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CORPORATE POINT MEN AND THE CREATION OF THE MONTANA CENTRAL RAILROAD, 1882-87

WILLIAM L. LANG

On 21 November 1887, a crowd jammed Ming's Opera House in Helena, Montana, to celebrate the completion of the Montana Central Railway, a branch line of the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway. Sharing the Opera House stage that day were railroad executives and managers from the East, Montana politicians, and local businessmen. Their reason for celebration was three-fold. First, because Montanans had struggled for more than a decade to get rail connections, sometimes nearly making unwise and unnecessary deals with railroad corporations, getting a railroad to build through Montana was cause for celebration.

Second, the Montana Central brought with it the promise of breaking an oppressive rail agreement that had weighed heavily on Montana. The Union Pacific, which had built to Butte in 1881, and the Northern Pacific, which had completed its transcontinental road through Helena in 1883, had concocted a rate pool agreement that set artificially high freight rates. Third, the completion of the Montana Central ended a bitter economic and political war that had divided businessmen and split up political alliances within the city.

The crowd at Ming's had these developments in their minds as they clapped and cheered at the speechmakers. But they turned their primary focus on James Jerome Hill, the forty-nine-year-old president of the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway, the man who had brought the Montana Central to Helena. Just emerging as a major player in railroad development in the Northwest, Hill brought with him a reputation as a man of capital, power, and corporate success. It was a reputation that often elicited fear among westerners because he was one of those distant financial and political power brokers who seemingly controlled Montana's fate. But he also had a reputation as a


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FIG. 1. In 1886, the Montana Central had been completed from the main line of the Manitoba at Great Falls to Helena. The line to Rimini and the Red Mountain mines was built by the Northern Pacific. Map by George Cram, 1886, courtesy of Montana Historical Society.

dynamic and manipulative entrepreneur who had brought essential rail connections to the isolated northern territories. The Montana Central was Hill’s first penetration of the Montana market, but the railway would gain even more significance when Hill completed the rest of the Manitoba’s mainline across the state—the new transcontinental Great Northern Railway that would be completed in 1893 and connect St. Paul with Puget Sound.²

The Great Northern Railway was both dream and goal in his mind as Hill stood before the appreciative crowd, but still he had reason to boast in 1887. His Manitoba railway had built 643 miles across Dakota and Montana, setting a record for track-laying in a single season and bringing relief to Montana shippers who had suffered under the UP-NP rate pool agreement.³ The crowd cheered when Hill listed the achievements, but their loudest ovations came when he tipped his hat to his Montana associates on the opera house stage, his point men in building the Montana Central.⁴ They were men of influence in Montana, men who understood business and had political savvy. Principal among them were Territorial Delegate Martin Maginnis, Great Falls founder Paris Gibson, and freighting entrepreneur Charles A. Broadwater.
THE POINT MEN

Not unlike a general with his cavalry officers, Hill used his point men for intelligence reports, suggestions on tactics, and reactions to overall strategies. Hill provided the power of corporate investment and decision making, while the point men prepared the ground in Montana between 1884 and 1888, the critical years of Manitoba's extension into the Territory. Hill was a veteran of successful corporate teamwork and he understood its importance; he had benefited enormously from his early associations with the aggressive entrepreneurs, Norman Kittson, Donald Smith, George Stephen, and John S. Kennedy, who together had created the Manitoba road during the late 1870s. Hill listened to his financial partners—Stephen, Smith, Kennedy, Edward Nichols, Samuel Thorne, Greenleaf Clark, and others—who invested in his schemes and served as a quasi board of directors. They questioned his plans in Montana, advised him on how to organize complementary corporations, and devised critically important strategies for selling bond issues. He especially relied on Kennedy, who carefully monitored developments in St. Paul and Helena from his office in New York. The Hill-Kennedy combination, as Albro Martin has put it, was "the strongest railroad team in the Northwest." It was the western end of Hill's transcontinental team, however, that had the most profound effect on Manitoba's fortunes. In ways that Montanans and Hill could not have anticipated, the point men took on the brunt of the tough work of railroad building on the frontier. That work pushed these point men to their financial and political limits, forcing them to
commit their personal fortunes and their local political capital to this one enterprise. It was a great risk, much greater than the risk embraced by Hill and his coinvestors in the Manitoba’s foray into Montana. If they failed, they knew that their economic and political losses could be irreversible, that they might never recover. In their visions of success, they could see an unlimited future of economic development and even local political hegemony. What they did not appreciate in the heat of their pursuit was that success for the Manitoba would bring its own irreversible changes that would tip Montana’s economic and political balance of power and help cant Montana toward a new industrial future. The history of their exploits in building the Montana Central shines a light on how railroad politics affected the western territories.

Paris Gibson. In Montana, the first man to attach himself to Hill was Paris Gibson. Born in Maine in 1830 and educated at Bowdoin College, Gibson had moved west to St. Anthony Falls on the Mississippi in Minnesota and rose quickly among the area’s nascent industrialists. After his investments in flour milling and a woolen mill turned downward during the depression of the mid-1870s, Gibson sought a new field in 1879 in northern Montana, where he entered the sheep business at Fort Benton. Within two years, Gibson focused his entrepreneurial eye on the Great Falls of the Missouri, where he saw vast industrial potential. First alerting Hill in 1881 to the possibilities in Montana, Gibson wrote encouraging and even pleading letters to the Manitoba president over the following three years to build his road west to the Great Falls, which Gibson thought was destined to become a “New Minneapolis.”

Unmatched as a promoter in Montana, Gibson incessantly boosted his town, telling Hill that its water power, its proximity to substantial coal fields, and its location on a potentially moderate-grade railroad route made Great Falls an ideal industrial townsit. His steady imporings finally convinced Hill to invest in a townsit company in 1882. The Hill-Gibson partnership served both men well and endured for more than two decades, although their interests differed—Gibson was for Great Falls first, while Hill did little that did not benefit the Manitoba. What Gibson did, though, was to pester Hill and suggest Montana’s larger opportunities to him.

Martin Maginnis (Fig. 3). For the Manitoba, however, the most strategic point man in Hill’s circle was Martin Maginnis. Born in New York and raised in Duluth, Maginnis had migrated to Montana after serving valiantly in the Civil War and editing a newspaper in Red Wing, Minnesota. He rose quickly in Democratic politics in Montana and won election as the territory’s congressional delegate from 1872 to 1885, making him arguably the most important Democratic politician in Montana. His popularity and connections with political and business leaders made him invaluable to Hill in Montana, but a second and more important benefit came when Maginnis agreed in 1885 to lobby Congress on Hill’s behalf for a right-of-
way bill that would open Dakota and Montana Indian reservations to transit by the Manitoba road.  

Maginnis had been one of several Democratic politicians in Montana, including William A. Clark, Marcus Daly, Samuel T. Hauser (Fig. 4), and Charles Broadwater, who had allied themselves with key Republicans to promote a general economic development of the Territory. Montana’s political leadership during the territorial period split on many issues while maintaining a “no-party” structure and governing by coalitions. Throughout politicians agreed that the first interest was economic and general development of the territory. In addition, Maginnis and Hauser had developed strong ties with other western Democrats who were interested in economic development, notably Senator George Vest of Missouri. For Democrat and entrepreneur Hill, these political connections were essential if he expected to launch new industries in a far-flung territory. In that effort, one man spanned both the industrial and the political and became Hill’s primary point man in the territory—Charles A. Broadwater.

Charles A. Broadwater (Fig. 5). Broadwater came to Montana in 1862, a twenty-one year old with some experience in mercantile businesses in St. Louis and an eagerness to pursue the main chance. Buying and selling cattle and horses led naturally to freighting and within a few years he operated the Diamond R freight outfit, which secured lucrative government contracts during the 1870s. Through his connections with businessmen like A. H. Wilder of St. Paul and with political support from Territorial Delegate Maginnis, Broadwater landed a series of contracts to build and supply military posts in Montana, bringing him substantial wealth. By the early 1880s, Broadwater had interests in a dozen or more businesses and had organized the Montana National Bank in Helena, again with Wilder’s help. It was probably through Wilder that Broadwater first met Hill, perhaps as early as 1876.

By 1883 Broadwater had drifted away from an earlier alliance with Sam Hauser and eagerly joined Gibson’s chorus to convince Hill to extend the Manitoba westward to Montana and thereby break up the NP-UP transportation agreement. His split with Hauser began in mid-1882, shortly after he opened his national bank in Helena. The Broadwater-Wilder combination, which also included Territorial Governor Benjamin F. Potts and Russell B. Harrison—son of Senator and later president Benjamin Harrison—threatened Hauser. He scrambled to retain his own bank’s profitable account with the Northern Pacific by cementing his relationship with NP vice president T. F. Oakes, which tied him even more to the NP and would soon put him at further odds with Broadwater.

These were momentous developments in Montana. Economic competition had dissolved the pragmatic alliance between Republicans Potts and Harrison, and Democrats Hauser, Broadwater, and Maginnis but its effects spilled over into politics. By widening an already developing division among Montana Democrats, these antagonisms between the Broadwater and Hauser factions disrupted the connections
Montana's democracy had with national party leaders. In Montana, echoes of the split would reverberate for more than two decades and materially affect the fortunes of Hauser, Maginnis, W. A. Clark, and Marcus Daly. For Hill, these developments represented an opening in Montana, as Broadwater and Maginnis inclined away from Hauser and the Northern Pacific and toward him and the Manitoba.

Aggressive, intelligent, and known for keeping his own counsel—one newspaper called him “not much of a cackler”—Broadwater would prove to be Hill’s most effective agent in Montana. In many ways it was a natural combination. Both men were enamored of the bold public statement while harboring few if any political aspirations; both worked efficiently and stealthily through corporate agreements, and both understood that loyalty in finance and politics extended only as long as mutual interests were served. It is likely that Hill first learned of Broadwater’s interest in developing northern Montana through Wilder and Maginnis, when Broadwater urged the opening of Indian reservation land to settlement in 1881. As chief contractor and post sutler at northern Montana’s Fort Assinniboine, Broadwater realized that the region north of the Missouri River was the best area in the territory for new railroad development. It would open up a vast region and coincidentally aid his business interests.

HILL COMES TO MONTANA

At first Gibson was cautious about the ambitious and somewhat secretive Broadwater, who had risen quickly in Montana and had developed connections with eastern financiers and politicians. By June 1884, however, Gibson joined with Broadwater in hosting Hill and a company of engineers on a fast-paced tour of resource properties in Montana. In four days, Broadwater whisked Hill and his men to mining properties near Helena, to Butte, and to Great Falls, Fort Benton, and the recently discovered coal properties at Sand Coulee in the Belt Mountains near Great Falls. Montana’s press buzzed with reports, as Hill’s party bounced over rough stage roads from location to location. Would Hill extend the Manitoba? Would he build to Fort Benton—to Helena—to Butte? The Butte Miner claimed to have intercepted a message from Gibson that confirmed Hill’s promise to build the Manitoba to Great Falls; the Deer Lodge New Northwest speculated about Hill’s involvement in a newly organized Sand Coulee Coal Company; and Fort Benton’s River Press quoted Hill on the spot: “You can say,” Hill told the paper, “that I think favorably of the proposed road from Helena to Fort Benton.”

Prominent in Hill’s thinking about Montana, aside from his two-year-old interest in the Great Falls townsite speculation, were the mining properties at Red Mountain near Helena and the coal deposits at Sand Coulee. The Red Mountain mines were in the rich Boulder Batholith that included Hauser’s profitable silver
mines south of Helena and Tommy Cruse's spectacular Drumulummon goldmine north of Helena. Early reports from Broadwater's mining engineers suggested that the Red Mountain properties might be the richest of the lot. After looking over the Sand Coulee coal field, Hill was sufficiently impressed with the results of Broadwater's early tests to contract with J. S. Newberry of the Columbia School of Mines to inspect Sand Coulee and Red Mountain deposits. Newberry's report confirmed Broadwater's boasts.19

At the heart of Hill's plans for Montana, however, was the construction of an industrial railroad, one that would link Great Falls and adjacent coal fields with Butte. The Montana Central would ship coal to Butte, Butte copper matte to a future Great Falls smelter, and Red Mountain precious metals to the Manitoba mainline at Great Falls for shipment. Hill chose Broadwater to quarterback the development of his investments in Montana and to head the Montana Central.

CONFLICT WITH THE NORTHERN PACIFIC

A constant element in Broadwater's work on Hill's behalf in Montana was the enmity of the Northern Pacific. That animosity had simmered for years and had developed from both railroads' belief that the other had invaded their territory: the NP claimed Montana, while the Manitoba claimed the Red River valley.20 Using telegrams sent in code, Broadwater kept Hill apprised of the latest feints and tactical actions by NP managers in Montana. Hill, in turn, relayed the information to Kennedy and other financiers before devising overall strategies. Between 1885, when Hill's group began planning for significant investment in Montana, and the completion of the Montana Central to Butte in 1888, the NP and Manitoba forces contested each other on several fronts.21

The conflict between the NP and the Manitoba became politically explosive in mid-1885, when Hauser captured the territorial governor's spot in a bitter fight with Maginnis. Broadwater and Hill supported Maginnis, while Territorial Delegate Joseph K. Toole and Missouri's Senator George Vest supported Hauser. The split was now complete and tinged with political bitterness. Broadwater, for example, had gone so far as to charge that Hauser had contributed to the Republicans during the 1884 presidential campaign.22

CONTROL OF THE RED MOUNTAIN MINES

In the competition that mattered most—the economic one—a significant prize was control of the Red Mountain mines. That contest can serve here as a case study of the intricate and effective relationship Hill had with his point man in Helena. Located fifteen miles west of Helena up Ten Mile Creek, the mines had first been coveted by investors associated with the NP when Hauser, Maginnis, and Broadwater had hoped the NP would build a branch line to the area.23 Hauser had urged the NP to act quickly and company vice president Oakes had responded in early 1884, writing Hauser that "there will be no difficulty in building Ten Mile branch." But nothing materialized. By midyear Broadwater and other Hill associates made their move, investing in the Ten Mile district and planning a rail line to serve the mines. Broadwater enlisted the help of Helena mining engineer John Longmaid and Butte mining expert Thomas Couch. Throughout 1884 and 1885, Longmaid and Couch tunneled into Red Mountain claims and sent their reports to Broadwater. First secretly buying up claims and then disguising their connection with Hill's interests, Broadwater maneuvered in Helena financial circles to tie up the best claims.24

Broadwater played a secretive game, purchasing blocks of Red Mountain claims and passing on the results of mineral tests to Hill, who kept abreast of developments. "Have they cut into the Lexington [mine] on lower level," Hill queried Broadwater in October 1885, "and if so what was the thickness?" Encouraged by what he learned from Broadwater, Hill had already factored these mining properties into his planned investment in Montana by mid-December. Meanwhile, St. Paul and Montana pa-
pers speculated about ownership of the mines, the amount invested, and when a railroad would be built to the mines. 25

In the Red Mountain business, Broadwater had an advantage that must have frustrated Hauser's group. In 1873, he had married Julia Chumasero, daughter of a prominent Republican lawyer and political ally of Wilbur F. Sanders and other NP supporters. Not only had Broadwater married into what became the other camp a decade later, but he also had an inside line on the purchase of Chumasero's Red Mountain properties, reportedly the best claims in the district. So by early 1886, Broadwater had delivered to Hill a handsome group of mining properties and an opportunity to build a paying rail line smack in the heart of NP territory. 26

NP managers privately fumed and publicly questioned what Hill intended in Montana. Prohibited by their charter from building branch lines, the NP had to create separate companies to build branches. Writing as governor of Montana Territory in mid-January 1886, Hauser told NP executives that although he would encourage the building of any road that brought investment to Montana, he urged them to act quickly. But the NP dallied too long. Hill hired away one of the NP's finest engineers, Joseph T. Dodge, and sent him to Helena to work under Broadwater's keen direction. 27

As Dodge went out to survey the line and pick the best route, trouble developed in Helena. On 16 January 1886 Broadwater disclosed to Hill, "I have always had some fears that the NP or its agents might get in ahead of us and give us some serious trouble." Broadwater told Hill that Maginnis had pumped T. C. Power, a wealthy Republican businessman with ties to the NP, about the NP's plan to build their own line up Ten Mile Creek and he got bad news. Broadwater immediately had his attorneys, Chumasero and Chadwick, look over the legalities of branch line building in Montana, telling Hill: "If they [NP] organize ahead of us they would have decidedly the best of us, in fact they would have rights." Act now, he warned Hill: "We have paid out so much money now that I do not deem it wise to jeopardize it by any delay." 28

While this drama over the Red Mountain line was beginning, Broadwater and Hill tipped their larger plans by chartering the Montana Central Railway, the road that would connect Butte with Great Falls and the Manitoba mainline. The wording of the charter described their claim to a right-of-way "from a point one mile east of junction of the NP . . . to some point near the northeasterly corner of [Lewis and Clark] county." Although the general public might have missed the point, the NP knew that Broadwater's facile description of the "northeasterly corner" meant Great Falls. The charter also included a right-of-way for a branch line to Red Mountain. A few weeks later Broadwater and his associates also incorporated the Red Mountain Consolidated Mining Company to exploit the thirty-eight lodes of the Chumasero claims. It was a fast start for Hill's foray into Montana. 29

In many respects, Hill's investments in Montana were only as safe as Broadwater's intelligence and energy. As executive head of both the mining and railway companies, Broadwater directed engineer Dodge to survey the Ten Mile line and the Montana Central line north from Helena to Great Falls while he contended with the NP's challenge to their new enterprises and oversaw mining operations. In at least one instance he had to put the whip to Dodge: "I find he is very much inclined to have his own way about things," Broadwater informed Hill. "He delayed our maps at least 3 days and would not have had them yet if I had not given him positive orders to put 2 more engineers on them." Hill worried that without a map filed with territorial officials the incorporation of the railroad would be in jeopardy. As it turned out, such was not the case. It was the NP, however, that worried Broadwater most. As Hill put it to Broadwater, "I do not think our NP friends entirely enjoy your enterprise." 30

CONTROLLING ROUTES AND FINANCES

In mid-February 1886, Hauser went to New York to drum up support for NP branch lines
from Helena to Butte and Helena to the Red Mountain mines. Rumors of his success in organizing a syndicate floated through St. Paul and Helena. One of Hill's financial partners in New York, Samuel Thorne, warned him to "move very quickly" in Montana. But R. B. Harrison, a Hill and Broadwater confidant, was not so sure. Telegraphing Broadwater on 20 February, Harrison thought that the rumors were a "possible bluff to compromise territory with you—watch and move quickly." Meanwhile Broadwater went to St. Paul to confer with Hill. From Helena, Maginnis confirmed on 23 February that rumors were flying there. Writing to Broadwater in St. Paul, Maginnis repeated public statements that Wilbur Sanders had made on behalf of the NP, testing the waters with promises of branch lines. But Maginnis downplayed the incident, writing that "nearly everyone here construe [it] as a big bluff." Sanders "got no sympathy," Maginnis reported to Broadwater; "the whole town is with you." While Maginnis reassured St. Paul, the Montana Central managers in Helena moved to keep their advantage. William Harrison—a Manitoba man who had gone to Helena to be secretary of the Montana Central—fired off a telegram on 24 February to Broadwater and Hill in St. Paul: "have deeds on record or contractors in possession all critical points to and including mouth canyon Red Mt. Branch. Dodge not returned. Enemy invisible." Explaining further, Harrison wrote that "Hauser's championship of the N.P. is strongly deprecated [in Helena]. . . . I don't think they can follow Ten Mile Creek unless they . . . use our roadbed through the passes."31

Broadwater and his men had moved quickly, but had they been quick enough? Once he had returned to Helena and surveyed the situation Broadwater became convinced that the NP ploy was all bluff. Nonetheless he kept agitating against Hauser and the NP and threatened to call the matter before the Helena Board of Trade, a commercial club, to get "leading merchants to withdraw their patronage from N.P. and ship by U.P. until we get to Benton when they will use water route and our rails." Broadwater also planted embarrassing stories in Helena newspapers, further stirring the issue. As Broadwater had hoped, Hauser began to hear from his Montana allies. Hauser's banking partner, A. J. Davis of Butte, warned Hauser that the conflict with the Montana Central "was raising havoc with the bank" and if Hauser did not desist he would "kill himself politically." Talking with Broadwater about the situation, Davis assured him that Butte would fight for the Montana Central because they wanted access to Great Falls coal. This news helped further allay Broadwater's worries about Hauser and the NP, but he steamed at what he considered Hauser's audacity. Hill himself worried that Broadwater might do something foolish. Broadwater assured him: "I have been extremely cautious to say nothing that would antagonize them," but it was clear that Broadwater had reached his limit. "While I dislike to make war on anyone," he wrote to Hill in a plaintive tone in early March, "the sooner we put him [Hauser] down the less trouble we will have in the future. He never put a dollar into Red Mountain, we did, and now he is trying to ruin our investment." Among his suggestions, Broadwater thought that spreading embarrassing news about Hauser in New York to ruin his credibility with financiers might be a good plan.32

The situation concerned Hill, but removed as he was from the scratching talons and flying feathers in Helena he moved with more deliberation to settle the issue with the NP. At Hill's direction, Manitoba general manager Allen Manvel met with Oakes and NP president Robert Harris in New York in mid-March. In response to questions about Hill's plans in Montana, Manvel disingenuously—and evidently with a straight face—told Oakes and Harris that the Montana Central was a private operation and not connected with the Manitoba in any way and that "if it [Montana Central] was to be sold [Hill] had expressed a willingness to let the Northern Pacific have the first chance at it." Probably dumbfounded and certainly angry, Oakes was not fooled by Manvel's explanation. He reacted caustically, scolding Manvel and telling him to deliver a message.
to Hill: Oakes considered the Montana Central an unwarranted Manitoba invasion into NP territory and the Manitoba could expect the worst from this. Manvel left the meeting certain that the NP planned to build the Red Mountain line and certain that the NP fully expected Hill to extend the Manitoba to Montana.33

BUILDING QUICKLY

The NP "bluff" had suddenly become real. As the conflict in Helena continued to foam during March, Hill urged Broadwater to move quickly. "I am satisfied that the N.P. are greatly alarmed at Montana Central . . . and will do everything in their power to head it off." He instructed Broadwater: "work fully and . . . crowd the grading as fast as you can. I expect to have 3,000 tons of rails, with splices and spikes, ready to ship to you within two or three weeks." A hard push, Hill believed, would put the Montana Central line so close to finishing during the summer of 1886 that building the Red Mountain branch could proceed immediately. Hill's financial partners—especially Thome and Kennedy—agreed.34 Writing to Hill on 30 March, Kennedy sent in his order for 300 blocks of shares in Montana Central stock and assured Hill: "I am quite sure you need apprehend no trouble from parties connected with the Northern Pacific Railroad."35

What Kennedy and Hill knew, as Hill told Broadwater, was that while the NP might try to harass the Montana Central there was not time for them meet the legal requirements allowing them to condemn property for their Red Mountain line. Broadwater had beaten them to the ground. "We are so far ahead of them," Broadwater had written Hill, "they [NP] would not believe it."36 Keeping on the offensive, Broadwater fed a news story to Associated Press in New York through R. B. Harrison that sought to embarrass Hauser in Helena. But the NP had no intention of giving up the fight. Throughout the next several months, their surveying crews contested Broadwater's men along the Ten Mile route.

CLAIMING THE ROUTE

The issue was joined in a particularly narrow canyon where NP engineers forcefully tried to impede the grading. Broadwater appealed to the court for an injunction to halt the NP, arguing that the Montana Central had occupied the ground and had prior right to the grade. The Montana Central got the injunction, which was upheld by the Montana Supreme Court in late 1886, forcing the NP to find another grade and to complete full legal requirements before condemning property along their line.37

The deadlock had been broken, at least for the time. The Montana Central crews continued to prepare the grade to Rimini, the terminus of the line, while Chief Engineer Adna Anderson of the NP located another line through the narrow defile at the canyon mouth. Broadwater and Hill could have breathed with some relief, but the NP was still determined to make the Manitoba's entry into Montana expensive. Knowing that Hill planned to ship his rails for the Montana Central over their line, the NP charged a high rate—$35 per ton—and refused to ship at the $20 rate Hill requested. The NP's obstinacy, plus other discourtesies such as denying pro forma passes for Montana Central officials, confirmed Hill's view of the NP's management, which he had long considered idiosyncratic and shortsighted. After discussions with Broadwater and his financial partners, Hill decided to press forward with the Manitoba's extension to Montana and carry the rails themselves. They would lay them down during the 1887 season.38

At a gala held at the Grand Central Hotel in September 1886 in his honor, Hill told Helenans that the NP's exorbitant freight rates had delayed the Montana Central, but the road would be completed to Helena by autumn 1887. And, he reminded his audience, they would get a bonus. The Montana Central's connection with the Manitoba in Great Falls would give Helena shippers a faster route to St. Paul. Standing before the group, Hill jabbed the NP as he read from a Northern Pacific timetable some joker had placed under each dinner
plate. Hill told the group that the NP was twelve hours too slow; the Manitoba would serve them better and faster.39

BEST ROUTE TO BUTTE

As much as Hill genuinely reveled in the Montana Central's successful pursuit of the Red Mountain line and surveying the Helena-to-Great Falls route, the ultimate destination and payoff for the Montana Central was Butte. Broadwater long before had convinced Hill that the Butte connection would guarantee that the Montana Central would be a paying road. In late April 1886, Broadwater reported to Hill that Daly had confirmed that earlier evaluation. “Daily [sic] says Butte is in her infancy,” Broadwater wrote Hill, “and will work 5 tons of ore where she is working one now. If so, the road from Butte to the falls value is unknown. So I think we had better fight it out on our line if it takes all summer.”40

The fight Broadwater anticipated was again with the NP. Hauser had been after the NP managers for years to invest in an extension of the Wickes branch (built in 1883-84) to Butte, and it seemed they were now ready to proceed. Hill and Broadwater knew they would be in a race with the NP to run the first survey line to Butte, so they put the best man they could hire into the field. Discoverer of the Canadian Pacific's route through the seemingly impregnable Selkirk Mountains in British Columbia, A. B. Rogers came to Helena in early May with instructions from Hill to find a route to Butte and to keep his purpose confidential.41 Rogers struggled through heavy snow drifts in mid-May, reporting to Hill that he had found a line “at a grade not exceeding 116' per mile.” Nearly one month later, Rogers could report to Broadwater “I have succeeded in getting a line. . . . I will call on you for that box of cigars . . .” Rogers had staked out the ground to Butte ahead of the NP. As Rogers wrote Hill in August, “I know you have the best route the country affords, and the present efforts in the field will assure the possession of it to you.”42

While Rogers had been in the field, claiming the best line in the steep and broken gulches between Helena and Butte, Broadwater had been busy in Helena, purchasing depot property and staking out potential sites for a smelter on the city's south side.43 The NP had also been busy, incorporating their Helena, Boulder Valley & Butte Railroad Company, surveying their line to Butte, and estimating the costs. But Broadwater was confident that he had beaten them. One of his engineers had intercepted the NP contractor's grading estimates, which disclosed that the Montana Central had taken the best ground, forcing the NP to run their line with “a very large amount of curvature [with] . . . numerous high trestles.” The costs to the NP of building from Helena to Butte, Broadwater realized, would be prohibitive.44

CONCLUSION

Broadwater had delivered on his promises and Hill had a secured road from Great Falls to Butte. What remained to be done by the Hill forces in late 1886 to make the Manitoba's extension and the Montana Central's building a reality is another story, too long to detail here. The arena was Washington and the prize was a right-of-way across Indian reservations in Dakota and Montana. Successful lobbying by Maginnis and others had brought out a bill to open the Indian reservations to white settlement, but President Grover Cleveland stunned Hill and his colleagues by vetoing the measure in July 1886. Hill, Broadwater, Maginnis, Kennedy, and others applied more pressure and Hill finally got his right-of-way in 1887.45

There were more fights with the Northern Pacific over the Red Mountain and Butte lines. And there were scraps in Helena, including a desperate harassment just days before the last mile of track was spiked down south of town. In a final gesture of spite, the NP laid track across the Montana Central's right-of-way, where it crossed over the NP's grade. The NP parked one of their locomotives on the spot, threatening to force the Montana Central into
court to get the NP engine off their line. Cooler heads in the NP organization ordered the tracks taken up in time for the completion of the Montana Central, but it was testimony to the continuing enmity of the two roads in Montana, an enmity that prevailed until the signing of the London Agreement in 1896. 46

Despite the ongoing competition with the NP, Hill would achieve most of his goals in Montana after the completion of the Montana Central. The first trains to Butte arrived in 1888, and within two years Butte ore was being shipped over the Montana Central to a smelter in Paris Gibson's industrial city on the Missouri. Hill also built branch lines to the Sand Coulee and Belt coal fields and a major feeder line north to Canada, but despite the effort on the Red Mountain line the Manitoba abandoned the effort and let the NP build to Rimini.

Meanwhile, the NP did not complete the too expensive Helena-to-Butte line, opting to build directly west to Butte from Three Forks. An NP-sponsored company did build a line to the Drumlummon mine at Marysville, but none of their building seriously damaged the Montana Central. Hauser got his extension of the Wickes branch in 1887, even though he decided the next year to build a new silver and lead smelter next to the NP mainline east of Helena, a smelter that still operates today and is one of only a few remaining lead smelters in North America.

Throughout it all, Hill's point men in Montana had done their job. Gibson had attracted investment and settlement in Great Falls and Maginnis had done his work well in Washington and among Montana politicos. Broadwater had been the most involved and the most successful. But what had happened to Montana in the process? There are always two sides to any ledger and it was no different in this case. The corporate war in Montana left stains. The effort that had taken so much of Broadwater's time was part of a longer and larger battle over control of investment, the sources of that investment, and the colonialization of the American frontier by interests east of the Plains. The corporate managers used the power of investment to gain advantage on the frontier, often employing the energy and creativity of their point men.

In Montana, as elsewhere, the railroad wars corrupted and disrupted territorial politics. The battle between Broadwater and Hauser split the Democratic Party in Montana and soon became a scene in a broader political struggle that pitted Helena against Anaconda in the fight over the permanent location of the state capital and erupted in the estrangement and then open hostility between copper barons Marcus Daly and William A. Clark. The content of political dialogue followed the low path outlined by the corporate struggle. Political alliances were made to acquire local economic advantage that could be enlisted to aid in the ongoing corporate battle. The point men brought all of it home and allowed the corporate managers to wage their disputes on Montana's turf. At the conclusion, Montana's political system suffered, and Hill and his men moved on to other fields.

These disruptions and dislocations aside, for most Montanans the completion of the Montana Central and the Manitoba brought enormous gain. The NP-UP rate pool had been broken, which meant more competitive freight rates, at least in the short run; within a decade, however, the railroads had combined to levy rates Montanans thought were extortionate. Montana's industrial economy expanded as a direct result of Hill's foray into the territory, especially at Great Falls where construction of a dam across the Missouri, the construction of a sizable copper smelter, and mining nearby coal fields made it one of Montana's major industrial cities within a decade. By connecting Butte to Great Falls, the Montana Central opened an industrial corridor along the Continental Divide, which spurred more mining and manufacturing activity and gave the area access to a national market through the Manitoba line.

Agricultural development also benefited from building the Manitoba-Montana Central line. Whites who had lusted for access to Indian lands north of the Missouri River got their wish fulfilled, even if meant wholesale theft of Indian lands in service of the railroad lords. Within
two decades, agricultural immigrants rushed to the area served by the Manitoba, constituting the largest land rush in the history of the northern Plains. Hill’s dream of an agricultural fee-simple empire of farmers served by his railroad along the northern tier became a reality when the homestead boom brought thousands to stake out dryland farms on the Montana steppes. Hill spared no effort to encourage settlement along his line, echoing some of the promotional hyperbole that accompanied the Montana Central excitement of the 1880s. That great inrush of settlers radically altered Montana politics in the twentieth century and led directly to the creation of dozens of new counties and a new constituency that continues to play a major political role in the state.

Finally, for Helena, the Montana Central meant an infusion of new capital, as Broadwater funneled investment from Hill and Hill’s financier friends into railroad, real estate, and mining companies that he managed. It also bolstered Helena’s position in competition with other cities, especially Butte and Daly’s Anaconda. So, for Montanans, there was great reason for rejoicing on that day in November 1887, when the town feted James J. Hill at the Opera House. And Broadwater must have been at least a little bit smug as he heard Hill recount the essence of Broadwater’s service to the Manitoba:

It is now about three years since I first saw your beautiful mountains and your city [when] . . . Col. Broadway, your enterprising citizen, was at that time particularly anxious that I should come out here to see what a field there was for railway development, and when I came here he did not give me any peace until he had rushed me over the mountains four times, I think, in three days. He insisted that every stone was a mine; and he told his story so well that I am half inclined to believe him right.47

During those three years, Broadwater had told his story well enough to bring Hill’s money to Helena, to cut his friends in on much of the opportunity, and to prevail over his rivals. He had served his interests and what he perceived to be Helena’s and Montana’s interests, while for Hill he became an ultimate operative—a corporate point man on the western frontier.

NOTES

Research for this project was completed with a Research Fellowship from the James Jerome Hill Reference Library, St. Paul.


4. Helena Independent, 22 November 1887.


8. Gibson to Hill, 3 April, 17 June 1881, James J. Hill Papers, James J. Hill Reference Library, St.


14. For more on the political aspects of the railroad wars see White, "Railroad Wars," pp. 46-48. For the divisions among Montana's Democrats, see Roeder, "E lecting Montana's Territorial Delegates."

15. Earlier in 1882, Hauser had been shaken when Oakes declined to participate in a major mining investment near Helena. Hauser appealed to Maginnis for aid, but Maginnis was already in Broadwater's camp. Hauser to Maginnis, 10 January 1882, Hauser Papers.

16. Broadwater wrote to Maginnis in late 1881: "My idea is to throw open to settlement all the country between the Mo. and Milk Rivers as far west as the Coal Banks or Marias... I do hope you will make an effort to accomplish this matter this winter. It would materially help me in my business by a large increase in city trade and would be a large feather in your cap with the people of northern M.T." Broadwater to Maginnis, 6 December 1881, Martin Maginnis Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives (Maginnis Papers). Butte Inter Mountain, 1 May 1889.

17. Gibson worried about Broadwater's motives, mostly because he realized that Broadwater was more interested in his own investments and not committed to Great Falls. But Gibson himself edged his bets. As late as March 1884, he had tried to convince NP managers to build a branch to Fort Benton to boost his investments there. By the time Hill came to Montana in June, Gibson argued forcefully for the Montana to build from Helena to Great Falls through Fort Benton. See White, "Railroad Wars," p. 39; *Helena Independent*, 19 July 1883; *Helena Herald*, 13 September 1883.

18. *Fort Benton River Press*, 10 April, 14 June 1884; *Helena Independent*, 6, 9, 10, 11 June 1884; *Butte Miner*, 28 June 1884; Deer Lodge New Northwest, 27 June 1884.

19. J. S. Newberry Report, October 1884; Newberry to Charles A. Broadwater, 18 November 1884, Hill Papers. One year later Newberry confirmed his original evaluation, Newberry to Hill, 3 November 1885, Hill Papers.


22. George G. Vest to Hauser, 30 March, 1 May, 29 June 1885, Hauser Papers; Spence, *Territorial Politics in Montana*, pp. 164-68; Butte Inter Mountain, 10 June 1885.


24. Thomas Couch to Broadwater, 11 February 1885; John Longmaid to Broadwater, 9 November 1885, Broadwater to Dennis Ryan, 28 December 1885, Hill Papers.

25. Hill to Broadwater, 2 October 1885, Broadwater to Hill, 31 December 1885, Hill Papers; St.
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Paul Pioneer Press, 29 December 1885; River Press, 30 December 1885.


29. Broadwater to Hill, 27 January 1886; Pioneer Press, 15 January 1886; Helena Daily Herald, 16 January, 4 February 1886; Helena Daily Independent, 27 January, 4 February 1886; Red Mountain Consolidated Articles of Incorporation, 1 February 1886; William Harrison to Charles H. Benedict, 10, 11 February 1886, H. C. Ives to William Harrison, 18 February 1886, Hill Papers; Great Falls Tribune, 20 February 1886. In a letter of 13 January Broadwater had instructed Hill on the minimum stock issue for a mining corporation—$2 million—and advised not springing it until the rail line was located.

30. Telegram, Broadwater to Hill, 3 February 1886, Hill Papers; see also Clark, Eller, and How (law firm) to Broadwater, 21 December 1885, Hill to Broadwater, 19 January 1886, Broadwater to Hill, 27 January 1886, Hill to Broadwater, 5 February 1886, and Chumasero and Chadwick to Broadwater, 7 February 1886, Hill Papers.


32. Harrison to Benedict [communicating Broadwater’s message], 2 March 1886, Broadwater to Benedict, 3, 4 March 1886, Broadwater to Hill, 6, 7 March 1886, Hill Papers.


34. Hill to Broadwater, 19 March 1886, Hill Papers.


40. Broadwater to Hill, 27 April 1886.


42. Rogers to Hill, 11 June 1886, Rogers to Broadwater, 15 June 1886, Rogers to Hill, 13 August 1886, Hill Papers.

43. Helena Daily Herald, 26 August 1886; Broadwater to Hill, 7 May 1886, Hill Papers.

44. River Press, 7 July 1886; Robert Harris to Hauser, 12 August 1886, W. A. Haven to Hauser, 7 September 1886, A. Anderson to Hauser, 16 September 1886, Hauser Papers; Helena Daily Herald, 16 September 1886; J. T. Dodge to Broadwater, 20 September 1886, Hill Papers.

45. See Smith, “Procuring a Right-of-Way.”


47. Helena Daily Independent, 22 November 1887.