, frost, grasshoppers, or prairie fire. But in good years, they harvested "beautiful, golden Scotch Fife, No. 1 Hard [spring wheat]." Though some left, and some longed to return "home," many of those who stayed found that "after a few years, everything was good, we made a lot of money, and spent it."

Sources: WPA Pioneer Biographies, WPA Ethnic Group Interviews, Kildahl Papers, Special Collections Department, University of North Dakota, Emma Severson, "The History of Crary," ND Collections, 1924: 289.

This did not deter GN President Carl R. Gray, who served 1912–1914, from recruiting Italian settlers, and his directives illustrate the GN's positive attitude toward at least that group of new immigrants. In response to the southern railroads' well-organized advertising campaigns, Gray wanted information about work, land, and citizenship sent to Merrigio Serrati of the Italian Royal Immigration Service. Due to abuse of immigrant workers who had been recruited by the Canadian Pacific Railroad, the Service was hesitant to publish materials provided by individual companies. Still, after Leedy met with Umberto Colleti, a secret agent of the Italian government in charge of all his country's immigration matters in the U.S., the Royal Immigration Service agreed to help promote settlement along the GN's lines. Gray viewed this as a "very promising lead."²⁰

The Great Northern also displayed a favorable disposition towards often denigrated Slavic

immigrants. "In-as-much as the people from the Balkans largely follow agriculture," wrote President Gray, "we conceived that they would be of greatest possible benefit to us, because this is essentially agricultural country...." The railroad welcomed any immigrant who aspired to own land, and it could provide work until the immigrant obtained a homestead. Because the Great Northern hired large numbers of men, on schedules amenable to those who also farmed, Gray thought that it could "insure employment to practically an indefinite number."²¹

In North Dakota, these inducements did not necessarily attract large numbers of southern or eastern Europeans. The largest numbers of immigrants who settled during the first boom, 1880–1890, came from Scandinavia, Germany, Canada, and the British Isles. Russians numbered more than four thousand, but many of these were ethnic Germans.

Although Poles, Bohemians, Armenians, Greeks, and Bulgarians arrived during the second boom, Germans, Scandinavians, and British immigrants still predominated. The GN achieved its greatest success in attracting Norwegians, German-Russians, and the previously mentioned Dunkers to the state. If President Gray's Italian connection paid any dividends in the form of colonists, they did not settle in North Dakota.²²

Overall, GN officials expected to see large movements of colonists during the 1910s. E.C. Leedy's work went well, and he hired William Blonder to help with immigrant recruitment. In conjunction with various steamship companies, Blonder planned to visit the British Isles, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Although he worried about compliance with U.S. immigration law, Kenney lauded Blonder's junket and authorized funds for advertising during the trip. Both he and President Gray expected that it would result in a "large movement of attractive emigrants." In combination with the work done by Leedy and others, Kenney and Gray anticipated that Blonder would have particularly good results in drawing immigrants from northern Italy and Switzerland.²³

Foreign language publications, such as *Deutsche Kolonien in Nordwestlichen Staaten Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, appealed to prospective settlers in their native tongues. They often included testimonials to the Northwest's agricultural opportunities. Several of these witnesses lauded the benefits

to be found in North Dakota. The GN also purchased newspaper advertisements, which included pictures of homeseekers arriving at its terminals, and ran exhibition cars, which carried immigration agents and crop samples.²⁴

North Dakota figured prominently in GN colonization plans during the 1910s, despite the fact that its boom years had begun to subside. To assorted groups, the Great Northern offered assistance in such matters as land prices, soil conditions, and crop choices. It promised to aid the Catholic Colonization Society in its efforts to induce German-Russian settlement in the Towner and Karlsruhe region of McHenry County, and Louis Hill showed an interest in the Netherlands Emigration Society's plans to colonize the same area. He also discussed working on immigration with Reverend Leon Favreau of St. John. The railroad also kept in contact with previously colonized areas. Vice President Kenney promised to provide a speaker for the Lake Region Association meeting at Cando, the Dunker settlement in north-central North Dakota whose residents had first come to that area at the urging of Max Bass.²⁵

The railroad enjoyed good working relations with a diverse lot of North Dakota governors. After leaving office, Elmore Y. Sarles, a former governor and part of "Boss" Alexander McKenzie's political machine, worked with Louis Hill on land settlement. Appropriately, the GN branch line that bore his name transported large numbers of "immigrant movables." Hill also enjoyed good working relations with Sarles's successor, "**Honest**" **John Burke**, a Roman Catholic son of Irish immigrants. During the winter of 1912–1913, for example, Burke prepared a letter for the railroad's publicity bulletin, and the Great Northern sponsored the Governor's Special, a traveling exhibit designed to display North Dakota's attributes. Governor Louis B. Hanna, a Republican who succeeded the Democratic Burke, also pledged to support the GN's immigrant colonization in North Dakota.²⁶

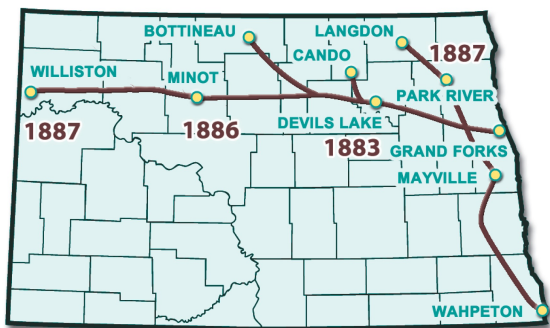


Figure 8. The Great Northern Railway routes, 1883–1887. (Graphic by Cassie Theurer)

The pursuit of "**desirable settlers**" led the Great Northern to tap a variety of sources. In addition



Figure 9. Great Northern Railway depot at Fargo, North Dakota. (SHSND 0512-01)

to the political contacts and religious organizations noted previously, the GN took special interest in the activities of financial institutions and booster organizations. Kenney believed “that the parties most interested in immigration in North Dakota are, in many cases, the heads of the local banks ...,” with whom he urged cooperation. He also wanted the railroad to work with county and state officials, newspapers, and commercial clubs. For its part, the railroad could supply information about what immigrants it brought to the state, with their destinations broken down by county, which could be used for publicity purposes. “I think that we can get a great deal of good by this method,” wrote Kenney to Louis Hill, “and it will be followed up in an energetic manner.”²⁷

There were limits to how much the Great Northern could or would do with regard to colonization. In early 1914, the Fargo Commercial Club contacted James J. Hill, seeking to obtain the GN’s assistance in a plan to get state appropriations to hire an Immigration Commission. The Club wanted Hill’s company to provide enough funds to pay for five thousand miles of rail passage, which representatives would use to promote the Commission

idea. In view of the need for settlers on contiguous territory, Agent Leedy recommended that the GN grant the request. Louis Hill, however, explained that the railroad could not legally issue free passes for that purpose; nor would it provide a subscription which might give the appearance of malfeasance.²⁸

J.W. Ryckman, who wanted to colonize Belgian, Dutch, and Danish farmers, believed that much more had to be done in promoting the American Northwest. “North Dakota,” he told Louis Hill, “has particularly been given a bad name here [in Europe] which must be remedied before we can hope for any large movement of good farmers from northern Europe to ... [North Dakota].” Ryckman hoped that Hill could take steps, such as placing an agent in the Netherlands, to remedy this unfortunate situation.²⁹

Did James J. Hill and his subordinates deliberately mislead immigrants? Did they paint an overly rosy picture of what awaited settlers in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century North Dakota? Its short growing season and lack of moisture, especially in the western part of the

state, did seem to invite disaster, but Hill never wavered in his dream of seeing the northern Great Plains with a veritable army of yeoman farmers. “The soil is the place for them,” he said of newly arrived foreigners. They needed a rural environment, which promoted steadfastness, industry, and worth among its toilers, and America needed more farmers.³⁰

Some settlers, originally smitten with GN’s sales pitch, no doubt came to regret their decision, but there is no evidence that Hill or any of his employees engaged in any type of deceit or duplicity. Quite the contrary, the Great Northern recognized the difficulties faced by Great Plains homesteaders and tried to encourage the use of agricultural techniques which were most suitable to the region’s climate. E.C. Leedy, in particular, assisted farmers by sending out special demonstration trains, promoting agricultural diversification, and stressing the need for livestock development. For example, the GN gave farmers in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Montana purebred bulls.³¹ Although these endeavors certainly did not make a success out of every immigrant farmer, they are indications of the sincerity of the Great Northern’s colonization efforts.

World War I brought an end to forty years of mass migration from Europe to the United States, but it did not necessarily end the Great Northern’s interest in bringing newcomers to North Dakota. Louis Hill maintained his interest in coloniza-

tion and Leedy looked for prospective settlers in the more established Midwest states. In monthly advertisements in *The Country Gentleman*, he described North Dakota as a land of low prices and an “opportunity state for homeseekers.” Between 1927 and 1931, the railroad also maintained an agent in Europe, but as then GN President William P. Kenney (1932–1939) noted in 1934, the era of Great Northern colonization in North Dakota and elsewhere, had come to an end.³²

When the Great Northern ceased its colonization work in the late 1930s, it could only estimate how many men and women the railroad had influenced to settle on the northern Great Plains. They certainly numbered in the tens of thousands. Many of these settlers had traveled from distant shores, from Norway, Denmark, Germany, and Russia. Together, they and their progeny bear witness to the efforts of James J. Hill and the Great Northern Railway to people their empire in the Great Northwest.³³

About the Author

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 7. P.B. Groat to Hill, January 10, 1896, D.J. Mum to Hill, December 2, 1895, PS, Folder 2950-2; [Hill] to R. M. Rassmussen, September 28, 1892, PS, Folder 656; Hill to W.W. Finley, August 7, 1893, PS, Folder 2098; [Hill] to L.J. Moss, March 20, 1893, PS, Folder 2116; Bloom to Hill, March 20, 1893, PS, Folder 1718; Hidy, *Great Northern*, pp. 99–100.
 8. W.C. Plummer to Hill, April 19, 1896 and C.A. Lounsberry to Hill, April 7, 1900, Hill Papers; F.I. Whitney, Ledger, 1895, Samuel Hill to James J. Hill, June 6 [1895], D. R. McGinnis to Hill, December 9, 1895, North Dakota Immigration Association, Flyer, [ca. 1895], PS, Folder 2862; J.B. Power to F.I. Whitney, December 3, 1895, Hill to Schute, January 7, 1896, James J. Hill to James D. Brown, March 14, 1896, Charles C. Connolly to Hill, May 15, 1896, Hill to Connolly, May 19, 1896, PS, Folders 2950-1 and 2.
 9. H.L. Schute to F.E. Ward, November 13, 1895, PS, Folder 2862; P.I. Whitney to Schute, January 7, 1896, PS, Folder 2950-2; Roy Thompson, "The First Dunker Community of North Dakota" *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota* 4 (1913): 81–300; Sherman, *Mosaic*, pp. 62–63.
 10. P.I. Whitney to Schute, January 7, 1896, Schute to Rill, January 8, 1896, Hill to Schute, January 10, 1896, W.H. Newman to Hill, November 25, 1846, Hill to Newman, December 16, 1896, Newman to Hill, December 19, 1896, and Hill to Newman, December 22, 1896, PS, 2950-1 and 2.
 11. F.I. Whitney to Blabon, January 28, 1904, Blabon to Whitney, March 2, 1904, [Blabon] to J.W. Cooper, March 4, 1904, Blabon to Louis Hill, October 10, 1904, PS, Folder 4022-6.
 12. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925*, 2d ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1978), pp. 189–193; Barbara Miller Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition*, Reprinted. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), pp. 180–188; Charles W. Eliot, National Liberal Immigration League Memorandum, January 10, 1911, and E.C. Leedy to Louis Hill, PS, Folder 4022-3.
 13. Leedy to Louis Hill, February 17, 1911; Louis Hill to A.O. Werhart, March 7, 1911, PS, File 4022-3; Hidy, *Great Northern*, p. 100. There is a paucity of background information about Leedy, but Hidy, et al., do cover his later activities with the Great Northern; see especially, pp. 187–188.
 14. Renney to Gray, January 25, 1913, PS, File 4022-1.
 15. John Lombardi, *Labor's Voice in the Cabinet* (New York: Columbia University Studies in the Social Sciences, 1942; New York: AMS Press, 1968), pp. 142–145; Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). pp. 2–3.
 16. Lombardi, *Labor's*, pp. 142–145, and Lissak, *Pluralism*, pp. 2–3.
 17. Louis Hill to Leedy, April 13, 1912, Louis Hill to C.L. Twohy, April 16, 1912, Parkhouse [Assistant to Hill] to Hoke Smith, August 19, 1912, PS, File 4022-2, Louis Hill to W.W. Boughton, December 17, 1910, File 4022-4. Louis Hill to Leedy, October 23, 1911, File 4022-3; Hidy, et al., *Great Northern*, pp. 100–101. Sherman, *Prairie Mosaic*, discusses numerous examples of group settlement in North Dakota.
 18. Louis Hill to Rev. F. X. Van Nistelroy, Catholic Colonization Society, June 13, 1911, Hill to Leedy, June 24, 1911, PS, File 4022-3, Parkhouse to Rev. C. W. B. Ellis, March 9, 1910, 4022-5, William P. Kenney to Carl R. Gray, February 27, 1913, File 4022-1.
 19. Hill to A.O. Eberhart, March 7, 1911, PS, Folder 4022-4; address delivered by Max Bass, February 8, 1908, Folder 4022-6; Higham, *Strangers*, p. 159. The author personally disagrees with Higham's contention that the distinction between so-called old and new immigration became the central issue of early twentieth-century nativism; see Zeidel, "Ellis Island and the American Immigration Experience," *USA Today: The Magazine of the American Scene* (September 1992): 24–33.
 20. Louis Hill to Eberhart, March 7, 1911, C. R. Gray to Kenney, December 29, 1912, Leedy to Kenney, January 21, 1913, Kenney to Gray, January 25, 1913, Gray to Kenney, January 29, 1913, PS, File 4022-1.
 21. Gray to Professor Michael L. Pupin, January 29, 1913, PS, Folder 4022-1.
 22. Robinson, *North Dakota*, pp. 146, 282–283; Sherman, *Prairie Mosaic*, pp. 36, 68, 70.
 23. Kenney to Gray, January 25, 1913, and Gray to Kenney, January 29, 1913, Kenney to Gray, September 29, 1913, Gray to Kenney, September 30, 1913, Kenney to Gray, October 29, 1913, PS, File 4022-1.
 24. *Deutsche Kolonien in Nordwestlichen Staaten Vereinigten Staaten von Minnesota, Nord-Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon*, Great Northern Railroad Company, ca. 1913, and *Belgische-Hollandsche Kolonie in Montana onder de Bescherming van Mgr. Carroll, Bisschop van Helena en Mgr. Victor de Bradandere*, Great Northern Railroad Company, ca. 1913, GN Archives, Agricultural Department-Subject Files [hereafter AgS], Folder 3; Fray to C.C. Chapman, March 18, 1913, PS, Folder 4022-1; [James J. Hill] to Jose Sirvent, Legacion Argentina, July 29, 1910, Folder 4022-4; H.A. Noble to Louis Hill, March 19, 1910, Folder 4022-5; Hidy, et al., *Great Northern*, p. 101.
 25. Julius E. Devos, President, Catholic Colonization Society [CCS], to Thomas Shaw, GN Agricultural Agent, January 23, 1915, Shaw to CCS, February 2, 1915, Hill to Leedy, September 15, 1915, Parkhouse to Kenney, March 26, 1912, Kenney to Parkhouse, March 27, 1912, PS, File 4789; Sherman, *Mosaic*, pp. 62, 68, 72.
 26. Sarles to Louis Hill, June 19, 1911, PS, Box 73, Pile 4022-3; E.C. Leedy to Louis Hill, March 8, 1911, PS, Box 73, File 4022-6; Burke to Louis Hill, January 24, 1912, Louis Hill to Burke, February 3, 1912. Frank H. Hyland to Louis Hill, January 21, 1915, PS, File 4789; Robinson, *North Dakota*, pp. 265–268; Tweton and Jelliff, *North Dakota*, pp. 131–134.
 27. Louis Hill to Graves, October 16, 1915, Kenney to Louis Hill, April 30, 1915, Kenney to Hill, May 6, 1915, PS, File 4789.
 28. Leedy to Parkhouse, April 20, 1914, and J.P. Hardy to Louis Hill, April 23, 1914, PS, File 4789.
 29. J.W. Ryckman to Louis Hill, May 5, 1915, and Hill to Leedy, May 21, 1915, PS, File 4022-1.
 30. James J. Hill, "Excerpts from an Address on Irrigation," August 21, 1905, AgS, Folder 1223.
 31. Hidy, et al., *Great Northern*, pp. 187–190; Bernard A. Weisberger, *Many People, One Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 173.
 32. Hidy, et al., *Great Northern*, pp. 187–188; Hill to John H. Worst, North Dakota Commissioner of Immigration, January 11, 1922, PS, Folder 4789; *The Country Gentleman* 135 (April 10, 1920): 1–2, 28, 30 and (April 24): 10–11, 34, in AgS, Folder 3.
 33. Hidy, et al., *Great Northern*, pp. 99–103.

