

MATTY'S MEMOIRS

CHAPTER XVII

I have mentioned in earlier chapters how the street railroads in Syracuse grew up from the old horse-car lines, first as independent enterprises and then combined as the Consolidated Lines and the Syracuse Street Railroad Company, finally getting under one management as the Syracuse Rapid Transit Company.

All of these old franchises were full of holes. A good lawyer, honestly trying to do it, could have driven my best team of horses through any of them. None of them gave the city anything in return for the perpetual rights given to use the streets, except for some of the later ones in which I, personally, insisted that the city get at least a little something.

One of McGuire's greatest issues was opposition to the street railroad interests, which he always called "the franchise-grabbers." He campaigned along that line the first time he ran, and after he got elected and got rid of Charlie Ide as corporation counsel, he had Jim Newell, Ide's successor, start a suit to revoke the franchise on the ground they were invalid.



FRANK MATTY.

Col. John F. Gaynor, Democratic state committeeman, was interested in the Syracuse and Suburban, and also in the old Syracuse Street Railway Corporation, or what was left of it. And there was quite a lot of opposition to giving the Rapid Transit a clean bill of health and a virtual monopoly on the trolley business.

The newspapers went after us almost as hard as they did on the subway franchises, but I put it over, just the same. We passed the franchise ordinance over McGuire's veto, after one of the wildest nights the old city hall ever knew. The place was full of people, taxpayers and lawyers and lobbyists and plain cranks and reformers and what-not. Bob Drake, who was counsel to the Rapid Transit, and Loomis Allen and Ed Tozier, both of whom the old-timers will remember, came over and worked with me, and finally, we put it across.

Here is the interesting part of it.

In order to soften up McGuire, I agreed to include in the franchise an amendment providing that the traction company must pay one-fourth mill for every passenger carried after Jan. 1, 1906. But I didn't put the amendment in the original franchise!

First, I repassed the franchise ordinance, exactly as it stood. And then, I introduced and passed the "amendment," which read like this:

"The said Syracuse Rapid Transit Railway Company, its successors, and assigns, shall pay into the city treasury for the use of the city of Syracuse annually on the first day of January in each year commencing with the Jan. 1 after the year 1905, one-quarter mill per passenger carried by said company over its roads or any part thereof which it now owns and operates within the city of Syracuse, or which it is hereby authorized or permitted to operate, and in case of any such payments being not made as above provided, then the same may be recovered by the city in an action instituted by it for that purpose, and to enable the city and its officers to ascertain the amount of such cash fare collected by said corporation from passengers carried by said corporation, over its said roads or lines, from which it has received or collected cash fares,

By
FRANK MATTY
As Told to
JAMES GORDON FRASER

the books of said corporation shall at all times be open after the date above mentioned to the inspection and examination of the treasurer of the city of Syracuse or his duly appointed agents.

"The said Syracuse Rapid Transit Railway Company, its successors or assigns, shall, on or before the 26th day of July, 1897, file with the city clerk an acceptance of this franchise."

How many people knew that anything like that was on the books?

Well, there was a great clamor about that "amendment." Some lawyers said it was meaningless and invalid, because it was simply passed after the franchise had been granted. Others said it was all right. But nobody ever saw a dollar of that money collected. By 1906, the trolley company was carrying a lot of people, and one-quarter of a mill for each of them would have amounted up to a tidy little sum. But, so far as I know, no effort was ever made to collect.

As for the Rapid Transit, it just ignored the whole thing, and as is usually the case when the public utility corporations have smart lawyers hired and smart politicians on the stock books, the Rapid Transit got away with it. I remember that, the night we put the deal over, Joe Griffin, then an alderman, got up on his feet and announced that he had seen all he could stand and intended to quit.

He said:

"This is a cursed franchise! It is the most damnable piece of business I have ever seen. That amendment doesn't amount to anything; the company already has its franchise. The whole thing is an outrage upon the people!"

I accused Joe of being a demagogue and reminded him:

"You don't know anything about the people. You would just as soon make a working man walk as let him ride."

And McGuire signed the amendment!

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