

Thomas J. Hill

March 4, 1805-1894



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¹Thomas Jefferson Hill, son of Cromwell Hill, was born March 4, 1805, died in 1894. His schooling was very limited, attending the public schools intermittently until he was fourteen year's old, and then entered the blacksmith shop of his father where he learned his trade. He subsequently served an apprenticeship in the machine shop of Pitcher & Gay at Pawtucket, manufacturers of cotton machinery. Except for three months, when he was employed in the repair shops of Jenkins & Mann at Manville, he remained with Pitcher & Gay, afterward the firm of Pitcher & Brown, as apprentice and journeyman, for nine years, during four of which he was a contractor and employer on his own account. He went to Providence, April 19, 1830, to take charge of the machine shop of Samuel Slater, an adjunct

of the latter's cotton mill. In 1834 he bought a two fifths interest in the machine shop and the business was conducted under the name of the Providence Machine Company, Samuel Slater being the silent partner in the concern. After the death of Mr. Slater, in 1835, his interests in the Providence Machine Company were sold. The business prospered. In 1837 Mr. Hill bought the Lee Mill at Willimantic, Connecticut, intending to move his business thither, but after repairing the factory and manufacturing the machinery at his Providence shops, he started a thread mill in 1840. Five years later he sold the thread business to A. D. & J. Y. Smith, and in the same year built a new machine shop on land bought of the Stonington Railroad Company. In 1846 he became sole owner of the Providence Machine Company, then one of the largest and most efficient establishments in New England for manufacturing cotton and

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woolen machinery. In 1847 he manufactured the first fly-frames, which have since been perfected and patented and sold to mills in all parts of the country, being in universal use to-day.

In 1849, the Androscoggin River Water Power, at Lewiston, Maine, was bought by Benjamin E. Bates, Francis Skinner and others and the Lewiston Water Power Company was organized in 1850. Mr. Hill became a stockholder and organized the Bates & Hill Manufacturing Company. Four cotton mills, known as the Bates Mills, Nos. 1 and 2, and the Hill Mills, Nos. 1 and 2, were erected. In 1850 Mr. Hill built a foundry and rented a machine shop at Lewiston, Maine, where he built part of the machinery for the mills, in partnership with Samuel W. Kilvert, formerly foreman of his foundry at Providence. In 1864 he sold part of his stock to Amos D. Lockwood and others, who organized the Lewiston Machine Company. In 1866 he sold his remaining shares. He bought part of the Peckham Mills at East Greenwich, Rhode Island, manufactured part of his machinery and started a cotton mill, which he called the Bay Mill, from its location on Greenwich Bay. This mill he afterward gave to his two sons. Mr. Hill owned several hundred acres of land at Hill's Grove on the old Stonington Railroad, seven miles from Providence, and in May, 1867, with G. Blackburn, Samuel W. Kilvert and Smith Quimby, formed a partnership and organized the Rhode Island Malleable Iron Works with a capital of \$100,000. Mr. Hill was president and treasurer of the company. A large foundry for making malleable iron castings was erected. Mr. Hill sold his holdings in this concern a few years before he died.

In 1874 he associated his son, Albert Hill, and son-in-law, Charles M. Pierce Jr., and G. J. Hazard, who had been in his employ, and incorporated the Providence Machine Company with a capital of \$350,000. Mr. Hill was president and treasurer and held those offices until the time of his death. In 1875 he built at Hill's Grove a mill having 20,000 spindles, for the manufacture of fine cotton yarn and named it the Elizabeth Mill in honor of his wife. He owned Hill's Wharf and Pike's Wharf at Providence and other wharves at East Greenwich. In 1866 he organized the Providence Dredging Company, and in 1874 the Providence Pile Driving and Bridge Company, which built the Crawford Street bridge in Providence and other bridges. Mr. Hill gave the lot on which the railroad station stands at Hill's Grove and paid half the cost of the building. In 1869 at a cost of \$4,000 he built a hall for religious meetings. He gave the land on which the Hill's Grove Methodist Church is built. He attended the Methodist church, but

gave liberally to other denominations.

He was a member of the Providence Board of Trade for many years; president of the Lime Rock National Bank for nearly forty years; vice-president of the City Savings Bank of Providence, January 6, 1859 to 1884, and also a trustee. He was a member of the Providence city council, 1848-52, 1855-56 and 1878, and member of the general assembly of Rhode Island. He was a member of the Rhode Island Historical Society and of the Rhode Island Agricultural Society.

He married (first) October 12, 1825, Betsey Brown, who died May 9, 1859, daughter of Sylvanus and Ruth Brown, of Pawtucket. He married (second) December 9, 1861, Olive I. Farnham, who died November 16, 1866, daughter of Stephen and Hannah Farnham, of Canterbury, Connecticut. He married (third) August 9, 1869, Elizabeth C. Kenyon, daughter of John H. and Ruth (Collins) Kenyon of Warwick. She was a descendant of John Kenyon, one of the pioneers of Kingston. Children by first wife: 1 James Brown, born August 20, 1827, died September 21, 1827. 2. Abby Ann, born April 19, 1829, died June 23, 1829. 3. William Wallace, born July 5, 1830, died December 23, 1871: part owner of the Bay Mill; married Emily M. Fuller Copeland, who died May 19, 1890: child, Walter Cushman, born February 10, 1855, died September 27, 1856. 4. Albert, born March 3, 1834, died at East Greenwich, November 5, 1880: part owner of the Bay Mill. 5. Amanda Elizabeth, mentioned below. 6. Thomas Henry, born July 19, 1840, died the same month. Mr. Hill's residence at 42 Lockwood Street was built in 1849, and he lived there until he died, his widow dying there, December 19, 1908. Amanda Elizabeth Hill, daughter of Thomas Jefferson Hill, was born August 7, 1836. She married, November 28, 1860, Charles M. Peirce Jr., of New Bedford.