

CHAPTER XIX

RAPID TRANSIT IN BROOKLYN.

RAPID TRANSIT development in Brooklyn naturally followed the successful operation of the elevated railroads in New York, although several years elapsed before the growth of Brooklyn reached a point which demanded better and quicker transportation than was afforded by the horse car lines. These had multiplied with great rapidity in the period between 1850 and 1870, when New York's first elevated railroad began practical operation. But by that time Brooklyn had grown to be a city of 400,000 people, and the demand for rapid transit was already insistent. It had been partially supplied by the Long Island Railroad and other steam roads leading to Coney Island, but aside from these the city itself had no means of rapid transit.

The first project of note was that of the Brooklyn Steam Transit Company, chartered in May, 1870, for the purpose of building an elevated railroad from the East River to Flatbush. The charter covered both underground and elevated construction, allowed two or more tracks and gave wide choice of a route, which was to run from Fulton Ferry to the southern limits of Prospect Park in such streets as might be found most convenient. It permitted the use of steam or any other power except horses. The company was to provide both first and second class cars, but in the city limits was not to charge more than ten cents for a first class fare. The capital was to be \$3,000,000 with power to increase it to \$7,000,000, and the right to extend the line to and through any towns of Kings County was granted. At least one mile of road must be built within three years.

The list of incorporators included the names of many men then and afterwards famous in the civic life of Brooklyn. Among them were Samuel McLean, Seymour



ENGINEERS OF PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION.

1. Daniel L. Turner, Chief Engineer, 1917.
2. Alfred Craven, Chief Engineer, 1912 to 1917.
3. Robert Ridgway, Engineer of Subway Construction.



L. Husted, Henry E. Pierrepont, Alfred S. Barnes, A. A. Low, Archibald M. Bliss, Jacob I. Bergen, Cyrus P. Smith, John Lefferts, William C. Kingsley, Simeon B. Chittenden, Benjamin F. Tracy and Alexander B. Powell.

The project, however, came to naught. The length of the proposed road was more than five miles, and its estimated cost more than \$5,000,000. Subscriptions to the capital stock came in slowly, and the panic of 1873 made the financing all the more difficult. In that year it was reported in the press that only \$500,000 had been subscribed, and after many ups and downs the company went out of existence, the Court of Appeals in 1879 deciding that it had forfeited its charter by its failure to build in the specified time. The company had broken ground to begin work on June 1, 1878.

Meanwhile the company destined to operate the first elevated railroad in Brooklyn was organized. This was the Brooklyn Elevated Railroad Company, which was chartered in 1874 with \$5,000,000 capital to build a "silent, safety" road from the end of the proposed Brooklyn Bridge, then just started, to Woodhaven in Queens, through several Brooklyn streets and Fulton Avenue, East New York. It was also to have a branch to Fulton Ferry. It was provided in the charter that steam locomotives might be used for motive power, but that they should not emit smoke or cinders and that the noise of operation should be lessened by suitable devices. The latter provisions seem to have been honored mainly in the breach.

The incorporators included Jacob Cole, Cornelius B. Payne, John H. Burtis, Abraham Lott, B. F. Clayton, John L. Nostrand, Job Johnson, Florian Grosjean, John Q. Kellogg, Joseph F. Bridges and other well known citizens of the time. Burtis was elected president and Kellogg secretary.

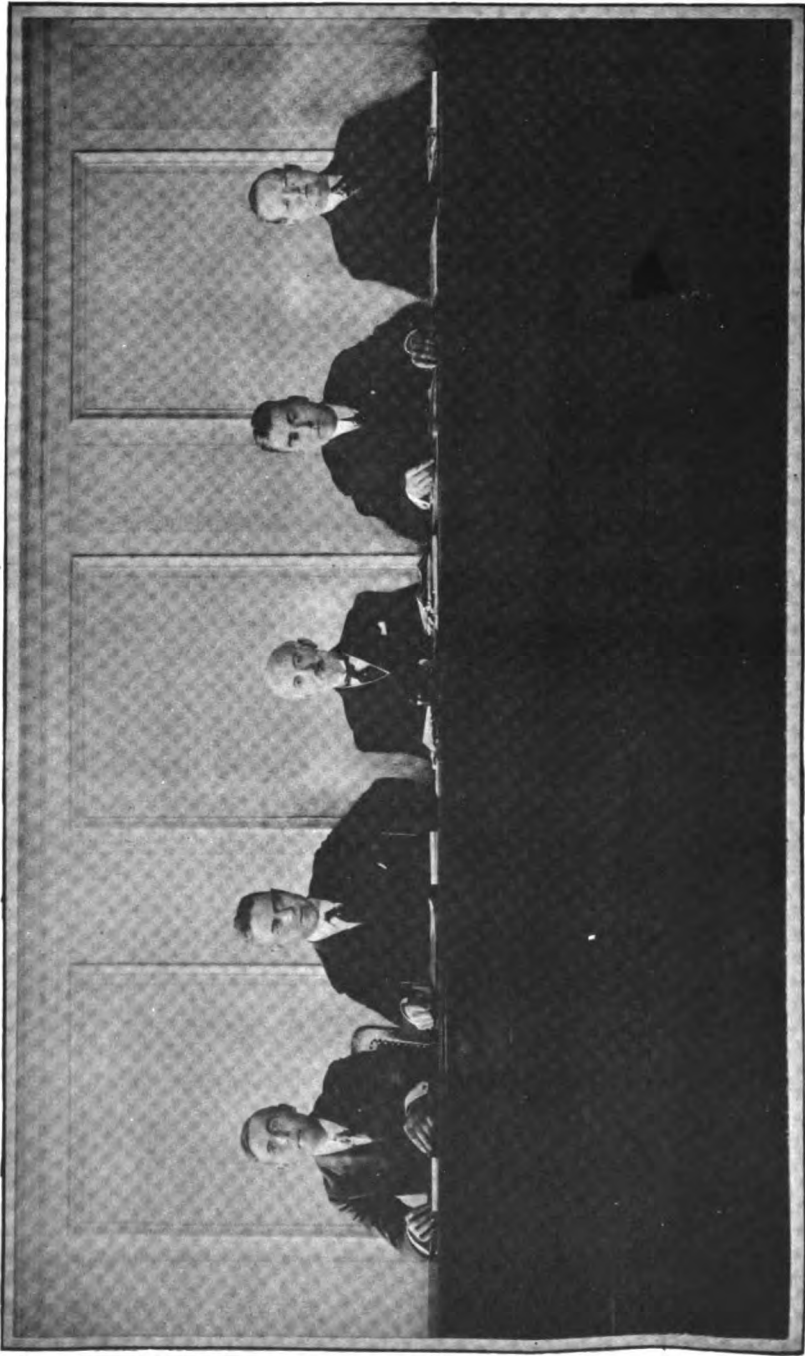
Like similar projects in Manhattan this scheme had its ups and downs and its tragedies. Among the latter

the pitiful story of Q. Kirkup, an English engineer takes first rank. In England Kirkup had been connected with John Stephenson, the father of railroading, and with an only daughter had come to this country with some money. In March, 1875, he became connected with the Brooklyn Elevated Railroad Company, drew its plans, solicited funds and devoted his whole time and means to the scheme for two years. After vainly trying to put the company on its feet he died in extreme poverty. His work, his honest life and his sacrifices have earned for him a place in the history of rapid transit.

The directors quarreled and Burtis resigned as president. Various schemes were tried to raise money. A promoter named Whibeck was employed, and one of his methods was to open with prayer the meetings he got up to stimulate interest in the enterprise. In May, 1876, Burtis was re-elected president and the company obtained from the Common Council a resolution changing its route so as to pass through Willoughby street, Gold street, DeKalb avenue, Grand avenue, Lexington avenue and Broadway. This caused a popular outburst of opposition, and an agitation ensued, led by such men as the Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, which resulted in the veto of the grant by Mayor Schroeder.

It was then decided to build according to the original route, and on May 24, 1876, ground was broken at the corner of Reid and Lexington avenues. Mayor Schroeder himself turned the first shovel-full of earth, but in his address justified his previous action in vetoing the new route. The company's workmen then dug pits and installed a few foundation stones for pillars, and these stones came into use later when the road was built. After they were placed, however, no more work was done for some time.

An internal fight over plans ensued. Kirkup had drawn plans for a two-track elevated road, substantially like those finally adopted, but Nostrand did not like them



PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, 1917.

**Left to Right — Travis H. Whitney, William Hayward, Oscar S. Straus, Chairman;
Henry W. Hodge, Charles S. Hervey.**



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and submitted a set of his own. Another director became enamored of a single rail device and urged its adoption. This was an invention of General Roy Stone and had been placed in trial operation over a gorge in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, at the Centennial Exposition then in progress. It was described as "a triangular trestle work like the letter A, with one rail on top, over which engine and cars hung like a saddle on a horse's back." Nothing came of this plan.

It is a singular thing, however, that just thirty years later, namely in 1906, an English engineer, F. B. Behr, who had patented the same idea, was demonstrating the scheme in New York and trying to get the Board of Rapid Transit Railroad Commissioners to give him a franchise to build and operate a mono-rail line on substantially this plan from the heart of Brooklyn to Coney Island. Behr proposed to operate it by electric motors and claimed to be able to attain a speed of one hundred miles an hour with perfect safety to the passengers. He failed in his efforts to get a franchise.

In 1877 and 1878 the Brooklyn Elevated project languished. Other rapid transit schemes attracted public attention. Deacon Richardson negotiated the lease of Atlantic Avenue to the Long Island Railroad Comp.ny. In June 1878 the Brooklyn Steam Transit Company, previously referred to, then dominated by S. B. Chittenden, broke ground for its road on Atlantic Avenue, but Deacon Richardson caused railroad iron to be piled over the excavations and hired men to drive off the other company's workers if they dared to remove it.

The style and form of the first elevated road in Brooklyn were settled in 1878 by a Rapid Transit Commission appointed on the petition of property owners by Mayor Howell, under the Act of 1875. This commission consisted of J. W. Adams, N. H. Clement, C. J. Lowrey, J. Y. Culyer and Felix Campbell. Several plans were submitted to the commission, which finally decided

on the type of road later built and thus sounded the death knell of the "silent safety" and "saddle-back" devices. It was this commission which organized the Kings County Elevated Railroad Company, which was later to put into operation Brooklyn's second elevated railroad system. Boston capitalists got a large share of the original stock, and for some time there was continued agitation against "foreign" capital gobbling up the Brooklyn franchise.

In 1879 the Brooklyn Elevated Railroad Company was reorganized. R. B. Floyd-Jones, a well known Long Islander, acquired control and brought in the most picturesque figure in Brooklyn's rapid transit history, W. Fontaine Bruff. Bruff was an English engineer, who parted his hair as well as his name in the middle. He was one of the early types of the breezy, energetic promoter, and while he spent money lavishly he seems to have had a talent for gathering it in, and is credited with infusing life into the languishing project and bringing about the road's construction. When he finally got the work started he would drive to it each morning in a stylish carriage, with a liveried coachman. He brought bankers into line and for a time funds rolled in upon him at the rate of \$90,000 a week. He was elected president of the company in January, 1879.

In the meantime the Kings County Elevated Railroad Company became active, under the presidency of Judge H. G. Bond. Unable to get the consents of property owners in the required number, it applied to the courts for a commission to determine the necessity of the road. In March 1879 the court appointed J. G. Hewlett, S. B. Bartow and Thomas E. Silliman. In April it became known that the Brooklyn Elevated had let a contract in February for the construction of its line to Floyd-Jones. Then ensued a fight between Bruff for the Brooklyn company and Bond for the Kings County company, which wanted a franchise for a part of the route of the former. In spite of opposition Bruff started work with sixteen men

on May 12 at the corner of Reid and Lexington avenues. The police, who had announced that this would not be permitted, promptly stopped the work and arrested all hands. Later they were released on bail, and next day Bruff resumed operations with another gang. They, too, were arrested, and work then was suspended pending the action of the courts. Finally the defendants were discharged and Bruff was permitted to resume work.

While these events were in progress the Brooklyn aldermen approved the franchise of the Kings County company. The act aroused a storm of indignation and Mayor Howell vetoed the grant and rebuked the aldermen, who promptly passed it over his veto. The fight for the franchise was then taken into court. Meantime Bruff had put in the foundations for his elevated columns at every point on the Brooklyn company's line touched by the Kings County company's franchise or had erected scaffoldings or iron work. He had 700 to 800 men engaged. On October 9, 1879, the Court of Appeals decided against the Kings County company, leaving the field clear for the Brooklyn Elevated.

During the year 1880 materials came in slowly, construction work lagged and a fight on Bruff began. In October the directors quarreled and many resigned. Finally on the application of one director, Edward S. Keeler, the Supreme Court ended Bruff's reign by appointing Richard G. Phelps as receiver for the company. His appointment was attacked and after much litigation he was ousted and John B. Lydecker and Samuel M. Schaeffer were confirmed as receivers. They issued \$2,500,000 in receivers' certificates and built two miles and a half of elevated structure, from Hudson avenue and Prospect street to Bedford and Lexington avenues. Then the money ran out and work stopped.

From that time to 1884 little was accomplished. In 1881 the Common Council adopted a resolution permitting the Brooklyn Elevated company to change its route

so as to include Myrtle avenue and part of Fulton street in its franchise. Mayor Howell vetoed it and the aldermen were enjoined from passing it over his veto. On the last day of the year, however, they did so in the face of the injunction and all were arrested. After a hearing in January, 1882, they were sentenced to jail for from ten to thirty days each. They actually were incarcerated for a short time, but were released on legal proceedings pending trial. In the following November most of them had to go to jail for a brief period.

In 1884 the Brooklyn Elevated was reorganized, taken out of the receivers' hands and successfully financed to completion. This was brought about principally by Frederick Uhlman, who acted as chairman of the Bondholders' Committee. The first mortgage, which was held by the Farmers' Loan and Trust Company, was foreclosed, and on May 12, 1884, the property was bought in by Uhlman on behalf of the trustees for the bondholders for \$100,000 in excess of the receivers' certificates. On May 29 articles of incorporation were filed for the Brooklyn Elevated Railroad Company, with the following named directors: Frederick Uhlman, Alfred J. Pouch, Stephen Pettus, Elbert Snedeker, Hugo Rothschilds, Edward Lauterbach, Charles J. G. Hall, Abram J. Hardenberg, Leonard Lewisohn, Adolph Landenberg and Henry W. Putnam. On June 1 Putnam was elected president, Hall vice-president, Snedeker treasurer and Pettus secretary.

Thereafter everything went smoothly. An extension of time was obtained from the Legislature and work all along the line was pushed. The first rail was laid in January, 1885, and on May 13 following the first five miles of road was placed in operation. Mayor Low, then Brooklyn's chief magistrate, participated in the opening ceremonies, and the people hailed the first rapid transit line with great enthusiasm.

The route as it began operation was from York and

Washington streets along York to Hudson avenue, along Hudson to Park avenue, along Park to Grand avenue, along Grand to Lexington avenue, along Lexington to Broadway and along Broadway to East New York. George B. Cornell was the chief engineer who finished the road. The main part of it is now (1917) operated as the Broadway line of the New York Consolidated Railroad Company, of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company's system.

Similar vicissitudes marked the career of the Kings County Elevated Railroad Company, already referred to. It was organized in December, 1878, about a year after the charter was granted. Judge Bond, of Brooklyn, above mentioned, formed the company which accepted the franchise and took up the work of getting property owners' consents. Failing to obtain the required number, the company appealed to the court. A commission to determine was appointed and reported favorably, but the General Term refused to confirm the report on the ground that the construction of the road would destroy private property. Judge Bond became discouraged and dropped the project.

A combination was then formed by General James Jourdan and H. J. Davison, of Brooklyn, and William Foster Jr., of New York, which attempted to resuscitate the scheme. They made another effort to get consents but failed, although they met with more encouragement than their predecessors. They obtained the appointment of another commission by the court, and again the commission made a favorable report. Judge Gilbert, of General Term, confirmed the report but left his decision sealed and sailed for Europe before its consideration was taken up formally by the court. Judges Barnard and Dykman gave judgment that the decision was incompetent and that Judge Gilbert would not have rendered it had he known all the facts. After this defeat William Foster

Jr. became discouraged and withdrew from the enterprise.

Davison and Jourdan, having faith in the project, formed a new combination, which after many ups and downs resulted in the company which built the road. It was involved in continuous litigation, which it fought successfully to the Court of Appeals. The directors of this company were Edward A. Abbott, James O. Sheldon, Henry J. Davison, Wendell Goodwin, Henry J. Robinson, Harvey Farrington, James Jourdan and William A. Read. Jourdan was president.

The contract for construction was given to the Phoenix Bridge company, which built the road from Nostrand avenue through Fulton street to the Bridge and Fulton Ferry. This part of the line was placed in operation April 24, 1888. Ground had been broken at the corner of Fulton street and Red Hook Lane in the fall of 1885. The line is now a part of the Fulton street elevated road operated by the New York Consolidated Railroad Company.

Another pioneer project in rapid transit in Brooklyn was the Union Elevated Railroad Company. This was organized in 1886 to build certain lines, which as soon as constructed were leased to the Brooklyn Elevated Company to operate. The first line opened was the Hudson avenue branch, running from the Long Island Railroad station through Flatbush and Hudson avenues and connecting with the line of the Brooklyn Elevated from Park Avenue to the Fulton Ferry. By 1890 the Union had constructed eleven miles of elevated road, all operated by the Brooklyn Elevated. In the same year the two companies were consolidated under the name of the Brooklyn Union Elevated Railroad Company. The combined capital was \$13,000,000 and the total length of the combined roads was eighteen miles.

Within a few years all the various elevated companies were acquired by the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, which also absorbed most of the surface car companies of

Brooklyn. The same interests control them today. As told in a previous chapter, the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company joined the City of New York in the Dual System agreements of 1913 and organized the New York Municipal Railway Corporation to enter into the contract with the City. In preparation for this step the elevated railroad companies were merged under the name of the New York Consolidated Railroad Company, which operates the old lines together with the new lines leased to the New York Municipal Railway Corporation.

Aside from the projects mentioned Brooklyn like New York was filled with rapid transit schemes during the period of organization and construction. Many never got beyond the paper stage, while others flourished for a time only to fail in the end. Among the unusual ones was the Gravity Railroad. This was projected in 1888 by an engineer named Henning. His plan was to connect Brooklyn with New York by two tunnels under the East River, starting from each side at the surface of the ground and descending to and under the river at a grade sufficient to carry the cars from one side to the other by the force of gravity alone. In 1890 the East River Tunnel Company was incorporated to build the tunnels and to operate them partly by Henning's gravity system and partly by cable power. The scheme was never carried out. Henning calculated that he could shoot his trains under the river in one minute and a half.