locality was full of game when he settled in it. A gun was accidentally discharged in his hands and the charge came near hitting one of his sisters when he was a young man, and he has never touched one since. He was one of the founders of the Free Lutheran church at Neby, three miles north of his place, and has been connected with it ever since in a leading way, serving as one of its trustees and as a participant in all its useful work of every kind.

JAMES JEROME HILL.

There are names which in themselves are a history and an inspiration—themes which are their own eloquent interpreters beyond the power of speech or writing—and who is there that can add a word or a thought to the story involved when before the people of the northwest, or any part of it, one mentions the name and calls to notice the achievements of James J. Hill?

The record of this master producer and empire builder is written in his work, and that is ever present under observation in the appreciative regard and service of millions of our people.

It is beyond the purpose of the present writing, however, to present a narrative of Mr. Hill’s life, and happily such an act is no longer anywhere necessary. The salient features of Mr. Hill’s career are so well known, the world over, that they need no repetition in any part of it. But his fruitful connection with the early history and development of Polk and the adjacent counties, especially in drainage, railroad building and agricultural progress, and the valuable results which have flowed from his activities here, have been so potential for good to this region that they are deserving of special mention in a work devoted exclusively to Polk county chronicles. Indeed, so productive of large consequences have those activities been that no compendium of Polk county history would be complete without some account of them.

Mr. Hill passed a number of the years of his early manhood at Fisher’s Landing, as the village of Fisher in this county was then called. Early in the seventies the thought of a possible railroad through the northwest began to occupy his mind. The thought came from his experience in Northwestern transportation problems, his faith in the productive powers and natural resources of this part of the country, and of the state of railroad conditions at the time. The feverish activity in obtaining land and cash in concessions to railroad enterprises during the sixties had brought on a collapse, and a great many of such enterprises were wrecked in the panic of 1873. But Mr. Hill retained his faith in his project and began to prepare for carrying it into tangible realization.

The fragments of the old St. Paul & Pacific system were available for the development of the northwest if converted into real assets, and the holders of their securities were eager to sell them for what they could get. Their value lay to a considerable extent in what was left of a land grant, and they were in the hands of a receiver. “Yet so great seemed the task and so uncertain the reward, in the general opinion,” according to Mr. Hill’s own statement, “that any plan of acquiring and reorganizing the property was regarded as visionary in those days by most holders of capital and most men of affairs.”

Mr. Hill did not share this view. In company with the late Lord Strathcona, George Stephen, afterward Lord Mount Stephen, and Norman W. Kittson, he bought the defaulted bonds and at once began operations. The gaps in the lines that first required filling were those between Melrose and Barnesville and Crookston and St. Vincent. Filling the former was necessary to save the land grant, whose time limit, already extended, was about to expire; and filling the latter was required for connection with a railroad projected by the Canadian government from Winnipeg south. These gaps were soon filled, and the sub-