

HALLOCK HILL

In earlier days there was a custom in nearly every community for the neighbors to call and "sit up with the sick". Usually there was some certain person who was the first to arrive at the bed of illness and the last to leave. Eventually, the neighborhood learned to depend on that person and, inevitably, he became quite as beloved as the family physician.

Hallock Hill was one of those, and moreover, as a health officer for the city of Topeka for more than 25 years, his visits to the homes of thousands of Topekans made him a familiar figure throughout the city.

Mr. Hill was a Civil War veteran and one of those energetic young soldiers who, at the close of the war, came West. He arrived in Topeka in 1866 and lived here remainder of his life with the exception of 14 years spent on a farm which he purchased in Wabaunsee County and which neighbored that of his father, Christopher Hill, who had homesteaded a short time earlier.

As a soldier he had an interesting record. When war broke out between the Union and Confederate States in 1862, Hallock, an 18-year old, left his home in New York State in March of that same year to enlist in the 15th U.S. Infantry. Because of an injury he later was discharged from the regular army but, upon his recovery, enlisted with the 109th Volunteer Infantry of New York which was later consolidated with the 51st N.Y. Vol. Infantry.

Most of the service of Hill's regiment was along the Potomac River and he took part in all of the active campaigns in that district. He saw the surrender of General Robert E. Lee to General U.S. Grant. He was at Fortress Monroe when Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States, was held prisoner there. When Lincoln was assassinated, his regiment was called from duty on the Potomac River to participate in the search for the assassin. At the close of the war, the regiment took part in the historical two-day review of the Army of the Potomac in Washington.

A number of Hill's relatives served as officers in the Confederate Army. His father's cousin, A.P. Hill, was a major general and one of the best known officers of the South. Ancestors on his mother's side of the family had fought in the Revolutionary War.

Hill was mustered out in July 1865 near Alexandria, Virginia. An epidemic of smallpox had broken out and Hill, one of the few who had been vaccinated, stayed to take care of his stricken comrades. The epidemic lasted several months. Hundreds of the soldiers died but Hill helped nurse many back to health.

When the disease had run its course, he returned to his home in Mount Hope, New York and a short time later came West.

Without a single relative or acquaintance in the state, Hill arrived in Topeka, Kansas on October 15, 1866. A friend at home had given him a letter to "Uncle Chet" Thomas, one of the prominent citizens of Topeka. From North Topeka, where he left his train, Hill walked across the pontoon bridge to "Uncle Chet's" office on Kansas Avenue. He boarded at the Garvey House which stood on the northeast corner of Fifth and Kansas Avenue, the present site of the Federal Building.

Like most pioneers, Hill had a number of personal experiences with Indians. He was once made a member of the Cheyenne tribe and forced to lived with the tribe for a considerable time.

Not long after his arrival, Hill joined two other men in a trading expedition among the Indian camps. Their two wagons were loaded with such goods as sheets of silver for the making of ornaments, food and tobacco but no whiskey. The first camp of Indians was found on the Arkansas River where Wichita now is and the traders exchanged much of their stock for robes and furs. Another stop was made about 30 miles southwest. At the third camp the traders had so depleted their stock that two of the men decided to return to Topeka for more supplies. The Indians were Cheyenne and friendly. By sign language Hill's partners told the chief that they would return in one moon, then loaded one wagon with the furs they had traded for and started for Topeka. Hill stayed in camp with the wagon containing the remaining stock.

During the first month, Hill was given the best of treatment. Then the spring rains came causing the Kansas streams to rise and make the country impassable. The two traders did not return and the Indians were not treating Hill with their former respect. Finally the chief called at his tent and in broken English and by signs, told Hill that it had been more than one moon since the other traders had gone and that he did not believe that they would return. As he followed the chief out of his tent he saw the other Indians helping themselves to his stock. That night the tribe broke camp and went southward. When camp was made again the chief, who seemed to enjoy the opportunity of having a white man for a prisoner, indicated to Hill that he must look like an Indian. He was stripped of his clothing and furnished with a breech clout and a blanket. Still dissatisfied with Hill's appearance, the chief ordered his eyebrows and beard pulled out and warned he must not escape.

After carefully thinking over the matter of escape, Hill decided that the best method would be to get into the good graces of the Indians and endeavor to get permission to become a herder for the tribe, and, then, to seize the first opportunity to get away. The waiting was long and wearisome. In the meantime, a smallpox epidemic broke out in camp. Recognizing the symptoms and using the few simple remedies at hand, he did the best he could for those afflicted, thereby gaining the gratitude of the chief and his confidence as well. Once he was permitted to accompany a group of the tribesmen to the trading post of "Dutch Bill" but was warned to say nothing to the trader under penalty of a tomahawking. It was at "Dutch Bill's" store that Hill first saw "Buck" Smith who was employed as a clerk. Twenty years afterward, Hill met Smith in Topeka and recalled their meeting but Smith never knew that one member of the band was a white man so carefully had the Indians disguised him.

As the weeks went by, Hill sought to increase the Indians' trust in him, and eventually, he was given the job of herding and was even allowed to carry a rifle. A few weeks of herding in the day time convinced his captors that their prisoner had no desire to escape and he was permitted to herd at night. Finally, one foggy night it appeared that his chance indeed had arrived. Mounting a stolen mule bearing the United States brand, he rode at break-neck speed all night. There were no stars to guide him but a natural sense of direction took him in the proper general course. At daybreak he hid in a ravine and during the day saw parties pass by in search of him. On the second day the stars shone and the going was easier. With little rest he rode all the next day, and, at nightfall, saw a ranch house in the distance. He tied his mule a mile away, as a precaution, and walked the rest of the way to a house. It was the home of a man named Meade. Hill's troubles were over.

A few days later, Hill found a party of traders who were returning to Topeka for supplies and he joined them. He came into the city by the Burlingame Road and thereafter maintained that Topeka never looked prettier to him than it did at that time.

Hill returned from that adventure in May 1867. For two years he farmed the Douthitt tract of 80 acres and then moved to Wabaunsee County where he farmed for 14 years on land near that of his father's homestead. In 1883 he returned to Shawnee County and lived in Potwin, then a separate corporation from Topeka. The first city job held by Hill was that of street commissioner and city marshal of Potwin. He was appointed by James Troutman who then was mayor of

Potwin. He held the position for seven years. In 1901, after Potwin had become a part of Topeka, he was appointed to the city health department. At the time of his retirement, he was 80 years old and was the oldest employee in point of service in that department.

Hallock Hill was born in Mount Hope, Orange County, New York, on December 17, 1844. He married Agnes Casson and had three children: Burton Hill, who was a pioneer in the dog food industry, Louis H. Hill and Elizabeth Ann Hill. He died October 20, 1925 and is buried in Rochester Cemetery, Topeka, Kansas.

Addenda:

The grandchildren of Hallock Hill are, in order of birth, Faye Dawna (Hill) Davis-Greene, Fern Darlene (Hill) Hogue and Floy Daylia (Hill) Hancock. He died in Kansas City while visiting his daughter, Elizabeth Ann (Hill) Tilley.

Faye (Hill) Davis Greene

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The material was, for the most part, compiled from two newspaper interviews given by Hallock Hill and which were solicited by reporters from the Topeka, Kansas papers.

Faye (Hill) Davis Greene remembers sitting on the lap of Hallock Hill, her grandfather, and listening to him tell the story about his capture by the Indians. He was a kindly man, beloved by all who knew him.

Faye (Hill) Davis Greene