

# MATTY'S MEMOIRS ::

By  
FRANK MATTY  
As Told to  
JAMES GORDON FRASER

## CHAPTER XVI.

The subway franchise fight was, except for the mayoralty campaign in which I was defeated by Alan Forbes, the hottest, most bitter and most unusual one ever waged in Syracuse.

It happened away back in 1896, with J. K. McGuire in the Mayor's office. He had been elected on a "reform ticket," declaring his independence of all the Democratic bosses and everybody else, and he started out to give the people what they always want and never get—an honest effort by an honest man to run public affairs in an absolutely honest way.

William B. Kirk was then the nominal head of the Democratic organization. Eugene Hughes, who was one of three brothers who ran a stone-yard over on the bank of Onondaga Creek at Gifford st., where the typewriter works is now, was Kirk's right-hand man. Col. John F. Gaynor, a Fayetteville man who made millions in the contracting game, was State committeeman. William P. Gannon was the Syracuse Rapid Transit power. And these four cooked up the first subway scheme.

You know, in those days, all wires were on poles—telephone, telegraph, electric light and all. Salina st. was a forest of poles and wires. A bird could hardly fly off the sidewalk without hitting a wire. Most of the downtown streets were just as bad. And if that system had continued until today, you couldn't get through the business district because of poles and wires.

Well, Kirk, Gaynor, Hughes, Gannon and one or two others conceived the idea of constructing subways in the business streets to carry all wires, and then compelling the lighting company, the telephone company and everybody else, using the wires, to use the subways. They got the idea from New York, where it had been done a short time before—with great profit to everybody connected with Tammany Hall. And, when they came to me with the scheme, I could see no reason for opposing it.

I might as well say, right here, that I am still of the opinion that the subway franchises were a great thing for Syracuse. I have been condemned more or less on account of them than almost anything else I ever did, but I can honestly say, looking back after nearly 40 years, that I am glad I did what I did do.

Of course, McGuire made a terrible outcry. He raced back and forth across the city, stopping at all newspaper offices, to rouse the populace against what he called the most gigantic franchise steal ever perpetrated in Syracuse. A little later, you'll get a chuckle out of that, if you'll remember it.

Without half-trying, McGuire stirred up a hornet's nest around our ears. But, in spite of all that, it was child's play for me to put the blanket franchise through the Common Council. I had 13 votes that the angel Gabriel couldn't have taken away from me, and I used them. As a matter of fact, I used only 12, voting against the thing myself, just to make McGuire madder. It was a trick I used a lot in those days—it helped to befuddle reformers who tried to paint me as the chief franchise-grabber and who were usually dumfounded to find my vote recorded in opposition.

McGuire promptly vetoed the franchise, denouncing Kirk, Gaynor, Hughes and the rest, and being lauded by the newspapers to the skies as the popular hero who was protecting the people's interest. Just as promptly, I passed the franchise again over the veto, having the votes to do it. And that made the franchise as good as a government bond.

I wish the folks alive today could have seen the commotion. You could hardly find anything else in the newspapers. The preachers bombarded us from every pulpit, and Chancellor James R. Day came down from the university to a chamber of commerce dinner and advised riding us out of town on a rail. He said we were a bunch of ward-healers and saloon-keepers and thieves.

The upshot of it all was that the Chamber of Commerce got behind a scheme to beat us in a new way. They got Horace White, who was then senator, to introduce a bill in the Legislature, creating a subway commission for Syracuse, something like the grade crossing commission is now. It was to have power to issue bonds for \$50,000. White's brother, Ernest, was back of the proposition, but I don't see any need of going into that angle of it, at this late date.

The bill went down to Albany and, while we were waiting for action, Donald Dey, who was then president of the Chamber of Commerce, and Ernest White, got a group of business men together to make an offer to build the subways and turn them over to the city as soon as they were paid for out of the rentals. I don't believe they would have done it, but anyway, it was turned down. And everybody settled back to wait for action at Albany.

Ted Wells, who died recently, was one of the assemblymen then and he had the handling of the bill in the Assembly. If I am not mistaken, Col. Joe Bondy was another assemblyman. And it was largely because Wells delayed the bill that it didn't get through both houses and actually pass until long in April.

Under the law, as it was then, all local legislation had to be sent to the city it effected, for the approval of the Mayor and the Common Council. If it was disapproved, it could be re-passed by the Legislature and become law just the same.

But the subway commission didn't work out that way. The Common Council turned it down. After taking the full 15 days allowed by law, McGuire approved it, of course, and we still turned it down. And, by the time it got around to Albany again, it was too late to do anything about it. The Legislature adjourned and went home without attempting to repass the bill. I saw that through some friends in New York.

Well, you can see that left the field clear to the Kirk-Hughes-Gaynor crowd, with an unlimited right to collect rent from every wire that went under the streets.



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But, as a matter of fact, they didn't actually want to build subways. What they wanted to do was to sell their rights to the telephone company which, then, looked like the biggest user of subways. They negotiated for a long time, but the telephone company wouldn't pay the price.

That was where matters stood when Sim Dunfee, concerning whom I have told you earlier in this narrative, came to me one day and said:

"Frank, you got that subway franchise through pretty smooth for Bill Kirk and Gene Hughes. I suppose that settles the subway business?"

I asked him: "Why? What do you care about it?"

Sim replied: "Well, I just wondered. Could you give more than one franchise like that?"

I thought it over and I couldn't see why not. So, I told him: "We could give a dozen, if we had the votes—and the people who wanted the franchises."

Sim said: "All right, you get the votes. I've got the people who want a franchise."

It turned out that Sim had tied up with the telephone company, then called the Central New York Telephone Company, and wanted another subway franchise. And there was nothing to do but give it to him. Anything Sim Dunfee wanted from me, he could have had, to say nothing of a franchise or two.

When that news got out, you would think revolution had broken out in Syracuse. There couldn't be much more excitement. Kirk, Gaynor and Hughes almost went crazy. They had not thought it was necessary to take Dunfee in on the original plan, but they certainly lived to regret it. Be-

cause we jammed through a franchise for Sim about as fast as we put one through for Kirk and Hughes. Of course, McGuire vetoed it and, of course, we passed it over his veto.

You would have thought that McGuire might be glad we nullified this "gigantic steal" he had been talking about, wouldn't you? But you would be wrong. Because McGuire had, in the meantime, patched up things with Kirk and Hughes and was depending on them to renominate him for another term. And he pitched in and fought like a major to keep Dunfee's franchise from going through. As a matter of fact, he even came down to the Common Council meeting and begged and pleaded with several of my boys to turn it down and let Kirk, Hughes and Gaynor have a free field!

What the papers did to McGuire for that was a caution! For once, they forgot me and concentrated on him. In my scrapbooks, I find dozens of clippings showing how they pilloried him. They claimed he had never been on the level with his opposition to the Hughes franchise, or, if he had, had sold out for a promise of renomination. I read the papers for a few days with more enjoyment than in several years.

It was a tough spot, though, for me. Kirk and Gaynor and Hughes and McGuire and all the rest of the big Democratic chiefs threatened to beat me for alderman that fall. That was when Sim Dunfee pulled his famous line: "Don't worry. Sim is smarter than any of them—you stick to Sim and Sim will see you through!"

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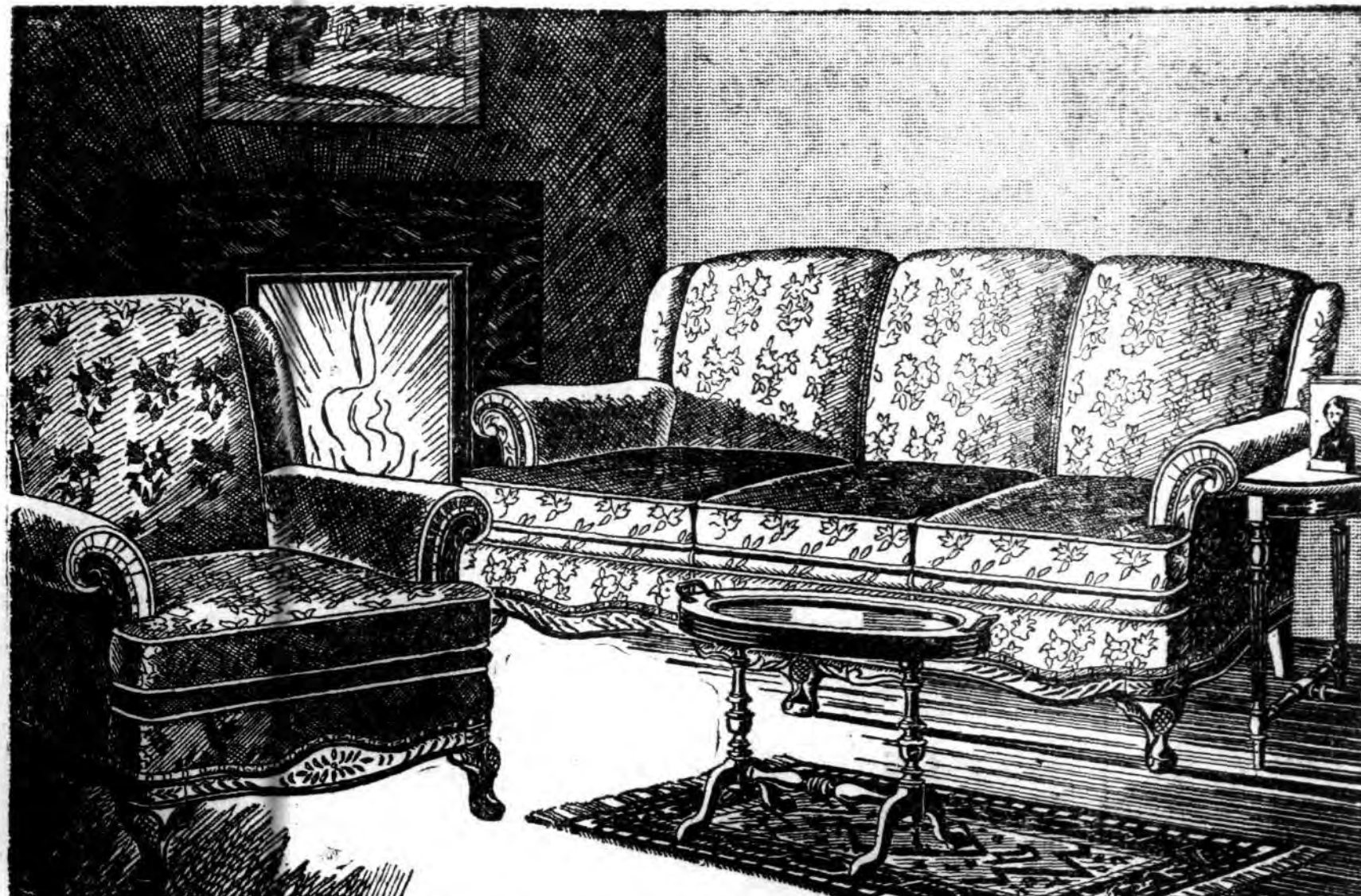
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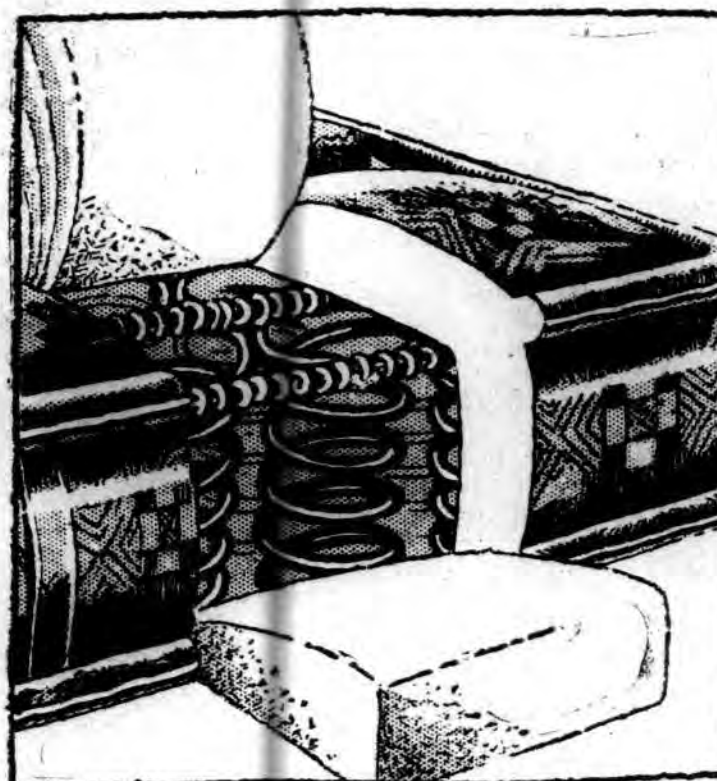


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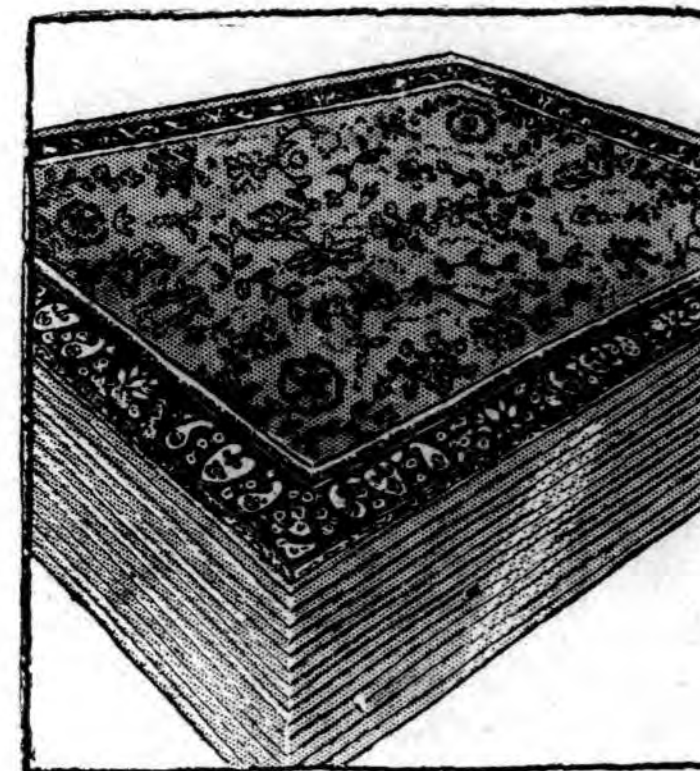
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