
THE “HISTORIC FIGHT”

THE STRUGGLE TO CONTROL ST. PAUL CHARITY

RANDALL T. GETCHELL

ON A WARM, SUNNY DAY IN LATE October 1914, Louis W. Hill visited the offices of Associated Charities in St. Paul. Hill, Great Northern Railway president and son of railroad baron James J. Hill, had come to see Associated Charity’s general secretary, Charles Stillman. If the three-hour meeting began cordially, pleasantries soon ended as Hill laid out a litany of

charges and threats. According to Stillman’s account, Hill named members of Associated’s board of directors who, in his opinion, “knew nothing at all about charity.” He added that “the only man who [did] know anything about charity was M. L. [Morgan] Hutchins,” the general secretary of the Society for the Relief of the Poor, a charity with a 30-year connection to the Hill family. Hill, who was then serving on its board of directors, said the Relief Society was the only agency

providing charity “in an effective way.” He also judged it a “disgrace” that Associated Charities paid Ruth Cutler, a millionaire’s daughter, for her work as assistant general secretary. Then Hill labeled Associated’s “friendly visiting” operation a “farce.” Middle- and upper-class women “wearing tight-fitting skirts [and] going into the homes of the poor, posing as their friends” did not, in his estimation, constitute charity. Finally, according to Stillman’s account, “Mr.



Ramshackle brick and wooden tenement housing, about 1915

Hill stated that all we ought to do with the poor was 'just give them enough to keep them alive' and that that was what the Relief Society was doing." As Hill turned to leave, he declared, "Well, I don't know why I should do anything for this organization!" Stillman must have been relieved to see him go.¹

Alas, Hill returned Monday morning to investigate a referral his wife, Maud, had made to Associated. A third party had told Mrs. Hill that a certain woman needed urgent surgery. Louis Hill claimed that Associated had not followed up on this referral; actually, it had. When Hill left Associated's office, he took, against Stillman's protest, the case file and issued a categorical threat: "I will do all I can to close up this place."²

Hill's accusations really mattered to Stillman, a mild-mannered but passionately dedicated ex-Baptist home missionary who had moved to St. Paul to lead Associated in 1913. Following their meeting, he drafted a five-page account, which he read into the record at Associated's next board of directors meeting. What Hill said also mattered to national charity leaders: In 1916, more than two years after the clash, Francis McLean, general secretary of the American Association of Societies for Organizing Charity, reported to his executive committee that an "historic fight" had occurred in St. Paul. The fight had been precipitated by the "intrusion into the scene [of] Louis Hill," whom McLean characterized as Associated's "bitter opponent."³

THE ST. PAUL FIGHT MIRRORED A national debate that placed nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century social-welfare ideologies at odds. The debate turned on one question: Could the poor be helped out of



*Associated Charities'
Charles Stillman, 1940*

poverty? Until the late-nineteenth century, most Americans believed charity meant taking care of the so-called dependent classes. As Hill had put it: "Keep them alive." Contributions from benefactors like Hill provided the poor with material relief such as food, fuel, and clothing. But this approach only sustained. By the turn of the century, a new philosophy and method for dealing with poverty was emerging. A new breed of social-welfare professionals—and enlightened volunteers—had come to believe that broad social reforms aimed at root societal problems, combined with sustained individual assistance, could eliminate poverty.⁴ The condition of the poor would be changed—permanently. As Stillman wrote in his first year in St. Paul:

Who gives us the omniscience to . . . issue a memorandum in terms of bread, navy beans, soup bones and advice? . . . Our work is done [only] when . . . we can put our finger on the chief cause of distress. . . . It leads us on to the very consti-

tution of society, and makes us ask why, and why again, till the struggling re-echo with the cry, "Why does free America show three men in every ten struggling with the monster of poverty?" . . . Let us [also] give the lie to that other fiction that poverty is a necessary evil. . . . I don't believe it; if I did, I could not worship God.⁵

In the struggle for control of St. Paul charity, Hill and Stillman personified opposing sides. With neither man inclined to throw in the towel, the battle would prove to be fierce. The Relief Society's method was consistent with notions long-held in the American psyche. The new approach that would drive the efforts at Associated Charities meant reform. And with reform came turmoil.⁶ If change were to come, it would not come easily.

Following the Civil War, most Americans believed that poor people had some personal weakness in body, intellect, or spirit, a view consistent with English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer's theory of "survival of the fittest." Spencer had applied evolutionary biology to human society and confirmed for the middle and upper classes that they, "the fittest," deserved their riches. Though Social Darwinism had a following, few Americans carried the theory to its extremes. Class prejudices aside, most Americans saw it as their reli-

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gious duty to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Through charity, many assuaged their guilt and some derived pleasure. The privileged—like Louis Hill—took pity on the poor, that is, the deserving poor.⁷

IN 1872 CONCERN FOR THE deserving poor and the stress on his agency had prompted Daniel R. Noyes Jr., St. Paul's YMCA president, to call for the creation of a new charity agency to "systematize" the work "previously left to individual caprice." Noyes outlined a plan for a new agency, and in 1876 the Society for the Relief of the Poor was established, modeled on principles of the Associations for Improving the Condition of the Poor. This na-

tional charity movement, started in the 1840s, sought to "repress pauper-



ism and aid the poor." As its name implied, the Relief Society's primary mission was to dispense material aid. But, as the agency matured, it sought to address another important founding objective: the coordination of the city's charities. Toward that end, the agency established, in 1885, its Department for Organizing Charity.⁸

The Relief Society discovered, however, that charity coordination diminished its ability to respond to ever-increasing demands for material relief. St. Paul needed an independent, investigative agency to organize charities—an agency free of relief responsibilities. Timing was good. The fast-spreading Charity Organization Society (C.O.S.) movement had

Morgan A. Hutchins of the Relief Society, about 1915, and the organization's home on East Ninth Street, about 1895



spawned agencies with just such objectives in other American cities. So, in 1892, the Relief Society invited other charities to unite with it and form a new agency that could improve the city's relief-delivery system by "eliminating fraud, inefficiency and duplicity in the field."⁹

On June 14, 1892, an organizing committee composed of 20 charity workers and prominent citizens adopted a constitution and elected officers for St. Paul's new C.O.S. organization, Associated Charities. Associated would be governed by a board of directors comprised of two representatives from each of St. Paul's public and private charities (one of whom was the Relief Society's Morgan Hutchins) plus 15 at-large and several ex-officio members. Associated Charities opened its doors just in time for the Panic of 1893 and subsequent four-year depression.¹⁰

Just across the river, Minneapolis had had its own C.O.S. agency (also named Associated Charities) since 1884. But Minneapolis was missing a large piece in its charity-delivery system—it lacked an active, well-established relief agency. Its version of a relief society, begun in 1874, lasted only a few years. By contrast, St. Paul's Relief Society had been active and effective since its beginnings. As a result, St. Paul's new Associated Charities could turn its attention to other, broader objectives.¹¹

Modeled on C.O.S. scientific-charity philosophy and method—"rationality, efficiency, foresight, and planning"—St. Paul's Associated laid down six founding objectives: "To promote the co-operation of the several public and private charitable agencies"; to establish a central registration office to record the work of all agencies; to cooperate with the agencies in investigations they de-

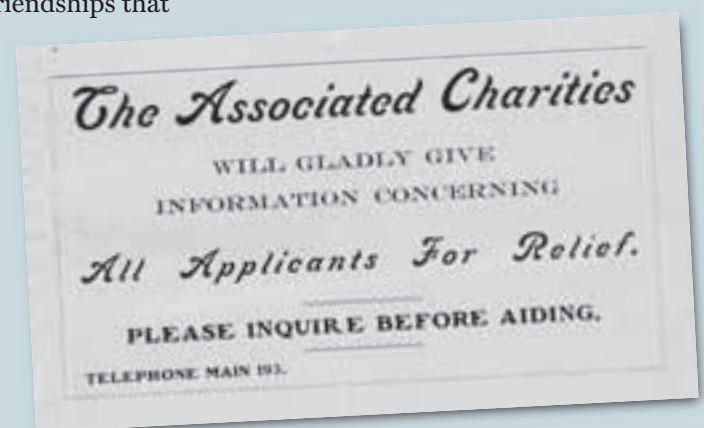
sired or needed; to inform the public about the general work of the charitable organizations; to exchange information with similar organizations throughout the country; and, finally, "The Associated Charities shall not interfere with the management of any existing charitable organization and shall not directly administer any relief." Consistent with the C.O.S. motto, "Not alms, but a friend," Associated's objectives promised guidance, not relief.¹²

In 1895, three years after its founding, Associated instituted the C.O.S. method of "friendly visiting" that Hill later scorned. Friendly visitors registered and investigated poor families and designed individualized self-help plans based on their findings. This program, together with charity collaboration and systematization, "formed the basis of [the] 'science' of social therapeutics that was supposed to relieve philanthropy of sentimentality and indiscriminate almsgiving," according to historian Walter Trattner.¹³

Friendly visiting was not just a methodology; it was the very "heart and soul" of C.O.S. practice. But the program had inherent problems. Well-to-do women called on poor families living under dramatically worse conditions than the visitors' own servants. Early C.O.S. leaders believed that friendly visiting fostered cross-class friendships that would inspire visitor-designed, client-specific self-betterment plans. In many cases, however, what the poor most needed was not advice and inspiration but food, fuel, and

clothing. Visits meant to detect "moral lapses" and encourage moral improvement could not resolve crises. Further, the method's central premise—the rich befriending the poor—had a central flaw. As Trattner put it, intervening "by virtue of a presumed wisdom and superiority" and considering their clients "objects of character reformation, whose lowly condition resulted from ignorance or other deviations from middle-class norms" made it "impossible to establish satisfactory *personal* relationships." Whatever had motivated Louis Hill's censure of friendly visiting, his criticism did have some basis in fact.¹⁴

LOUIS HILL'S FATHER, JAMES J. Hill, had contributed \$500 to the Relief Society's building fund in 1892, and a close relationship ensued between the agency and the donor. Hill himself received thousands of aid requests from the poor. He referred some cases directly to Hutchins at the Relief Society who investigated, determined case merit, and reported back, allowing Hill to manage his charitable endeavors just as he managed his railroads—hands-on. Hill followed case disposition closely, as evident in this 1898 note from Hutchins to Hill's secretary: "I took the little girl 'Susie' to my office and gave her a good warm jacket,



new stockings, shoes and rubbers, for which she seemed very grateful. I then sent her, in charge of my stenographer, to a nice comfortable place to stay (the Young Women's Friendly Association), with instructions to call at my office after she had her breakfast." Hutchins's reports continued as long as Hill lived. J. J. Hill made sure his charity went only to the deserving.¹⁵

Louis Hill, like his father, mentor, confidant, and next-door neighbor, stayed close to the front lines, whether in business or charity. For example, while the Interior Department was developing Glacier National Park, Louis Hill, as president of the Great Northern Railway subsidiary, Glacier Park Hotel Company, oversaw the construction of railroad, hotel, and other park facilities. Hill handled the smallest of details, too. He made sure that the washrooms had paper towels and that the restaurant stocked his choice of tea. And he issued ultimatums. For example, when Washington delayed funding for professional guides and trail maintenance, Hill wired his disapproval and expectations to the Secretary of the Interior, closing with, "I will continue to wire daily. I expect something to be done."¹⁶

Although Louis Hill had, perhaps, his longest charitable affiliation with the Relief Society, he had many other philanthropic interests, both large and small. The Volunteers of America summer camp gave poor mothers and their children a two-week respite from their day-to-day realities. In addition to providing the land for the camp, Hill also supplied most of the capital. In 1922 alone, he funded \$10,637 (equal to \$112,000 today) of camp construction, equipment, and operating costs. Further, Hill often reconciled the all-too-common season-end deficits. And,



James and Louis Hill conferring, about 1905

as was his custom, he was hands-on, procuring linens for the beds and fielding bids for potatoes.¹⁷

Al Heckman, executive director of the Louis W. and Maud Hill Foundation from 1951 to 1975 (now the Northwest Area Foundation), worked closely with Louis Hill. In a 1982 interview Heckman corroborated Hill's hands-on modus operandi: "[Louis Hill] would often seek out others for information. . . . Then he ended up doing what he had intended to do in the first place or what he thought was the best course. He did his own investigation and made up his own mind. . . . Hill was his own man."¹⁸

The extended Hill family had also supported Associated Charities for a time. Nearly every year from 1901 to 1908, either Louis or Maud made a contribution (usually \$10). Louis's sister Clara gave from 1908 to 1911, averaging \$75 per year. J. J. Hill gave from 1894 through 1911, averaging about \$25 per year; his wife, Mary, donated \$100 in 1901 and 1911. Then, all contributions stopped until March 1914, when J. J. Hill, deviating dramatically from the family pattern, donated \$1,000.¹⁹ We cannot be sure what happened to stop Hill family contributions (or to

prompt the \$1,000 gift). By the 1910s, however, Associated was on a downward slide.

CHARITY ORGANIZATION SOCIETY agencies across the country—St. Paul and Minneapolis included—were experiencing financial problems as the movement aged. As one contemporary historian put it, "Progress in the movement has been uneven; here a new society, there a society atrophying or undergoing rejuvenation." Many benefactors perceived C.O.S. agencies like Associated to be "cold," inclined to "red tape," and more interested in searching than serving. Such perceptions diminished the benevolent impulse and the agency's operating funds.²⁰

Compounding the problem in St. Paul, the economy, "powered for years by rail expansion," experienced a slowdown in the years following the completion of the Great Northern. Construction opportunities and the jobs that went with them dried up. With the success of mail-order retailers and the decline in westward migration, St. Paul had lost "its pivotal point as a distribution center," according to historian Mary Wingerd. Then, in 1914, the Panama Canal opened, diverting more freight and taking even more jobs from the area. In such rough times, the city needed a well-run, well-funded, investigative, coordinating organization. Instead, as its assistant general secretary, Ruth Cutler, wrote, Associated Charities was in a state of "rapid decline."²¹

This was the challenge that Charles Stillman faced when he took the helm of Associated in March 1913. Arriving in St. Paul from Kansas City, Stillman knew well that he could not turn Associated around alone. In a June 1913 memo he chas-

tised Associated's board for its lack of support, saying that he needed their attention, interest, and active involvement in fundraising: "Your salaried employee has no entrée into the circles of men and women whose right understanding of our work is essential to its success."²²

Several factors had contributed to Associated's decline. For one, the previously stable, symbiotic, and amicable relationship between Associated and the Relief Society had deteriorated. Oftentimes the Relief Society did not respond to Associated requests for emergency relief in cases it had investigated. Stillman expressed his frustration when he complained that the Relief Society's torpidity was both "humiliating" to Associated and, more importantly, "disastrous" for St. Paul's poor. Associated saw a solution: merge the two organizations. But between March 1912 and October 1914 the Relief Society had rebuffed three merger overtures, with the final refusal coming just two weeks before the Hill-Stillman meetings.²³

Adding to Associated's woes, its governing body proved unwieldy and inefficient. In most other American cities, C.O.S. agencies elected their own boards of directors and operated autonomously. St. Paul's board was largely comprised of representatives of other city charities, which hampered Associated's independence. Though the organization had finally adopted the typical C.O.S. model in 1913, the effects of the markedly less efficient "St. Paul Plan" lingered.²⁴

Furthermore, in the years preceding Stillman's arrival in 1913, Associated had suffered "a leadership vacuum." In 1910 General Secretary Arthur W. Gutridge (who had served since 1898) resigned because too much of his time was being taken up

with fundraising. Three acting general secretaries served over the next three years. Such turnover did not foster stability.²⁵

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, many philanthropists reduced their charitable giving after the richly endowed Amherst H. Wilder Charity arrived on the St. Paul scene in 1911, after a consolidation of smaller Wilder agencies. According to a *Pioneer Press* editorial, Wilder's operating capital probably exceeded that of all other St. Paul charities combined. No wonder that people believed that the charity, with its vast wealth, could provide for all the needs of the poor. Between 1911 and 1913, Wilder launched several major programs: it opened a day nursery for children of working mothers at 903 Edgerton Street, built and operated a public bath and pool facility at 319 Eagle

Street, placed more than 200 pensioners on its rolls, and provided staff, equipment, facilities, and capital for a variety of medical services to the poor. Wilder operated from the four-story Amherst H. Wilder Charity building at Fifth and Washington (today, the site of the Ordway Center). Opened in 1913, the building provided rent-free space to several St. Paul charities, including the Relief Society and Associated, which shared the first floor.²⁶

Associated was, as national C.O.S. executive Francis McLean later put it, "backed into a corner" to the point that the men and women of its board had to make personal pledges to cover the 1912 payroll. In 1913 McLean spent a week in St. Paul, assessing the situation and the chances that his protégé, Charles Stillman, could rescue the operation. Fiscal year 1913-14

Amherst H. Wilder Charities building, on the current site of the Ordway Center, in which Associated Charities and the Relief Society shared a floor, about 1913





“Men’s Day” at the new Wilder-funded public bath and pool on Eagle Street, 1914

contributions to Associated were only \$15,342. St. Paul, with a population of 240,000, ranked well behind funding levels for C.O.S. agencies in smaller cities. For instance, Memphis, with about half the people, raised \$32,800. Just across the river, Minneapolis, with a population of 310,000, raised \$85,000—nearly six times as much as St. Paul. After consulting with city leaders, McLean wrote that, despite St. Paul’s “mania for relief,” a few C.O.S. ideas had “sunk in.” Stillman could be, in McLean’s estimation, the charity’s first secretary to have “an opportunity to really do something.”²⁷

In retrospect, 1913 was a pivotal year, and McLean’s words proved prophetic. With Stillman aboard,

Associated proceeded to make some unilateral changes. Unable to count on the Relief Society, it established its own relief department. (Associated Charities of Minneapolis had been providing direct relief since 1895.) In 1914 it hired Ruth Cutler, a Vassar alumna and post-graduate student at the University of Minnesota, for the key position of assistant general secretary. Associated also merged with the St. Paul Day Nursery, Anti-Tuberculosis Society, and Free Medical Dispensary. Finally, a new name, United Charities, effective December 1, 1914, would mark a new beginning and provide a much-needed, fresh public image.²⁸

Now, however, the agency would require more professional workers

who would be paid higher salaries. It also had to meet new material-relief obligations. In response, United launched a \$60,000 fundraising campaign augmented by a major public-education initiative meant to correct public misconceptions about the agency’s activities, the merger, and goals for the future. Lucius P. Ordway, principal stockholder in a young company named Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing and builder of the St. Paul Hotel, kicked off the campaign with a \$1,000 contribution.²⁹

ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS alone would have been enough to cast Hill and Stillman on opposite sides of the national debate over

society's potential to end poverty. However, Hill's stature in the community, coupled with his hands-on approach to charity, and Stillman's ideological passion, lent force by a geared-up national social-welfare reform movement, ratcheted the level of contention even higher. National C.O.S. leader McLean later wrote that only Pittsburgh had a more hostile environment than St. Paul.³⁰

On November 2, just days after his unpleasant visit to Stillman, a letter describing United's upcoming campaign kick-off dinner arrived in Hill's mail. Invitations to the event, to be held Friday of that week at the St. Paul Hotel, were to be sent that very night to a "Committee of One Hundred" who had been recruited as front-line fundraisers. The letter named five "prominent St. Paul men" as dinner hosts, "a citizen's committee of men who lend their support to United's plan." One of these five was none other than Louis Hill. It is difficult to imagine that the planning committee would have been foolish enough to use Hill's name without his prior consent.³¹ And, if he had been approached, why would Hill agree to host a fundraising dinner for the very organization he so strongly opposed? One can only speculate that the letter was composed and sent before Hill's first visit to Stillman.

The letter impelled Hill to quick action. He fired off a missive to Victor Watkins, Wilder's president, pointing to a stipulation in Amherst Wilder's will that required any charity receiving Wilder funds—Associated/United being one—to provide a public accounting of staff salaries, the amount disbursed for care of the poor, and the number of clients assisted during the previous year. Hill wrote, "I have been asked to interest myself [in United's affairs] and have

been looking into the question of [the] force required for the work, salaries paid, etc. . . . I shall appreciate it if you can furnish me with a copy of such report." Watkins may have forwarded this request to Stillman, whose reply, formal in tone and very detailed, is the only known response.³²

In that first 1914 meeting with Stillman, Hill had made one other threat. He charged that the Wilder charity was badly managed and that he would bring about the resignation of its entire board through a negative publicity campaign. This was, clearly, an irrational threat for at least two

reasons: the unquestionable stature of the directors, nearly all of whom had been nominated in the Wilder wills, and the public goodwill Wilder had garnered for its considerable contributions to St. Paul. If the Wilder directors had heard about Hill's threats, they were unfazed. The board proclaimed that it "heartily approved [of the United restructuring], and . . . commended the said undertaking to the citizens of St. Paul."³³ St. Paul's largest and most influential charity had weighed in on the side of reform.

Hill's influence had been felt, however. The banquet was postponed

Examination in a United Charities-funded eye clinic, about 1916



To the Citizens of St. Paul:

To administer charity intelligently and thoroughly is of the greatest importance in this city.

Co-operation and consolidation will accomplish the administration of charity at the smallest cost, doing the greatest good to the greatest number. Therefore the UNITED CHARITIES, a consolidation of the Associated Charities, the St. Paul Day Nursery Association and the Anti-Tuberculosis Committee, has been formed.

Its aim is the prevention of crime, disease, and poverty, by removing their causes, and the upbuilding of character in men, women and children after their material wants have been provided for.

The demands a city of Saint Paul's size makes upon a charitable organization that attempts to cover it thoroughly and comprehensively, are tremendous.

A Few Demands

6,738 persons in Saint Paul today are wholly or partly dependent upon the United Charities

3,176 boys and girls, not fifteen years old, need shoes, clothing and food

434 aged men and aged women have no one to help them keep body and soul together

220 tons of coal are needed to provide warmth for these unfortunates

1,540 persons look to the Legal Aid Bureau to collect wages due by absence or other court procedure

AND SO WE COULD GO ON THROUGH ALL THE VARIOUS RAMIFICATIONS OF CHARITY WORK

The Immediate Need Is This:

We must have \$60,000.00 to take care of this work. That sum will be used for two years, 130,000.00 a year. A contribution on your part will help raise this money. Payments may be made to suit your own convenience.

The character and integrity of the men who are perfecting and managing this organization are undoubted. Your money will not be wasted. The following names are evidence of this fact:

The Campaign Committee

D. R. OGDEN
WHEELER CLARKSON
MRS. CLARA ROBERTS
O. R. BENTLEY
W. J. BRONKOLL

JOHN I. H. FIELD
W. H. HALLIDAY
J. H. JACOBSON
J. H. KANNAPOURU, JR.

H. E. OLSON
W. F. FEET
A. H. BIRD
K. P. STUBBS

OSCAR L. TAYLOR
W. A. WASHBURN
W. L. WEST
MRS. W. L. WEST

Campaign Headquarters: 102 Pioneer Building

Telephones: N. W. Cedar 6754; T-5, 1924

Full-page notice in the St. Paul Daily News, November 23, 1914, spelling out United Charities' needs and mission

for several weeks, no doubt causing the program committee much worry and work. The new invitation named 18 prominent civic leaders on the fund-campaign committee. According to McLean, Hill then pressured newspapers to squelch publicity for the campaign. Fearing his disapproval, "panic stricken" men had resigned from committees and reneged on canvassing commitments.³⁴

IN EARLY DECEMBER, HILL SENT off a check for his annual \$100 Relief Society subscription. United Charities did not get a check. On December 15, William L. West, United's treasurer, dunned Hill for a \$100 pledge that he had, supposedly, made. Responding to West's letter, Hill wrote, "I believe if you will look up your records, you will find there is some mistake in this, as I do not recall

having made the subscription referred to, or any subscription to the United Charities." Hill had spoken with his pocketbook.³⁵

Thereafter, the relationship between the Relief Society and United Charities went unrecorded until April 1916, when William West proposed that the Relief Society discontinue its annual \$100 appropriation to United. By 1916 United had made great strides. As of April 1915 pledges had reached \$58,379. With the influx of funds, United's leadership approved long-delayed staff raises, opened district offices, expanded programs, and funded an ever-growing material-relief department. Relief Society estrangement could no longer jeopardize United's operation. Since 1912 United had sought, if not merger, then at least an improved relationship with the Relief Society. Not until United suggested the complete break did the Relief Society finally come around. West reported that the Relief Society wished "to enter into any amicable arrangement . . . with United Charities."³⁶

It is unclear how amicably the relationship evolved in the first years after reconciliation. In August 1920, however, there was a dramatic turn when St. Paul's newest agency, the Community Chest (predecessor of the United Way), considered the Relief Society's membership application. A primary function of the Chest was to raise funds and then disperse them to member organizations. Another function was to "secure cooperation and unity of action" between agencies, in order to achieve the "best results . . . with the least effort."³⁷

With this last maxim in mind, the Community Chest put a hold on the Relief Society's application, suggesting that the organization consider, for the good of the community,

“amalgamation” with another agency “doing similar work.” The Chest proposed that the Relief Society turn over its relief work to United Charities and place all of its remaining assets in trust, the income from which would be used only for United’s emergency relief operations.

There would be one other beneficiary of the fund. The Chest proposed that Morgan Hutchins receive an \$1,800 retirement annuity for the rest of his life in recognition of his 34 years of service. The Relief Society accepted these proposals. Sadly, Hutchins’s retirement proved very short. He died that same year on Christmas Eve.

For many years, United Charities made good use of income derived from the Society for the Relief of the Poor fund. When, in 1935, United Charities became Family Service, Inc., the income transferred to that agency, where it remains today. The work of Morgan Hutchins and the Relief Society continues to benefit St. Paul’s poor and disadvantaged.³⁸

LOUIS HILL’S ANTI-C.O.S. VIEWS were incongruous with the views of most, if not all, of St. Paul’s civic leaders. Further, men of Hill’s standing in other cities supported the C.O.S. movement, among them such distinguished philanthropists as Astor, Carnegie, Morgan, and Vanderbilt. Why did Louis Hill act as he did in the fall of 1914?³⁹

Though Social Darwinist ideology had gone out of favor, the philosophical remnants may have still held sway on Hill’s thinking, leading him to believe that the poor could not be salvaged. Instead they should be simply “kept alive”—as Hill had told Stillman—through the efforts of the Relief Society and other old-school relief-dispensing agencies.

Gender bias may have colored Hill’s view of Ruth Cutler’s status as a paid professional. Yes, she came from a wealthy family; however, she had penetrated the largely male ranks of paid, professional social workers. National leader McLean called her a “remarkable young woman.” Before she left United Charities in 1916, Cutler designed a district plan, a common organizational structure in other American cities that addressed the geographic challenges of distributing relief. But two generations of Hills had worked with and relied on a man, Morgan Hutchins. Although women had made inroads, it is unlikely that Hill had encountered any besides Cutler in such a responsible position.⁴⁰

In addition, personal factors may well have spurred Hill to action. Much, if not all, of his charity work had been hands-on, but Stillman’s strong leadership and Associated’s aversion, at the time, to direct material relief precluded Hill’s personal involvement in organization’s operations. Further, Hill may have harbored animosity against the emerging profession of scientific social work. Railroad work-place reforms—including minimum-wage increases, a shorter work day, and more stringent safety measures—promoted by new-breed professional social workers and other progressives could only adversely affect railroad operations and profits. Lastly, Hill, one of St. Paul’s most influential citizens, had learned from his father and mentor to be tenacious. Louis Hill would fight for what he believed, and he had done just that in the fall of 1914. But this time it was different. In a very public arena, he had lost the battle. Is it far-fetched to imagine that his subsequent actions came out of embarrassment, anger, or resentment?⁴¹



Ruth Cutler, about 1915, in a New York studio portrait

Whatever his motivations, Hill had a major and varied impact on the St. Paul charity scene. He caused the postponement of an important fundraising dinner. More important, his pressure tactics slowed fundraising by squelching publicity and causing men to resign from the campaign effort.⁴² Hill’s actions surely delayed St. Paul charity reform, which could only adversely affect the quality of life for St. Paul’s poor and disadvantaged.

Although Louis Hill’s prominent position in the history of St. Paul made him a compelling figure in this drama, Charles Stillman stole the show. Stillman’s mentor, Francis McLean, correctly foretold that St. Paul would be a tough venue. Nevertheless, he believed Stillman could handle the role with the help of a strong supporting cast of civic leaders and occasional mentoring from the national office. Once Stillman accepted his part as protagonist and Hill grabbed the role of antagonist, the contest of ideas and wills was inevitable.⁴³

Hill had come up against a great man in-the-making. From 1916 to 1918, while still at United, Charles

Stillman lectured in sociology at the University of Minnesota. In 1918 the directorship of a five-state Red Cross relief operation enticed him away from St. Paul. Later, he became secretary of the Grand Rapids, Michigan, Welfare Union (a Community Chest organization). While there Stillman authored *Social Work Publicity: Its Message and Its Method*, which “put original and influential emphasis . . . [on] intellectual versus merely emotional considerations.” In 1929 Stillman accepted a professorship in social administration at Ohio State University and there developed the country’s “first curriculum in community organization in health and welfare.” He became Ohio State’s School of Social Administration director in 1932. In 1948 the university conferred on him a Doctor of Laws degree. Stillman died in 1952. Ohio

State, posthumously, renamed a university building Stillman Hall.⁴⁴

Stillman accomplished great things in his social-welfare career, not least of them his success in St. Paul. A newcomer in town, he convinced his uninvolved board of directors and other prominent citizens that the social-reform cause was worth—and required—their wholehearted support.

Following his 1913 and 1916 visits, McLean wrote reports that serve as bookends to St. Paul’s “historic fight.” In 1913 McLean imagined St. Paul’s potential and accurately predicted that Stillman was the man to “infuse” its citizens with “modern notions” that would impel the city toward long-overdue social-welfare reforms. By 1916 McLean was able to report that there had been a “remarkable” change. In his opinion,

“It was about the first time that something was done in St. Paul despite the opposition of the Hill family, and it has given a healthier civic tone to the city.”⁴⁵

Stillman had predicted that change in 1913, when he wrote: “St. Paul is a generous, sympathetic, charitable city. It is a good place to live in. And we who love the city, who long to help its unfortunate citizens . . . ought to pool our information, blend our sympathy, dove-tail our effort, and work out the problems confronting us with faith in each other, faith in humanity, and faith in God. I have seen enough of St. Paul to believe we can do it.”⁴⁶ Stillman’s assessment was correct, and soon charity work in the town would be forever changed. Reform had won, and St. Paul joined the list of cities nationwide with forward-looking social-welfare programs. □

The “band of mercy” included, at far left, a serious-looking, young Ruth Cutler. St. Paul Daily News, November 15, 1915.



Notes

1. Stillman, account of meetings with Hill, Associated Charities (AC) Board of Directors meeting, Nov. 6, 1914, Family Service of St. Paul, 1892–1917, microfilm, roll 1 (hereinafter r1, FS), Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (SWHA). Hill's statement was consistent with Relief Society policy: "To prevent actual suffering from cold and hunger"; Joint Committee of AC and Society for the Relief of the Poor, minutes, Aug. 1, 1913, p. 2, r1, FS. According to extant Relief Society annual reports, Hill served on its board in 1911 (*Thirty-Fifth Annual Report*, JJH Pamphlets—1900s, James J. Hill Papers, James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul—hereinafter, Hill Library) and again from 1913–19 (reports in Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul [MHS]); 1912 is not on file.

Friendly visitors were middle- and upper-class volunteers—mostly women—who investigated charity applicants and designed individual and family self-improvement programs.

2. Stillman dispatched someone immediately to investigate the Hill referral and found that the woman was not in distress, had chosen to put off surgery, and, further, could afford to pay for it. See Minnie Anderson to Ruth Cutler, Nov. 2, 1914, and Mary A. Kidder to Maud Hill, Nov. 4, 1914, General Correspondence, Louis W. Hill Papers, Hill Library.

3. McLean to American Association of Societies for Organizing Charity Executive Committee, Nov. 25, 1916, p. 2, Family Service Association of America Records, box 60, SWHA (hereinafter box 60, FS); on Stillman, see "Quiet Mr. Stillman Goes on With Relief Work as Guns of War Boom Over His Head," undated newspaper clipping, and Charles Stillman address, Stillman Testimonial Dinner, St. Louis, MO, Nov. 12, 1947, p. 19–21, both in Biography—C. C. Stillman—1916–1956, Charles Clark Stillman Papers, Ohio State University Archives, Columbus.

4. Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 93–94.

5. Charles C. Stillman, "Report of the General Secretary of the Associated Charities for the Year Ending September 30, 1913," p. 1, r1, FS.

6. On controversies surrounding reform-legislation and casework issues, see Mary Richmond's 1897 paper in *The Long View: Papers and Addresses by Mary Richmond*, ed. Joanna C. Colcord and Ruth Z. Mann (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1930), 472.

7. Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 88–89.

8. Relief Society, *Fourteenth Annual Report . . . January 14, 1890*, 1, 5, MHS; Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 68. Known

briefly as the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor, the agency soon became the Society for the Relief of the Poor and, finally, to many, simply the Relief Society; Mark E. Haidet, *A Legacy of Leadership and Service: A History of Family Service of Greater St. Paul* (St. Paul: Family Service, Inc., 1984), 2; Relief Society, *Twentieth Annual Report . . . January 1, 1896*, 16, MHS.

9. Relief Society, *Twentieth Annual Report*, 17; Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 92.

10. Conference Committee of the Charities of St. Paul, meeting minutes, June 14, 1892, p. 1, and "In Sweet Charity's Name," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Oct. 2, 1893, clipping, both in r1, FS. Ex-officio members included St. Paul's mayor, the president of the State Board of Control, the city and county physicians, and chief of police. This unwieldy "central council" model would be known in national charity circles—with some derision—as the "St. Paul Plan." Frank D. Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States: A Study in American Philanthropy* (1922; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1971), 243, 466.

11. Haidet, *Legacy*, 2; David J. Klaassen, "The Deserving Poor": Beginnings of Organized Charity in Minneapolis," *Hennepin County History* 47 (Spring 1988): 17–23.

12. AC Constitution, June 14, 1892, r1, FS; Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 95.

13. Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 93.

14. Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 98–99. Ironically, it was the friendly visitors who triggered a major change that led to the demise of friendly visiting. In the late-nineteenth century, visitors began to see, as they reviewed years of data about the circumstances of being poor, that poverty had less to do with the morality, intellect, or spirit of the poor than it did with underlying societal factors: low pay, work accidents, unemployment, and unsanitary or unsafe living conditions. (Perhaps the rich were not the "fittest" after all, just the fortunate.) Volunteers and professionals eventually concluded that neither guidance nor material relief—or even the two methods combined—addressed the root causes of poverty. Instead, the expertise of full-time, trained social-work professionals was needed. This realization led to the end of volunteer service and the rise of the social-work profession.

Locally, Ruth Cutler wrote that only two volunteers were "faithful and efficient." She reported that an unnamed agency worker said that the visitors "were more bother than they were worth"; Cutler, "Charity Organization Principles: A Study of Their Application in Minneapolis and St. Paul," post-graduate paper, University of Minnesota, 1914, p. 40, copy in MHS.

15. Receipt signed Dan R. Noyes, Relief Society Treasurer, Oct. 2, 1882, Vouchers, and Hutchins to Hill, Dec. 21, 1898, p. 1,

General Correspondence, both in J. J. Hill Papers, Hill Library. There are some 4,000 "begging" letters in the Hill papers (1900–16), many with Hill's rejection letters attached; Eileen McCormack, associate curator, Hill Library, interview by author, Mar. 19, 2001.

16. Eileen McCormack, "The 146-Year History of the Louis Hill House," *Ramsey County History* 37 (Winter 2003): 8; McCormack interview; Christiane Diehl-Taylor, "Passengers, Profits and Prestige: The Glacier Park Hotel Company, 1914–1929," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 47 (Summer 1997): 26, 28–29, 34–35 (quote), 38–39.

17. Eileen McCormack, "Louis Hill's Gift: Volunteers of America Rest Camp," unpublished manuscript; H. W. Kask to Louis Hill, Nov. 22, 1928, folder 8, North Oaks, Box 19; and I. A. C. [I. A. Coppel] to Hill, Jan. 9, 1933, United Charities (UC), General Correspondence—all in L. W. Hill Papers.

18. A. A. Heckman, interview by Mark Haidet, Jan. 29, 1982, transcript, p. 11, Oral History Collection, MHS.

19. Associated Annual Reports, 1893–1911, in Annual Reports 1884–1939 folder, Family Service of St. Paul Records, box 4, SWHA (hereinafter box 4, FS); Voucher 50070, J. J. Hill Vouchers, J. J. Hill Papers.

20. Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 495.

21. Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming The City: Politics, Faith and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 87; Cutler, "Charity Organization Principles," 6.

22. Haidet, *Legacy*, 15; Stillman to Board of Trustees, June 18, 1913, p. 7, r1, FS.

23. Haidet, *Legacy*, 16; Stillman, "Report . . . Sept. 30, 1913," p. 1; AC Board of Trustees, minutes, Jan. 23, 1912, p. 2, Aug. 22, 1914, p. 1; and Joint Committee, minutes, Aug. 1, 1913, p. 1—all r1, FS; *What the United Charities Has Done: Annual Report . . . September 1, 1924*, 1, UC Annual Meeting (Dec. 12, 1924) folder, box 4, FS.

24. Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 243, 466.

25. Haidet *Legacy*, 9–10, 13.

26. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 7, 1912, second sec., p. 1; Merrill E. Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy to St. Paul* (St. Paul: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1981), 230–47.

27. McLean to Executive Committee, Feb. 9, 1913, p. 1, and Nov. 25, 1916, p. 1, box 60, FS; Associated Board of Directors, minutes, Nov. 6, 1914, r1, FS; Haidet, *Legacy*, 13; "Social Insurance: What the United Charities Is and What it Will Accomplish," 1914 circular, UC chronological files (filed with Nov. 21, 1914), L. W. Hill Papers.

28. Haidet, *Legacy*, 17; on Cutler, see AC Board of Directors, minutes, Apr. 21, 1914, r1, FS. Contrary to founding philosophy, most C.O.S. agencies eventually resorted to providing emergency material relief; Klaassen, "Deserving Poor," 20. In just 10 years, United's relief budget would increase nearly tenfold, from \$6,000 in 1915 to \$53,075 in 1924. Report of General Secretary, presented at Mar. 23, 1915, board of directors meeting, r1, FS; "What The United Charities Stands For," 3, UC Annual Meeting (Dec. 12, 1924) folder, box 4, FS. The strength of St. Paul's Relief Society delayed the need for Associated Charities to provide relief; Cutler, "Charity Organization Principles," 42.

29. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Nov. 11, 1914, second sec., p. 1; "Charities Fund is Past \$6,000 Mark," clipping, Nov. 24, 1914, scrapbook 1895–1922, p. 13, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation Records, MHS.

30. McLean to Executive Committee, Nov. 25, 1916, p. 3.

31. Messrs. Cotton, Sherer, Wickham, and Stillman of the Program Committee (on Stillman's agency letterhead) to Louis Hill, Oct. 31, 1914, General Correspondence, L. W. Hill Papers.

32. Hill to Victor Watkins, Nov. 3, 1914, General Correspondence, L. W. Hill Papers; Stillman to "Dear Sir," undated, r1, FS. Among other arrangements, Wilder paid Associated \$400 a year for case-investigation services, assigned a full-time nurse to the Free Medical Dispensary, and provided some material-relief funding; Secretary's Report, Dec. 1, 1914–Dec. 1, 1915, *Bulletin of the United Charities of St. Paul 3* (Jan.–Feb. 1916): 26, 32.

33. "Wilder Board For United Charities," clipping, hand dated Dec. 10, 1914, Wilder scrapbook, p. 21. The Wilder endowment in 1914 amounted to nearly \$3 million; "Report of Amherst H. Wilder Charity," July 8, 1914, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation Minutes and Financial Reports, 1910–71, p. 99, microfilm copy, MHS.

34. Associated rescheduled the dinner for November 18. Hill received a form-letter invitation—ticket cost: \$1. Messrs. Cotton, Sherer, Wickham, and Stillman of the Program Committee to Hill, Nov. 3, 1914, and UC, Nov. 12, 1914—both in General Correspondence, L. W. Hill Papers; McLean to Executive Committee, Nov. 25, 1916, p. 2.

35. Hill to Winthrop G. Noyes, Relief Society treasurer, Dec. 4, 1914; Hill to W. L.

West, United Charities treasurer, Dec. 15, 1914, General Correspondence, Louis W. Hill Papers.

In spite of Hill's disaffection toward United, he still sought case information from them for his other charity work. On December 14, 1914, Hill wrote to the Relief Society's Hutchins, "Will you kindly step across the hall to [United] and get me . . . number of children, sexes, ages, condition and whatever information they have in connection with [these families]." In a handwritten closing, Hill added, "I should like to obtain this information from the United Charities without their knowing that it is for me." Louis Hill to Morgan Hutchins, Dec. 14, 1914, General Correspondence, L. W. Hill Papers.

36. UC, Secretary's Report, Dec. 1, 1914–Dec. 1, 1915, p. 20, and UC Executive Committee, minutes, Apr. 19, 1916, p. 1, Apr. 27, 1916, p. 1—all r1, FS. No evidence links Hill directly to the Relief Society's unwavering disinclination toward better relations with Associated/United, but it is reasonable to infer that Hill wielded some influence.

37. Here and two paragraphs below, *The Community Chest: A Report Submitted by the Joint Committee on Community Chest* (St. Paul: 1920), 14; Acting Chairman of the Budget Committee, Community Chest, to C. M. Powers, Aug. 11, 20, 1920; and UC Treasurer's Reports, Sept. 1, 1920–Sept. 1, 1921—all box 4, FS; Death Certificate 1920-MN-026185, MHS.

38. "Relief Agencies Go Separate Courses," *St. Paul Dispatch*, Sept. 10, 1935, clipping, UC Reorganization Plan—1935, box 4, FS; "The Society for the Relief of the Poor Fund," 1961, unattributed short history, A. A. Heckman to Dawson Bradshaw, Jan. 19, 1961, and Endowment Fund Balance Report, January 1, 2002–June 30, 2002—all in Society for the Relief of the Poor Trust Fund file, Family Service, Inc., administrative offices, St. Paul.

39. Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 89.

40. McLean to Executive Committee, Nov. 25, 1916, p. 2; UC Board of Directors, meeting minutes, Apr. 28, 1916, p. 1, r1, FS. Ruth Cutler died in the 1918 influenza pandemic while serving with the Red Cross in France; Lucy Cutler Fricke (Ruth's niece), interview with the author, Oct. 25, 2003.

Further evidence of Hill's feelings on women in the work place is apparent in a memo to the manager of the railroad's

cafeteria saying that Hill wanted the higher-paid male cooks staffing the line to be replaced by "girls at a cheaper rate"; H. H. Parkhouse to Ralph Budd, May 2, 1916, Great Northern Railway Co., President's office, Subject Files, File #6952, MHS.

41. McCormack, "146-Year History," 8. In 1916 Hill lobbied President Woodrow Wilson against the eight-hour day. Hill said, "We think we know more about running our railroads than the government does" and that an eight-hour day "would cripple our train service so we could not operate." *St. Paul Dispatch*, Aug. 23, 1916, p. 13; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Aug. 19, 1916, p. 1.

In time, Hill began working with United. By 1927 his wife, Maud, contributed financially, and their daughter Maud volunteered. During the Great Depression's early years, Hill supplied, warehoused, and distributed meat and vegetables for United Charities (among others), and, as was his custom, made some deliveries himself. And, in 1931, Louis W. Hill Jr. joined United's board of directors. Phone conversation between Hill's secretary and A. A. Heckman, then United's general secretary, reported in I. A. C. to Hill, Jan. 9, 1933; invitation list, UC Annual Meeting, Dec. 12, 1927, p. 3; "Report Sums up United Charities' Work for Needy," clipping, UC Annual Meeting Records, Dec. 27, 1927; and Annual Meeting (Dec. 9, 1931)—all box 4, FS.

42. McLean to Executive Committee, Feb. 9, 1913, p. 1, Nov. 25, 1916, p. 2.

43. McLean to Executive Committee, Feb. 9, 1913, p. 1.

44. In 1915 the University of Minnesota initiated one of the country's first social-work bachelor's programs (concurrent with Ohio State University and Indiana University). Stillman may have had a hand in its development. "Biographical Sketch: Charles C. Stillman," Nov. 18, 1951, p. 1; C. F. McNeil, "Citation concerning Charles Clark Stillman . . . June 11, 1948"; "'Stillman—the Man'—1949"; "School of Social Administration Building, Ohio State University," undated, 1–4, in Biography—C. C. Stillman—1916–1956; and two-page biography, "Charles C. Stillman"—all in Stillman papers; Trattner, *From Poor Law*, 227n6; Stillman to Executive Committee, Oct. 9, 1917, r1, FS.

45. McLean to Executive Committee, Feb. 9, 1913, p. 1, Nov. 25, 1916, p. 1–3.

46. Stillman, "Report . . . Sept. 30, 1913," p. 6, r1, FS.

The photo of Stillman is courtesy the Ohio State University Photo Archives; the Associated Charities card is from the Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; and the portrait of Ruth Cutler is courtesy Lucy Fricke, St. Paul. All other images are from MHS collections, including the swimming pool, from the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation photograph collection.



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