

SPRAGUE
SAFETY CONTROL AND SIGNAL
CORPORATION

421 CANAL STREET

NEW YORK, Sept. 23, 1929

FRANK J. SPRAGUE,
PRESIDENT

Mr. J. W. Hammond,
General Electric Company,
Schenectady, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Hammond:

I am glad to learn that you are engaged in preparing a history of the General Electric Company, the successor of so many pioneer ones, - a story to be based upon original sources of information. Fortunately, the work has been undertaken while many of the early workers are alive, and before their records are scattered or destroyed. It should, therefore, be of exceeding interest and importance, for it will cover over a half-century of an astounding development.

My life span has seen this entire growth, and I am thankful that it has been my good fortune to have participated in it. I was not born to the purple, but was projected into the electrical field via the U.S. Naval Academy, where under the influence of the late Admiral W.T. Sampson I developed great interest in this subject, my latent scientific bent being further stimulated by the fast growing events of the early '80s.

Opportunities at the Newport Torpedo Station in 1881, my association with Professor Farmer, and particularly my experience as a juror at the Crystal Palace Exposition in 1882, all intensified my interest in the new industry. While in London I was ambitious to electrify the Underground Railway, developing two plans, one the forerunner of the modern trolley, but instead, I resigned from the Naval Service to join Mr. Edison. His ambition was to light the world, mine was absorbed in what I deemed a future of even greater possibilities, the use of electricity for power in all its phases, industrial and traction, - and our ways soon parted.

The successful introduction of the Sprague motor in 1884 was followed by a renaissance of interest in traction, which led to the Richmond enterprise, and nearly a decade later to the multiple unit system, both declared to be epochs in electric traction, for the former eliminated animal power, and the latter not only solved the rapid transit problem, but has gone a long way to make main line electrification possible.

Speaking of conditions existing when he wrote his famous History of England, Macauley said that "Of all inventions, the alphabet and printing press excepted, those inventions which have abridged distance have done most for the civilization of our species.

Mr. J.W.Hammond-- #2

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Every improvement of the means of locomotion benefit mankind morally and intellectually, as well as materially."

Another author has said that "Probably no other factor has contributed more substantially to human progress than transportation."

Is it too much, then, to say that electric traction, albeit only one of hundreds of uses of electricity, has indeed been one of the factors of far-reaching importance in its contribution to the growth and comfort of urban and suburban communities, and that it is destined to even a greater status?

With the vast system of interconnected central station plants now made possible by the inventions of these prolific years, light and power have gone hand in hand with other electric developments to render unbounded service to humanity, and your story of the early days will, I am sure, be of immense help to a popular and true understanding of what the pioneers went through, as well as of great value to your company.

Sincerely yours,

