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# HONOR F. J. SPRAGUE, 'EDISON OF TRANSIT'

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

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## HE PREDICTS NEW ADVANCE

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

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## HOOVER HAILS THE PIONEER

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Hedley and Admiral Robison List His Host of Achievements at Meeting in Engineers' Hall.

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Scientists and engineers, educators and inventors, industrialists and statesmen, including President Hoover, Nicholas Murray Butler, Owen D. Young, Charles M. Schwab, Michael I. Pupin, Gerard Swope and a host of other leaders, paid tribute last night to Frank J. Sprague, father of the trolley line, rapid transit, electric elevators, remote control, the commercial electric motor, and many other epoch-making inventions, on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, at a gathering in the Engineering Societies Building, 29 West Thirty-ninth Street.

The speakers included Frank Hedley, president of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company; Rear Admiral S. S. Robison, retired, and Dr. John H. Finley. Mr. Sprague responded with an address reviewing his long career, and concluding with a prophecy of the progressive electrification of the main trunk line railways as "the next great step in advance after the present depression."

Admiral Robison, one of Mr. Sprague's oldest friends, presented to the inventor a set of volumes containing more than 500 autographed letters from friends all over the world, with photographs of the writers. One of these letters was 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 felicitations on your seventy-fifth birthday and all good wishes for the future.

Your contribution in the development of the electric motor, followed by the application of electricity to street railways and to elevators, links your name for all time with that distinguished group of inventors and engineers whose pioneer work made possible so many of our present utilities, comforts and conveniences.

It is fitting that the engineering and scientific world should show general recognition of your noteworthy services to the electric art, and it is with regret that I find I shall not be able to be present at your anniversary celebration.

Yours faithfully,

HERBERT HOOVER.

Mr. Sprague's achievements include the first practical electric trolley at Richmond, Va., in 1887; the multiple-unit system now used in all subways and on many other electric railways; the first electric elevators, culminating in the modern dual system using two elevators in the same shaft; automatic remote control system for fire doors, banks, theatre curtains and many other purposes, and important features of modern electric railway signals.

## 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 so essential "that it has rightfully been said that he bears the same relation to electric transportation that Thomas A. Edison bore to electric illumination."

"The New York subways," Mr. Hedley continued, "are operated by Sprague's multiple-unit system, with which they are able to give the public faster acceleration, greater frequency of train service at a higher speed and factor of safety than ever would have been possible without Frank Sprague's inventive genius. Frank Sprague is primarily responsible for some of the most important miracles of transportation, and the traveling public owes and always 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 his fundamental education in physics and his experimental knowledge of electricity.

"It has been said," Admiral Robison said, "that when Sprague invaded Richmond in 1887 he awoke the world of transportation to an acknowledgment that the electric railway, though an infant, had a future. His success brought him contracts for 113 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 sane 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 it our existing social structure would collapse. The vital foundation, regardless of all others 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, into a limited number of balanced systems."

"A cursory glance at the map indicates much interlacing of these aggregations and how they lend themselves to ultimate dependence upon common sources of power supply attainable and available only through the use of electricity, now commercially possible over long distance, because of the development in high-tension transmission."

"For progress in this direction cooperative technical and manufacturing effort is vital. Happily, one of the first and the greatest advance in this direction has been recently affected. This achievement, coupled with the progress already made, is warrant for my prediction that the progressive electrification of main trunk-line railways is not only inevitable but after the present depression it will be the next great advance and its initiation is not far distant."

Admiral Robison later repeated his talk over Station WEAJ and a National Broadcasting Company network.