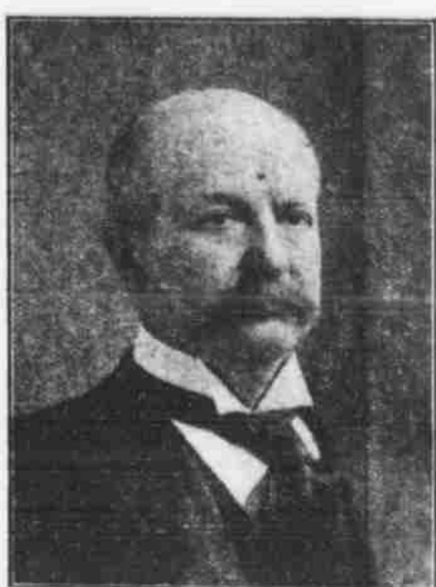
# Street Railway Kings of America

W. L. ELKINS.



P. A. B. WIDENER.

JUDGE J. H. REED.

MURRAY VERNER.

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WITHIN the last decade a new king has sprung up—the street railway king. He is always American and almost invariably he has been evolved from a poor boy. He is the practical man to whom American cities are looking for solutions of their transportation problems, and he is the man who is spending millions upon millions in his efforts to meet the demands of continually increasing centers of population. Representative of his class are H. H. Vreeland of New York, Charles T. Yerkes of Chicago. Murray Verner and Judge J. Widener and William L. Elkins of Philadelphia.

But although the transportation problem is far from solved in this country the American street railway king is already reaching out into foreign fields. Charles T. Yerkes is going to give London a modern underground system; Murray Verner is laying electric railways in the capital of the czar, St. Petersburg, and nearly every European city that can boast of up-to-date systems of transportation has to acknowledge that American money and American brains have figured largely in the consummation.

Mr. Verner is typical of the American railway magnate abroad. Like the majority of his fellows, he started with nothing except an indomitable determination to amount to somebody some day. It was this ambition that sent him from his father's farm in Western Pennsylvania to Pittsburg, where, after knocking around for several weeks looking for a job, he seized on an opportunity to become a horse car driver. His knowledge of horses, gained on the farm, stood him in good stead, and it was soon noticed that his car was hardly ever behind its schedule and his horses always in good condition. This led to young Verner's transfer to the car barns as stable boss. Here he remained for several years, saving his employers thousands of dollars in horseflesh.

As a reward for this piece of business he was graduated into a more responsible position, where, in the words of one of his old employers, "Murray did the work of two men in half the time they would have taken to do it." Then, gradually, step by step, he advanced until finally he became superintendent of the line. He was still young when this happened, but he had not been in his new position twelve months before the road was placed on a paying basis, something that former superintendents had strived in vain to do for years.

Mr. Verner had made the road a good investment simply because he had learned the business from A to Z, and it was not long before this fact was recognized. Then, when the era of the trolley car came, men of capital interested themselves in Mr. Verner, and pretty soon were found to be backing him in his purchases and electrification of rundown street railways throughout the central states.

In every case Mr. Verner gave the lines personal attention, with the result that they were transformed into profitable properties with almost lightning-like rapidity.

After he had amassed a fortune of $3,000,000 from this sort of work Mr. Verner concluded that he would see what could be done toward giving European cities better transportation facilities. With this object in view he went abroad. After looking over Paris, Berlin and several other continental cities, he traveled to St. Petersburg to visit a friend, who took him home in one of the rattle-trap tram cars that have been fixtures of the czar's capital for generations. Mr. Verner was so disgusted with that mode of getting around that he said, jokingly, to his companion:

"I've half a notion to come to this town and give it electric railways."

The friend took the remark seriously.

"If you can get the proper concessions from the authorities," he said, "you'll make a mint of money."

That remark made Mr. Verner prick up his ears, and, whereas he had planned to remain in St. Petersburg scarcely a week, he stayed two months making investigations and talking to officials. When he departed he carried back to Pittsburg an agreement between himself and the czar's representative for modern transportation lines in the Russian seat of government. The men who had backed him before were only too willing to back him again, and so, today, a former Yankee horse car driver is the street railway king of Russia.

Another Pittsburg man who has recently become widely known as a street railway power is Judge J. H. Reed. His prominence and his fortune of $8,000,000 have come to him only within the last few years, but both are the direct result of years of study of corporation law during spare moments.

When a young man Judge Reed went from a neighboring town to Pittsburg, where he read law in the office in which he earned his bread and butter by transcription. He stayed there until he was admitted to the bar and then he rented a dingy little room and hung out his shingle.

As he had precious few clients to represent for the first few years of his legal experience, he took the opportunity to verse himself thoroughly in corporation law, of which he had been extremely fond as a student. Some years later, while he was prosecuting a case in court against a railroad, that property's officials became aware of the fact that he was more than a match for their attorneys, and some time after the case had been disposed of they made Mr. Reed their legal representative in Pittsburg.

Along in the '90s the railroad got into a suit in which a million or two was at stake, and William K. Vanderbilt, who, by that time, owned a majority of the stock, summoned all of the road's attorneys to New York for a consultation as to the best method of defending the case. A score of lawyers were present and nineteen gave lengthy and involved reasons why the suit should be defended this way or that. When the nineteenth man had finished, the twentieth, who had been sitting quietly in a corner of the room, arose.

"Mr. Vanderbilt," he said, "the Pennsylvania supreme court will never take any of those views of the case."

"It won't, eh?" inquired Mr. Vanderbilt. "Why won't it?"

In a few brief sentences the speaker told why his colleagues' arguments would not be considered good law, and then, as succinctly, he outlined the position which he believed the court would take.

Mr. Vanderbilt was on his feet the instant the attorney finished.

"You're right," he almost shouted; "we'll make the case your way, and you're to present it."

The supreme court took the view that Judge Reed said it would and, as an immediate result, Judge Reed was made president of the Pittsburg, Bessemer & Lake Erie railroad.

A year or so ago when eighteen corporations, representing the street railway and gas interests of Pittsburg were consolidated, Judge Reed was chosen president of this $104,000,000 combine—and all because he had made himself familiar with corporation law while waiting for clients and after office hours.

Two of the controlling factors in the corporation of which Judge Reed is the head are P. A. B. Widener and William L. Elkins. These two men operate more miles of street railways in more American cities and towns than any other two men in the business. They have made an enormous checker board of Philadelphia with their properties; theirs are important voices in the management of New York's surface lines; they have no competition in a score of towns in the interior of Pennsylvania; the people of Chicago and Cincinnati travel by railways largely under their control, and many surburban and interborough trolley systems in Connecticut and the central states, especially Ohio, are operated by them.

The story of their rise goes back to the '70s, when Mr. Widener was a butcher and Mr. Elkins an oil dealer in Philadelphia.

Of the two Mr. Widener was heard of first in that city. Besides looking after his butcher shops, he dabbled in politics and one day he found himself a power in his ward. After that he chose to have himself elected to the city council, and while serving in that capacity he made the acquaintance of many of the Quaker City's prominent citizens. Among these was Robert Mackey, president of the Continental line of horse cars, which ran by the old city hall—Independence hall—and therefore was much used by politicians, judges and lawyers.

Mackey, who was a power in municipal and state politics, saw in Widener what he said was the making of a fine politician, and he interested himself in the young man. During the course of the lessons that Mackey gave Widener in things political the latter also gleaned from his teacher some interesting data about the profitableness of the street railway business.

Some years later Mr. Widener became treasurer of Philadelphia. At that time the office paid its holder, besides a liberal salary, about $20,000 a year in fees. When Mr. Widener began receiving this money he cast about for a way to invest it, and then it was that he recalled Robert Mackey's statement that a good street car line was equal to a big vein gold mine for returns. Mr. Widener decided to buy street railway stock, but when he went into the market he found that the People's company controlled nearly all the paying lines, and that so gilt-edged was their paper that no one wanted to part with his holdings.

The People's properties were in the center and built-up portions of the city. Surrounding them were other lines, all operated independently and all near bankrupt for the same reason—scarcity of population along their routes. Thwarted in his attempt to get into People's, Mr. Widener began a careful investigation of these railways, with the result that he became convinced that several of them would be good investments in a few years when the city had grown more. As his treasurer's fees were "velvet" to him, his business bringing him an income sufficient to live on, he decided to get control, if possible, of the most promising of these outlying lines. This proved to be the old Union, whose terminals were in the open country to the north and south.

In figuring up the situation Mr. Widener discovered that, if the amount of his surplus capital were doubled by some one else, the road could be secured. Right here he thought of his friend, William L. Elkins.

At that time Mr. Elkins was a prosperous oil dealer in that part of the town through which the Union line ran, and which he used to get to his business. On that route also, Mr. Widener had his most important butcher shop, and it chanced that frequently the two men met in the cars. This led to a nodding acquaintance, after a while to a speaking acquaintance, and gradually into friendship, so that when Mr. Widener was thinking of going into street railways the intimacy had become marked and warm.

It did not take Mr. Widener long to convince Mr. Elkins that the Union line would be a good investment in a few years. They pooled their capital and experienced no difficulty in securing a controlling interest, for the stockholders were only too willing to sell what they considered hopeless property. Two years later, owing to economies and the spread of population, dividends were declared.

This more than hoped for success encouraged Mr. Widener and Mr. Elkins to branch out, and they bought up a connecting line, two miles in length, whose equipment was exactly four cars and eight horses, and which penetrated still farther into the country to the south. And pretty soon that paid, too.

Then it was that the plan was conceived of getting hold of all the independent lines surrounding the People's system, which gridironed the business section of the city. The partners, keeping in the background, quietly set to work and whenever an opportunity offered bought blocks of stock, no matter how large or how small, through agents. This thing kept up for several years, until even the strong and important Continental line had been largely absorbed, Widener and Elkins, in the meantime not showing their hands and manipulating everything so unostentatiously that the public did not dream of what was going on.

Neither did the powerful corporation, the People's, until one day its members awakened to the fact that some unknown parties had got hold of their connecting lines seemingly over night and were covertly threatening to parallel some of their best dividend-paying properties. Here was a pretty how-de-do, and the People's fearing that the threat might be carried out, proclaimed to the agents of their opponents, who had hinted at such a move, that it was willing to consider a proposition for the merging of the two interests for their mutual benefit. Then Mr. Widener and Mr. Elkins came suddenly out into the open and met the People's representatives, convinced the latter that they were masters of the situation and made them a proposition. The upshot of the whole matter was that a few weeks later Philadelphians found that the all-powerful People's had been taken over by two men whom they had never dreamed of being street railway powers, and one of whom—Mr. Elkins—they had never heard of.

All of this happened some years before the advent of the trolley car, and ever since then Elkins and Widener have been the Quaker City transportation magnates.

Such, in brief, is the history of the first of their many notable street railway deals.

## About Noted People

IN HIS childhood days Senator Morgan of Alabama played a great deal with the children of Cherokee braves. While making a speech about Indians in the senate last week he told in simple but most affecting fashion how he and Arkeeche, one of his red-skinned playmates, went blackberrying. The Indian boy was bitten by a rattlesnake and died. None of the Indians thought the reptile hated Arkeeche, who was bitten, they declared, because the Great Spirit wanted him.

Senator Alger tells this story of W. H. Vanderbilt, who owned Maud S. He had purchased a horse from Mr. Vanderbilt about the time the latter had sold the famous mare and asked the millionaire: "Why did you part with such a notable animal?"

Mr. Vanderbilt replied: "When I drove her along the street the people used to say, 'There goes Maud S.' They never thought of saying, 'There goes Vanderbilt.' I couldn't play second fiddle to a mare—even such a mare."

Bishop Tugwell of western equatorial Africa is often asked when in England, "What is the size of your diocese?"

"I generally answer," he says, "by saying, 'You could put England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland, Holland and Belgium, France and Germany into my diocese and still have room to spare.'"

The area is estimated at 700,000 square miles and it includes the Gold Coast colony, Ashanti, Lagos, Southern Nigeria, the city of Benin, Northern Nigeria and Hausa and Bornu states.

Representative Champ Clark has a new sobriquet for General Grosvenor, which he has applied in debate before the house. "Out in Ohio," says Mr. Clark, "and even beyond the confines of that state my friend bears the sobriquet of 'Old Figgers.' The other day I happened to be standing down in the hall by the postoffice. An old employe of the house was talking to a 'tenderfoot.' The general swept by in his majesty, tenderly fondling his prophet's beard, and the old employe said to the newcomer: 'There goes the stud bug of arithmetic.'"

Harry Wadsworth, assistant clerk of the senate committee on claims, is a great expert on Indian sign language. He is credited with being able to converse with all kinds of red men. Recently he was appointed Indian agent for the Shoshone reservation in Wyoming. Seeing a band of Nez Perces Indians the other day on a street car, on which he was also a passenger, Wadsworth commenced to attract their attention by his signs. They eyed him suspiciously, but one, more friendly than the others, eventually crossed over to the new Indian agent's seat. "I am sorry," said he very apologetically for a red man, "but I never learned the sign language. I can only speak English."