HONOR F. J. SPRAGUE,  
‘EDISON OF TRANSIT’

Leaders in Science and Industry Pay Tribute on 75th Birthday to Electrical Inventor.

HE PREDICTS NEW ADVANCE

Father of Subway and Elevator Says Electrification of Big Railroads Is Next Step.

HOOVER HAILS THE PIONEER

Hayday and Admiral Robison List His Host of Achievements at Meeting in Engineers’ Hall.

Scientists and engineers, educators and inventors, industrialists and statesmen gathered in the Engineers’ hall in New York on Wednesday afternoon to celebrate the 75th birthday of F. J. Sprague, father of the trolley line, rapid transit, electric elevators, remote control, the commercial electric motor, and many other epoch-making inventions. Mr. Sprague was born in Whitehall, N. Y., on October 1st, the anniversary of his seventy-fifth birthday, at a gathering in the Engineers’ Institute meeting room Wednesday afternoon, 29 West Thirty-ninth Street.

Mr. Sprague is called Father of the Subway by Mr. John H. Finley, Mr. Sprague’s son, who responded with an address reviewing his father’s long career, and concluding with a prophecy of the progressive electrification of the main trunk line railroads of America. It is likely to follow in rapid advance after the present depression.

Admiral Robison, one of Mr. Sprague’s old friends, also spoke on the occasion, and read to the inventor a set of volumes containing more than 500 autographed letters from friends all over the world, written to him by leading engineers, writers, and leaders in the engineering and scientific world.

Mr. Sprague’s letter was read from a fellow-engineer, Herbert Hoover.

Tribute From Hoover

The President’s letter read as follows:

My dear Mr. Sprague:

I send you my cordial felicitation on your seventy-fifth birthday and all good wishes for the future.

Your contribution to the development of electrical power and light, and in the utilization of the application of electricity to street railways and to electric elevators is unique in the history of the world. With that distinguished group of inventors and engineers whose pioneer work made possible so many of our present utilities, comforts and conveniences.

In the electrical engineering and scientific world, should show grateful appreciation of your many contributions to the welfare services to the electric art, and it is with regret that I find I will not be able to be present at your anniversary celebration.

HERBERT HOOVER.

Mr. Sprague, then, dedicates the first practical electric system in the world to the public for the multiple-unit system now used on the New York Central and on the Brooklyn electric railways; the first electric elevators, culminating in the modern multi-story buildings in the same shaft; automatic remote control of the doors of banks, theaters, and many other purposes, and important features of modern electric railway signal systems.

Mr. Sprague is a native of New York City, and is the son of the late F. J. Sprague, Jr., who was one of the pioneers in the electrical industry.
A Comparison by Hedley

While the entire credit for the development of such an epochal invention as electric traction belongs to no one individual, Mr. Hedley said, Mr. Sprague’s contributions have been essential “that it has rightfully been he who has the same relation to electric transportation that Thomas A. Edison bore to electric illumination.”

“The New York subways,” Mr. Hedley said, “are not operated by Sprague’s multiple-unit systems, by which they are able to give the public a faster acceleration, greater frequency of train service at a higher speed and moderate cost, safety than ever would have been possible according to Sprague’s inventive genius. Frank Sprague is primarily responsible for some of the most important miracles of transportation, and the traveling public will owe a tremendous debt to him.”

Rear Admiral Robison pointed out that the inventor was a graduate of Annapolis, class of 1878, where he received a fundamental education in physics and his experimental knowledge of electricity.

“It has been said,” Admiral Robison said, “that when Sprague in 1887 arrived in Richmond, in 1887 he awoke the world of civilization to an acknowledgment that the electric railway, though an infant, had a future. His success brought him contracts for 138 street railways within two years.”

Federal Aid Suggested.

“If some of the hundreds of millions of capital,” Mr. Sprague said in his response, “which the National Government is ready to dole out for unproductive public works were diverted to legitimate and some electric railway equipment, a long step would be taken toward economic recovery. Transportation is the key to civilization; in fact, it is civilization, for without out our existing social structure would fall to pieces. The vital foundation, regarded as one of the means of travel, is the country’s vast network of trunk-line railroads, now to be consolidated, according to the recent decision of the Interstate Commerce Commission, with a limited number of balanced systems.

A cursory glance at the map indicates much interfacing of these aggregates, and how they lend themselves to ultimate development of common sources of power supply attainable and available only through high-voltage transmission. The trunk-line railways, now commercially practical over long distance, because of the development in high-tension transmission.

For progress in this direction cooperation is needed in technical and manufacturing effort toward one of the first and the greatest advances of this direction has been recently affected. This achievement, coupled with this progress already made, is warrant for prediction that the progressive electrification will be the next great advance and its initiation is not far distant.”

Admiral Robison later repeated his talk over KETV in a National Broadcasting Company network.