

**Dr. William Hill (1829-1906)** was a talented surgeon and one of Bloomington's most respected physicians in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Hill came to the area at the close of the U.S. Civil War, having served as a surgeon in the Union Army, and quickly made his mark in both medicine and politics. Hill's medical reputation was such that he was called to serve patients throughout Central Illinois and was sought after as a teacher by many would-be doctors, including many that would go on to serve the residents of McLean County. As an unabashed Democrat, he served in the Illinois state legislature from 1881 to 1882 and as a United States consul in Port Sarnia, Canada in 1885. Known for his honesty and outspokenness, Hill was an important fixture in local society and his death in 1906 was seen by many as the end of an era.<sup>1</sup>

William Hill was born in Middletown, Butler County, Ohio on March 12, 1829, one of ten children born to William and Isabella (Barker) Hill.<sup>2</sup> His parents were described as poor "but among the worthy and respectable people of the neighborhood."<sup>3</sup> When he was seven years old, Hill's family moved to a farm on the outskirts of Dayton, Tippecanoe County, Indiana. There he helped his family with farm work, except for three months each winter when he attended a local subscription school.<sup>4</sup> Though limited, this early schooling apparently instilled in Hill an ambition and desire to do better for himself and, at age 18, he left the family farm.

Hill traveled to Indianapolis, Indiana where he began to study medicine under Dr. A. T. Merrit (J. W. Merrit in some sources). After two years of training, Hill supplemented his practical education with a course of medical lectures held in La Porte, Indiana, funded by earnings from his work under Dr. Merrit.<sup>5</sup> In 1851, Hill struck out on his own, establishing a practice first in Middletown, Indiana before moving to Louisville, Indiana in 1853. During this time, he continued his education, using his earnings from his practice to attend medical lectures in Ann Arbor, Michigan each winter. Afterwards, he attended Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, graduating with a degree in medicine and surgery in 1856.<sup>6</sup>

Besides a medical practice, William Hill also began a family around this time. At some point he married Sarah Carr, with whom he had one daughter, Sarah Ellen, born around 1854 (d.1932) in Terre Haute, Indiana.<sup>7</sup> This first marriage was short-lived, however, with Carr apparently dying sometime between 1854 and 1856, at which time Hill moved to Salem, Illinois. That November, Hill married a second time to Frances P. Roach in St. Louis, Missouri. With her he would have two more children, Henry Otis (1857-1867) and Daisy Deane (1871-1951).

Born April 1, 1836, to a prominent family in Charlottesville, Virginia, Frances Roach had moved to Salem with her family as a young girl. Her father, John Roach, was a friend and neighbor to Silas Bryan, remembered in history as the father of noted orator and politician William Jennings Bryan. The friendship between the Bryan and Roach families extended to

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<sup>1</sup> "Dr. Wm. Hill in Last Sleep," *Daily Bulletin*, March 2, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> Find-a-Grave Memorial for William Hill, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/23748619/william-hill>, Accessed August 20, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> "Local Men of Note," undated, Dr. William Hill Scrapbook, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

<sup>4</sup> "Liked No Democrat," *Daily Bulletin*, February 20, 1899; Subscription schools were a type of private school common in rural areas of the United States. Instead of relying on local taxes or fixed tuition for support, these schools charged parents for the number of days each of their children attended. "Subscription school," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subscription\\_school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subscription_school) (8 July 2021).

<sup>5</sup> "Dr. Hill is Dead," *The Daily Leader*, March 2, 1906; "Dr. Hill is Dead," *The Pantagraph*, March 2, 1906.

<sup>6</sup> "Dr. Wm Hill Unconscious," *Daily Bulletin* (Bloomington, IL), March 1, 1906; Jacob A. Hasbrouck, "Dr. William Hill" in *History of McLean County* (Topeka-Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Company, 1924), 592.

<sup>7</sup> "Mrs. Sarah E. Elkins Dies in Delaware," *The Pantagraph*, February 19, 1932.

Roach's new son-in-law (Dr. William Hill) who became the Bryans' family physician. In 1860, Hill served as the attending physician for the birth of William Jennings Bryan and family lore held that the infant was named in honor of the doctor.<sup>8</sup>

Hill and his family remained in Salem for ten years, during which time he built up a successful medical practice and invested in local real estate, including the construction of a building on the corner of Main Street.<sup>9</sup> However, a major interruption in his medical career came with the coming of the Civil War in 1861. Hill traveled to Camp Butler outside of Springfield, Illinois and joined the Union Army as a surgeon, serving with the 48<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry until the following year when he resigned due to ill health.<sup>10</sup> He soon recovered, as later that same year he took another post as surgeon with the 1<sup>st</sup> Missouri Light Artillery. Hill remained in the army until February 1863, having attained the rank of Major.<sup>11</sup> Per family lore, Hill's young son, Henry, served briefly in Hill's unit as a drummer boy.<sup>12</sup>

In October of 1865, after the end of the war, Hill moved to Bloomington, having heard the city had a demand for doctors. In an interview with one of the newspapers in Bloomington, the *Daily Bulletin*, Hill recalled later in life that as he was settling into his new hometown, he was introduced to one of the physicians of the city. The unnamed physician asked him why he located to Bloomington. Dr. Hill, who found the physician's question a bit impertinent (especially coming from a colleague), answered that "people had said they needed a good physician in Bloomington, so I came in answer to that need." And with that, Hill said that physician did not speak to him for 20 years, even though they passed each other daily.<sup>13</sup>

Hill located his new practice in a small frame building on the southeast corner of East and Front streets (102 S. East Street, the current location of the CII East building). He remained at this site for the rest of his career, eventually expanding the original structure into a large brick edifice known as the Hill block. His building was called "the greatest loafing place for physicians in the city."<sup>14</sup> Hill's wife and children joined him on April 1 of the following year.<sup>15</sup> In 1870, Hill built a fine home for his family at 109 E. Olive Street (site of Bloomington's City Hall today), two blocks from his office, where he would reside the rest of his life.<sup>16</sup>

Hill's transition to life in Bloomington was not a smooth one. Although he had served in the Union Army for two years, Dr. Hill came under suspicion as a potential Southern sympathizer, owing to the fact he was a staunch Democrat, a party then heavily associated with the rebellious South. Because of this, Hill later commented that he felt the war did not end in Bloomington

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<sup>8</sup> "Mrs. William Hill, 94, Dies at Home of Her Daughter Here," *The Pantagraph*, June 4, 1930; "Veteran Physician Retires," *The Pantagraph*, July 17, 1902.

<sup>9</sup> "New Family Grocery," *Salem Weekly Advocate*, April 3, 1862; "Late Sales," *Salem Weekly Advocate*, February 23, 1865.

<sup>10</sup> "The Doctors Were Puzzled," *The Pantagraph*, December 31, 1895; "Wm Hill Unconscious," *Daily Bulletin*, March 1, 1906.

<sup>11</sup> "Wm Hill Unconscious;" "1<sup>st</sup> Missouri Light Artillery List of Regimental and Company Officers," Excerpt from the Annual Report of the Adjutant General of Missouri for the Year ending December 31, 1865, pp. 399-402, <http://turnerbrigade.org/history/ag1moof/> (July 8, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> "Mrs. William Hill, 94, Dies at Home of Her Daughter Here," *The Pantagraph*, June 4, 1830.

<sup>13</sup> "Liked No Democrat."

<sup>14</sup> Bill Kemp, "Bloomington's skilled 19<sup>th</sup> century surgeon," *The Pantagraph*, October 30, 2011; "Dr. Wm. Hill in Last Sleep."

<sup>15</sup> "Liked No Democrat;" "Dr. Hill is Dead."

<sup>16</sup> "Pillsbury House-End of an Era," *The Pantagraph*, November 13, 1960; Hasbrouck, 593.

until about two years after it had ended in the South. Some of this suspicion may have fueled several incidents that took place shortly after Hill first came to Bloomington.<sup>17</sup>

On two separate occasions, Dr. Hill was accused of being a “resurrectionist,” or body snatcher. In addition to his regular medical practice, Hill regularly took on students, and even ran a local institute for teaching anatomy.<sup>18</sup> Part of his students’ training included human dissection, for which specimens were kept in his office. One day, while removing the body of an expired patient for burial, an undertaker’s assistant discovered one of the dissected cadavers in the back room. This ultimately led to a mob congregating outside Hill’s office and accusing him of body snatching. It took a committee of five men investigating the matter to eventually calm and disperse the crowd.<sup>19</sup> In 1891, Hill was again accused of being a body snatcher when the superintendent of the electric company came to retrieve an arc lamp from the basement of Dr. Hill’s building. Hill, who was not in a good mood that morning, refused to allow him into his basement. A couple of days later, the superintendent returned with his manager/attorney to once again attempt to retrieve the lamp. This time, Dr. Hill wasted no time and slyly welcomed them in, telling them to “make themselves at home.” They went down into the basement, which was “as dim as twilight.” In the corner of the basement, the attorney bumped into an object, and upon lighting a match, illuminated the “hideous corpse of a man within a foot of the attorney’s face. The arms of the gruesome object were lifted and extended as if to grasp the barrister. The body had been pickled and carbolized for dissection,” with a portion of its face and neck having already been dissected. The frightened men fled the scene and headed for “a tonic at the nearest wet good prescription parlor.” The lamp was never found, and if it was in Dr. Hill’s basement, was likely to stay there.<sup>20</sup>

In another incident a few years later in 1870, Hill was nearly shot after a political disagreement with young lawyer Thomas McNulta turned violent. Having been called a liar by Hill, McNulta attempted to strike him, and failing in that, shot at him only to hit bystander Parke Temple in the foot.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Hill faced personal tragedy with the death of his only son at the age of ten in 1867.<sup>22</sup>

Despite this rough beginning, Hill soon established himself as one of the area’s premier physicians. He was easily recognizable on the street, over six feet tall and habitually garbed in a silk top hat and tailcoat.<sup>23</sup> An active member and officer of both the McLean County Medical Society and the Central Illinois Medical Society, he regularly presented papers at their meetings and often served as a delegate to medical conventions.<sup>24</sup> Hill’s papers and speeches were well-received, being both informative and entertaining. In one instance, an “instructive and humorous” paper on syphilis was so popular that he was requested to give an encore presentation for the young men of a local Methodist church.<sup>25</sup>

In late 1869, Hill briefly expanded his business to include a partnership in the People’s Drug Store with fellow veteran, Sanford K. Vanatta. Also known as Hill & Vanatta, the drug store was initially located on the downtown Liberty Block before moving to the corner of Main and Grove

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; “Dr. W. Hill’s Anatomical Institute,” *The Pantagraph*, December 17, 1867.

<sup>19</sup> “Liked No Democrat,” *Daily Bulletin*, February 20, 1899.

<sup>20</sup> “In Dr. Hill’s Cellar,” *The Pantagraph*, March 10, 1891; Kemp, “Bloomington’s skilled 19<sup>th</sup> century surgeon.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.; “Unfortunate Occurrence,” *The Pantagraph*, June 28, 1870.

<sup>22</sup> “Funeral Notice,” *The Pantagraph*, July 26, 1867.

<sup>23</sup> “Dr. Wm. Hill in Last Sleep,” *Daily Bulletin*, March 2, 1906.

<sup>24</sup> “Friends in Need,” *The Pantagraph*, May 2, 1877.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

streets. The venture was short-lived, and the partnership was formerly dissolved in November 1871, with the pharmacy being sold to Dr. R. D. Bradley.<sup>26</sup> Hill and Vanatta remained life-long friends, however. Hill would partner again a couple years later, this time with his former student Dr. C. R. Carr, in a joint medical practice where Hill maintained his own specialty in surgery while Carr focused on issues concerning the eye and ear. Carr retained his own office while keeping daily office hours at Dr. Hill's.<sup>27</sup> An early student of Hill's when he first came to Bloomington after the Civil War, Carr had returned to the area after completing training in New York City and Europe.<sup>28</sup> By 1876, another physician, Dr. Elias F. Stahl, also joined Hill, working at Alton Depot during the day and at Dr. Hill's office at night.<sup>29</sup> As with Carr, Stahl was a recent medical school graduate who had returned to his home city to work.<sup>30</sup> It appears that Hill was using his own network and reputation to help launch the careers of these younger physicians, an attitude in keeping with his lifelong dedication to teaching and education. Carr soon became a prominent physician in Bloomington, while Stahl moved to Mackinaw.<sup>31</sup>

Having these younger doctors on hand to tend to his patients no doubt proved valuable when Hill became a patient himself, having his own health crisis in the spring of 1875. On May 22, Hill, with several other local doctors as witnesses, conducted an autopsy of M. J. Fitzpatrick, a well-known local politician from Funks Grove who had died the day before after being stabbed in an altercation with another local man. Initially expected to recover, infection had set in, and Fitzpatrick expired several days later.<sup>32</sup> While sewing back together an incision made during the examination, Hill received a small wound on the first joint of his index finger that he had used to push the needle through. Although he promptly treated it with disinfectant, by the following day the wound showed signs of blood poisoning, or bacterial infection in the bloodstream. Hill became seriously ill and although he soon recovered, he would deal with lingering health issues the remainder of his life, which he blamed on this episode.<sup>33</sup>

His health somewhat recovered, Hill soon dealt with another crisis, one that brought his own medical abilities into question. As before, it centered around an autopsy, this time of fellow physician Dr. Edward Roth, a resident of Danvers, who died of starvation after losing the ability to swallow in late 1877. To determine the exact cause of Roth's condition, Hill and three other physicians, Worrell, Hutchinson, and White, conducted an autopsy of Roth's remains.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, after the relevant organs had been removed from the body and laid out for inspection, a mix-up occurred, with Roth's aorta mistaken for his esophagus. Although the mistake was soon realized and corrected, it resulted in a misreporting of the cause of death in the local paper as a hardening of the esophagus. Some local physicians accused Hill and his colleagues of negligence, and the McLean County Medical Society demanded a full report at the following month's meeting.<sup>35</sup> Offended by what he saw as an overreaction to a simple mistake, Hill decided to teach the society a lesson. At the following society meeting in October, he and

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<sup>26</sup> "Dissolution," *The Pantagraph*, November 29, 1871.

<sup>27</sup> Advert, *The Pantagraph*, May 21, 1875.

<sup>28</sup> "Dr. C. R. Carr, Pioneer Physician, Dies Thursday," *The Pantagraph*, April 18, 1919; William LeBaron, Jr. & Co. *The History of McLean County, Illinois, Illustrated*. (Chicago: Wm. Le Baron, Jr. & Co, 1879), 770.

<sup>29</sup> Advert, *The Pantagraph*, February 19, 1876.

<sup>30</sup> "The City," *The Pantagraph*, March 10, 1875.

<sup>31</sup> "Personal," *The Pantagraph*, June 5, 1877.

<sup>32</sup> "Post Mortem," *The Pantagraph*, May 22, 1875; "The Knife," *Pantagraph*, May 21, 1875.

<sup>33</sup> "Blood Poisoning," *The Pantagraph*, May 24, 1875.

<sup>34</sup> "A Novel Malady," *The Pantagraph*, January 24, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*; "The Wise Doctors," *The Pantagraph*, September 4, 1877.

his colleagues dutifully presented a thorough report on the findings on Roth, including the correct cause of death due to a hardened aorta pressing in on Roth's throat, which prevented him from swallowing. Specimens from Roth's body were provided to the society members for examination, including one identified as a piece of Roth's esophagus. Hill and his colleagues admitted to their initial error, but noted that it had been corrected and that anyone could make a mistake. They then demonstrated this to the society as Dr. Worrell announced to those gathered that the esophagus sample that they had unquestioningly accepted as human was in fact a vena cava, or large vein attached to the heart, from a calf. Dr. Hill had gotten it from a local butcher, having begun planning the trick since first ordered to make a report three weeks before.<sup>36</sup> Hill was promptly censured for his stunt, although this censure was officially rescinded the following meeting after Hill convinced the society of his view that they had overstepped their bounds.<sup>37</sup> Despite the controversy, Hill's relationship with the society soon mended and he was ultimately elected president, as well as vice president of the state medical society, in 1880.<sup>38</sup>

By then, a new concern had arisen before McLean County's physicians, the possibility of establishing a medical college in Bloomington. Hill was a major supporter of this effort, drafting a charter and offering his own building on Front Street as a location.<sup>39</sup> Interest in this endeavor rapidly spread among the city's doctors and after several meetings it was officially sanctioned by the county's Medical Society.<sup>40</sup> A board of trustees for the Bloomington Medical College was organized and plans were made to start the first term in the fall.<sup>41</sup> Hill was appointed Professor of Theory and Practice of Surgery.<sup>42</sup> Finding a location for the school proved a problem, however. Prominent local businessman, Asahel Gridley, offered to sell a property on East Grove Street, apparently with the condition the school be named for him, but this seems to have been rejected.<sup>43</sup> At one point, plans were made to make the college a department of Illinois Wesleyan University, but these fell through as the university lacked appropriately ventilated space for dissections.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, it appears plans for the school were abandoned. Although Hill's dreams of a medical college failed to materialize, he continued to take on students and often taught classes and hosted lectures at his office.<sup>45</sup> It was noted that Dr. Hill was "always a great friend of the students...always lending a helping hand trying to assist him forward and upward." Hill served as a mentor and trained thirty-six students throughout his career.<sup>46</sup>

Besides medicine, Hill was a political man and heavily involved himself with the local Democratic party. Known as "one of the most ardent Democrats of the old school," he was

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<sup>36</sup> "Pickwickian Pathologists," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), October 2, 1877; "The Pickwick Anatomy Club," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), October 3, 1877.

<sup>37</sup> "The M.D.'S," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), November 6, 1877.

<sup>38</sup> "McLean Medicals," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), April 6, 1880; "The Illinois Meds," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), May 20, 1880.

<sup>39</sup> "The Medical College," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), January 30, 1879; "On Its Feet," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), April 8, 1879.

<sup>40</sup> "Among the Meds," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), March 4, 1879.

<sup>41</sup> "On Its Feet," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), April 8, 1879.

<sup>42</sup> "Bloomington Medical College," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), May 6, 1879.

<sup>43</sup> "Gridley Medical College," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), April 24, 1879.

<sup>44</sup> "Meeting of the Medical College Projectors," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), April 22, 1879; "The Medical College," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), June 18, 1879.

<sup>45</sup> "Chemistry Class," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), February 17, 1879; untitled, *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), December 7, 1880.

<sup>46</sup> "Local Men of Note."

reputed to “make things lively” in local campaigns.<sup>47</sup> In 1880, he was nominated as the Democratic candidate for the Illinois state legislature.<sup>48</sup> After months of local campaigning, Hill won the election, serving in the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly in Springfield from 1881 to 1882. It was during his run that, while returning from a patient’s home, a bullet struck Hill a glancing blow on the left side of his face. Initially thought to be a politically-motivated attack, an anonymous letter to the local newspaper, the *Pantagraph*, revealed it to be an accidental stray shot resulting from the shooter, himself a Democrat, defending a cow from a pack of stray dogs.<sup>49</sup>

Although he served for only a single term, Hill kept things “lively” as expected. Within the first month, he was reported to be introducing a bill to convert the Illinois Soldier’s Orphans’ Home in McLean County into an asylum, though this was likely only a rumor spread by political opponents or, considering Hill’s sense of humor, a misunderstood joke that had snowballed into conspiracy.<sup>50</sup> A more substantiated incident occurred that February when Hill attended a joint meeting between the Senate Committee on Miscellaneous Affairs and the House Committee on License. Members were debating the licensing of saloons versus Temperance when Hill, who appears to have been in favor of the latter, inquired if any members of the Whisky Ring were present.<sup>51</sup> As this was essentially an accusation of corruption, it greatly angered the committee chair Senator Mamer and nearly led to a physical fight. Mamer ultimately left the room in a rage rather than hear the Temperance advocates speak.<sup>52</sup>

There was one instance where Hill did find common cause with Republicans, and that was when he joined with them in voting against a dog tax. Hill had an aversion to dogs, believing a dog bite had contributed to his only son Henry’s early death.<sup>53</sup> In later years, when reflecting on his time in the legislature, Hill noted that his primary activities were to receive his pay and to “let my constituents know I was still on earth [and] raise an occasional row,” as there were too few Democrats in the legislature to wield any significant political power.<sup>54</sup> Hill’s time as a representative was short. He lost the next nomination to Simeon West, although there could not have been hard feelings, as Hill would later go on to manage West’s campaign for the 1884 county primary.<sup>55</sup>

His legislative career at an end, Hill returned to his medical practice full-time, resuming a partnership with his friend Dr. Allen T. Barnes. Originating in January 1879, the partnership had been temporarily dissolved while Hill served in the state legislature, but resumed in June 1881. As with previous collaborations, Hill focused on surgery while his partner served as a general practitioner.<sup>56</sup> Their friendship was particularly notable, for Barnes was as strong a Republican as Hill was a Democrat.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “Who Will Be Mayor?” *The Pantagraph*, January 31, 1880.

<sup>48</sup> “Hill’s Haul,” *The Pantagraph*, May 10, 1880.

<sup>49</sup> “A Stray Shot,” *The Pantagraph*, April 10, 1880; untitled, *The Pantagraph*, April 13, 1880.

<sup>50</sup> “Orphans Versus Insane Persons,” *The Pantagraph*, January 19, 1881.

<sup>51</sup> The Whisky Ring Scandal was an 1875 conspiracy involving midwestern distillers and distributors bribing government officials and agents to avoid paying federal taxes on the whiskey they sold. It was often seen as representative of Republican corruption during Grant’s presidency after the war. “Whiskey Ring”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiskey\\_Ring](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiskey_Ring) (July 8, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> “A Bit of a Row – Dr. Hill Stirs Up the Animals,” *The Pantagraph*, February 24, 1881.

<sup>53</sup> “Liked No Democrat,” *Daily Bulletin*, February 20, 1899.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> “Soothing Obsequies,” *The Pantagraph*, September 1, 1882; “Democrats’ Day,” *The Pantagraph*, June 23, 1884.

<sup>56</sup> Untitled, *Pantagraph*, January 6, 1879; untitled, *The Pantagraph*, June 4, 1881.

<sup>57</sup> “Dr. Wm. Hill in Last Sleep,” *Daily Bulletin*, March 2, 1906.

In 1885, Hill once again sought political office. At this time, the presidency was held by Grover Cleveland, the first Democrat elected to the office since the Civil War. Wishing for a change of scenery and hoping as a Democrat himself to take advantage of the political patronage system, Hill traveled to Washington, D.C. to campaign for an appointment as a consulate in Europe. He was supported by many prominent Illinois politicians, many of whom felt that too many positions were being awarded to Chicago Democrats at the expense of those in the rest of the state.<sup>58</sup> Hill was ultimately successful in his quest for a consulate, but not in Europe as he desired. Despite his efforts, which included studying French and German, Hill was appointed to Port Sarnia, a small town in Canada opposite of Port Huron in Michigan.<sup>59</sup> He shortly removed there with his wife and youngest daughter, taking rooms in the local hotel, the Huron house.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, Hill's stay in Port Sarnia was brief. He was forced to resign after only a few months due to poor health, thought to have been brought on by the effects of the blood poisoning he had suffered years ago.<sup>61</sup> Hill and his family returned to Bloomington. Although he would continue to remain active in local politics, including serving on a reception committee for former Vice President of the United States, Adlai E. Stevenson I, in August 1900, and running for city alderman in 1902, Hill would never again hold office.<sup>62</sup> He did, however, eventually make it to Europe, visiting briefly in 1889, and again with his wife and daughter Daisy in 1895.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the setbacks to his own health, and his own advancing age, Hill's medical career continued as strong as ever. Hill expanded into the railroad business, becoming the local surgeon for the Lake Erie & Western Railroad, and serving as President of the Tri-State Railroad Surgical Society.<sup>64</sup> In 1894, he began the Cottage Hospital for housing his own surgical patients in a home on East Grove Street. It remained in operation for three years, treating over a hundred patients before closing due to financial issues, with Hill ultimately trading the property for the Kingman Farm in Normal Township.<sup>65</sup> That same year, Hill and Dr. Hall were reported to be using chloroformed dogs to practice a new method for uniting severed intestines from gunshot wounds.<sup>66</sup> This procedure may have been the use of Murphy's button, invented in 1892 by Dr. John Benjamin Murphy, a prominent surgeon and friend of Dr. Hill who had often consulted with him on various cases. This device was designed to hold the two severed halves of an intestine together in a way that allowed them to heal without obstructing the organ while minimizing infection. Hill was the first surgeon to successfully use the "button" on a typhoid patient in Bloomington, repairing the intestinal tearing that was a common and deadly complication of the disease.<sup>67</sup>

Hill was thoroughly beloved by many practitioners and his patients throughout the county and community. "He was kind, considerate and gentle to every patient" that he treated. One example of his compassion for his youngest patients came from a meritorious idea that he implemented in

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<sup>58</sup> "Dr. Hill in Washington," *The Pantagraph*, October 18, 1885.

<sup>59</sup> "Consul to Sarnia," *Daily Bulletin*, October 20, 1885.

<sup>60</sup> "Dr. Hill in the City," *Daily Bulletin*, October 30, 1885.

<sup>61</sup> "Dr. Hill Ill," *The Pantagraph*, December 9, 1885; "Dr. Wm Hill Unconscious," *Daily Bulletin*, March 1, 1906

<sup>62</sup> "To Welcome Stevenson," *The Pantagraph*, July 21, 1900; "Democratic Primaries," *The Pantagraph*, March 15, 1902.

<sup>63</sup> "Will Travel on Business Principals," *The Pantagraph*, July 29, 1889; "Off for Europe," *The Pantagraph*, April 19, 1895.

<sup>64</sup> "Will Go to Texas," *The Pantagraph*, May 1, 1894; untitled, *Pantagraph*, May 19, 1894.

<sup>65</sup> "Cottage Hospital Closed," *The Pantagraph*, January 16, 1896; "Dr. Hill Buys Another Farm," *Pantagraph*, May 22, 1900.

<sup>66</sup> Untitled, *The Pantagraph*, August 24, 1894.

<sup>67</sup> "Dr. Murphy's Early Days," *The Pantagraph*, August 15, 1916.

1885. It was reported that he discovered a new and unique anesthetic for eliminating pain while performing operations on children. His method: simply to play upon a violin before the operation. Following the operation, he would continue to play to take a child's mind from the wound. Dr. Hill employed this method to avoid the use of "dangerous gases" on children which were known to cause physical and mental injuries on his youngest patients.<sup>68</sup>

Hill's family also continued to expand. His eldest daughter, Sarah, had long-since married and moved with her husband to Washington, D.C., leaving only the younger daughter, Daisy, at home. On November 9, 1898, Daisy married up and coming local architect Arthur Pillsbury and two years later gave birth to the Hills' only grandchild, Frances Pillsbury.<sup>69</sup> The young family lived with the Hills in their home on East Olive Street.

In July 1902, at the age of 73 and after more than half a century of practicing medicine, Hill finally retired. At that time, he had one of the oldest practices in the city, having been in Bloomington for 37 years.<sup>70</sup> Although he no longer maintained an office, Hill continued to provide consultations. In late 1905, his health began to fail and on March 1, 1906, just a couple weeks before his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday, Hill fell into a coma and died the same day.<sup>71</sup> His death was thought to have been hastened by stress over his young granddaughter suffering from pneumonia.<sup>72</sup>

His obituaries, published that same day in the local papers the *Pantagraph* and the *Daily Bulletin*, described Hill as a "born surgeon" who "embodied more qualities that appealed to the average man than almost any other doctor who ever lived in Bloomington."<sup>73</sup> The entire McLean County Medical Society attended his funeral on Saturday, March 3, and presented to Hill's family a copy of a resolution they had passed earlier that day:

*Whereas, Dr. William Hill for many years an able practitioner of surgery and medicine, an honored man and citizen, was called from his field of earthly usefulness at the close of a long active life in the ripeness and fulness of age. He was always interested in the scientific practice of his profession, according to the ideals of his time, distinguished in our midst as an instructor and counselor to his professional brethren. Ever active in all that pertained to the welfare of the societies of the county and state he will be greatly missed from our ranks. His success in professional life will ever stand as worthy of emulation. Whether enduring the hardships of a pioneer practice or as an army surgeon, or in the operating or sick room, he ever considered the welfare of his patient of primary and supreme import. He was kind, considerate and gentle to every patient and thoroughly beloved by many practitioners throughout this country and community.*

*Therefore, We, the members of the McLean County Medical Society, his co-laborers, do hereby express to his family and friends, as well as to this*

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<sup>68</sup> "A Meritorious Idea," *The Pantagraph*, May 27, 1885.

<sup>69</sup> "A November Wedding," *The Pantagraph*, September 26, 1898; Lisa Dretske, "Arthur Pillsbury," 2009, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives; "Frances Pillsbury, 76, dies in hospital," *The Pantagraph*, July 7, 1978.

<sup>70</sup> "Veteran Physician Retires," *The Pantagraph*, July 17, 1902.

<sup>71</sup> "Dr. Wm. Hill Unconscious;" "Dr. Hill is Dead."

<sup>72</sup> "Dr. Wm. Hill in Last Sleep."

<sup>73</sup> Ibid; "Dr. Hill is Dead."



*community, our high appreciation of his worth, character, and service and our mutual sorrow at his death.*<sup>74</sup>

Funeral services were held at the family's residence on East Olive Street, with Reverend U.S. Davis of the First Baptist Church in charge of the services. Immediately following the brief services (owing to the fact that Hill's granddaughter, Frances, was ill), Dr. Hill was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.<sup>75</sup>

Hill's wife, Frances, outlived him by 24 years, passing away on June 3, 1930.<sup>76</sup> She was buried next to Dr. Hill in the family plot at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

His granddaughter, Frances Pillsbury, continued to live in the family home at 109 E. Olive Street until it was torn down in April 1961, a victim of urban renewal. The site is now home to Bloomington City Hall.<sup>77</sup>

By: Chelsea Banks, 2021

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<sup>74</sup> "Friends Pay Last Tribute," *Daily Bulletin*, March 5, 1906.

<sup>75</sup> "The Last of Earth," *The Pantagraph*, March 5, 1906; "Friends Pay Last Tribute."

<sup>76</sup> "Mrs. William Hill, 94, Dies at Home of Her Daughter Here," *The Pantagraph*, June 4, 1930.

<sup>77</sup> "Pillsbury House-End of an Era," *The Pantagraph*, November 13, 1960; "Urban Renewal Erasing Bit of Old Bloomington," *The Pantagraph*, April 2, 1961.