

Frank J. Sprague

(A '87, M '97, F '12, member for life)

President 1892-93

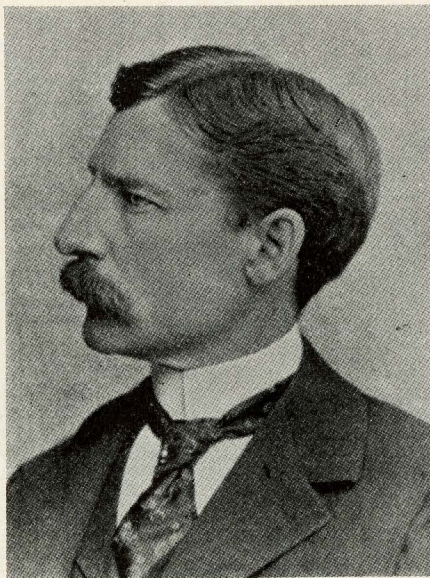
Honorary Member 1932

Edison Medalist 1910

OF THE early developers of electric motors and electric traction, Frank Julian Sprague is preëminent. His unflagging spirit and courage both as an inventor and as a financial manager had much to do with the successful development and operation of the electric trolley, the constant speed motor, the multiple unit, regenerative and remote control systems, and considerable equipment for elevator operation.

Mr. Sprague was born in Milford, Conn., in 1857. He early demonstrated his ability as a "financier" by borrowing money to attend the United States Naval Academy. It was while attending the Academy that the telephone was invented and his interest was aroused in things mechanical and electrical. He carried on experimentations in his free time, and in 1885, he resigned from the Navy and began his career as an electrical engineer, assisting Edison for one year. During this time he devised a mathematical system for determining the characteristics of central station distribution of electricity. Then he established his own enterprise, the Sprague Electric Railway and Motor Company, and immediately began the

application of electric motors to all kinds of stationery work, equipping the first electrically trained gun on the S. S. "Chicago." In 1887 he undertook a contract with the City of Richmond, Va., to plan, finance, and put into operation a street railway, the first successful system to be operated. Within 2 years his firm had received more than 100 contracts for similar work all



over the country and in Italy and Germany as well.

In the course of his career, he has organized a number of concerns bearing his name, some of which merged with such organizations as the General Electric Company. He is now president of the Sprague Safety Control and Signal Corporation and the Sprague Development Corporation.

Among his achievements are the introduction of electric high speed and house elevators, development of the automatic signaling and brake train control systems, and invention of the method of operating 2 elevators on the same rails in a common shaft. He has taken a keen interest in electrical traction in general, advocating underground rapid transit through the whole period of its development in New York City; also he has been interested in the electrification of the railroad, having served on the Grand Central Terminal Electrification Commission.

Mr. Sprague has long been active in Institute affairs, serving at various times as committeeman and as vice-president (1890-92). He represented the Institute and Inventors Guild on the U.S. Naval Consulting Board and was engaged in developing fuses and air and depth bombs during the war. He is a member of many technical societies; past-president of the New York Electrical Society, American Institute of Consulting Engineers, and the Inventors Guild; and the recipient of many distinctive awards.