Mrs. Abbie Williams Hill, Distinguished Native Artist, Was Born in Grinnell

(Editors Note: The Herald-Register has just received from Mrs. R. B. Hill of 4160 Flumea Way, San Diego, Calif., some information regarding Mrs. A. R. Hill, her mother, who died on May 14 after a distinguished career during which for many years she was official scene artist for the great Northern railroad. Local interest in the article is given in the following quotation from Mrs. Hill’s biographical notes of a remarkable woman, Mrs. Abby Williams Hill. "My mother was born in Grinnell and was the daughter of Henry Warren Williams and Harriet Porter Hubbard, both early pioneers in Grinnell. She was contemporary with an outstanding group of young people who, in the years immediately following the credit and renown to Grinnell and its college, Among them were Dr. Dana Bartlett, Mr. William Brainard, Dr. Oliver Emerson, Dr. Albert Shaw, Mary Grinnell Mears, Dr. George White and many others. She was a cousin of Mrs. Oliver Park, a long-time resident of Grinnell, who recently died. I have heard my mother tell many an interesting story of these early associations. I believe it was in 1906 that the degree of Master of Arts was conferred upon my mother. I am sure that there are still old friends and acquaintances reached by your paper who would be interested in reading an account of my mother’s life, work and her death.

The article, written by William Frothingham of Hartford, Conn., and San Diego for publication in the Tacoma (Wash.) New-Tribune is too long to be reproduced in its entirety, but the Herald-Register is glad to reprint a part of it dealing with the story of Mrs. Hill's eventful ten by Mrs. Hill which appeared in the article as sent.)

Mrs. Hill was not only a great artist but the organizer and first president, in 1906, of the Washington State Congress of Mothers, which in 1915 sponsored the formation of Parent Life. Lack of space prevents publication of a number of interesting excerpts from letters written by teachers and school associations in the state. After her retirement from the work years later, she was made honorary president of the state branch.

Abby Rhoda Williams was born in Grinnell, Iowa in 1862. At an early age she showed unusual artistic ability and when nineteen attended the Chicago Art Institute, under the instruction of Mr. SPEED, its founder. At that time she began the study of German; and later, for two years she studied painting at a French school in Berliner-on-Haut, Canada, she became so proficient in French that she was given the highest certificate at that time issued to teach that language. Having by then decided to devote her life mainly to painting, she entered the Art Students League in New York City, becoming a pupil of William Chase. Her fia, Dr. Hill, was also in New York taking post graduate work. They were married in New York in 1889 and thereafter located their home in Tacoma. Several years later she and Dr. Hill spent some time in Europe chiefly for study, during which time Mrs. Hill continued her art as a pupil of Herman Haase in Munich. While abroad that time she also took a course in Political Economy at the University of Bonn. Besides the one son born to Dr. and Mrs. Hill, they adopted from time to time three little girls. Mrs. Hill’s passion for interest in children her sense of responsibility, and her extraordinary energy, perseverance, resourcefulness and courage showed themselves in her tending these four children about with her on her painting and educational expeditions in this country and abroad. During these trips she herself taught them. She emphasized the cut-door life, accompanying them when in the open, on daily hikes or boating trips, making them of educational value by teaching about nature, trees (one of the chief features of her paintings), sea life, etc. She believed in "making the punishment fit the delinquency and did not believe that if you "spared the rod, you would spoil the child.

Mrs. Hill's prominence as an artist led to her employment at different times by both the Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railroads. For them she took extended trips, her designs of their lines and did painting of great artistic value, that proved not merely for the purpose of advertising these railroads.


Her paintings were exhibited at the first World's Fair, in...
Scenic Artist
For Railway
Succumbs Here

Abby Williams Hill, 82, for many
years official scenic artist for the
Great Northern railway, died Fri-
day in her home at 1610 Plum-
way, after a prolonged illness. She
was the widow of Dr. Frank H.
Hill, and had resided here since
1931.

A landscape artist, she was a
pupil of William Chase, of New
York, and of H. F. Spradell, one of
the founders of the Chicago Art
Institute. She also studied in Euro-
pe. The Great Northern railway
exhibited her pictures at the world's
fairs in Chicago, Jamestown, Seat-
tle and St. Louis. Speaking French
and German, she taught her chil-
dren these languages. She held the
degree of M.A. from Grinnell col-
lege, Iowa. Grinnell was her birth-
place.

She leaves a son, Romayne Brad-
ford Hill, of San Diego, and three
adopted daughters, Mrs. James L.
Torres, of San Francisco, Eudalie
Hill and Mrs. Ina Hill, of San Diego.

Services will be conducted Tues-
day afternoon at 2 in the Universi-
ity Ave. Baptist church, the Rev. Or-
son P. Jones officiating. The
Erickson-Anderson mortuary will
be in charge. Burial will be in
Glen Abbey.

San Diego Union May 16, 1943 (article and obituary)

Hill, Abby Williams
Leaflet telling of Hill Collection of pictures,
painted by Mrs. Hill and given to University of Puget
Sound, Tacoma, Washington

Died: 1943 - leaflet filled in obit file