

*Case History # 19 Ernest Pentz*

Charles P. Gillen born in Ireland in 1876; came with his family to Newark when eight years old; lived in Newark since; educated at Seton Hall College; entered real estate business at eighteen (1894) under the name of Charles P. Gillen & Company; continued under same name to present time; became active in politics at twenty-one; been active ever since; elected City Commissioner in 1912 on the Democratic ticket; turned down by the Democratic machine in 1915 for renomination he ran independently and was the first office holder to be elected as an independend in the City of Newark, beating the combined conspiracy of the Republican and Democratic machines; reelected in 1917 City Commissioner under commission form of government; was made Mayor and served from 1917 to 1921 as Mayor of Newark; reelected City Commissioner again in 1921, again in 1925, and again in 1929; served as such until May 1933; appointed member of Newark Housing Authority by the city commission in June 1938; made Chairman of the Newark Housing Authority , March 1939, which office he still occupies; served in elected city office for much longer period than any other public official in the City of Newark.

#### Business Career

Most men who become very active in politics, particularly those who run for office time and again and who have much to do with campaigns and politics in general, gradually lose their business or give it up. Mr. Gillen was one of the few public men who never neglected his business for politics. For the forty-four years that he devoted to real estate business from the time that he was eighteen years old to the present, he was always extremely active. For the past twenty-five years, he has devoted most of his real estate efforts to the development of tracts of lands of which he was part owner. He was part owner and developer of the last three residential tracts developed in Newark: The Monticello Park on South Orange Avenue, Stuyvesant Acres on Stuyvesant Avenue and Mount Vernon Park on Chancellor and Lyons Avenues. Besides these he developed many smaller tracts. Many hundreds of buildings were erected on those tracts.

### Socially

Socially he was always very active in all social activities of the city; belonged to many social organizations and mixed with all classes of people at all kinds of social gatherings.

### Financially

Financially he was one of the organizers and first Vice President of the Guaranty Trust Company and was a director in other banks, building and loan associations and mortgage companies.

### Politically

His political career was one of the most turbulent and strenuous in the history of New Jersey politics. Always a Democrat, he refused to be bossed or "machine-controlled". During his first term as City Commissioner of Public Works, he gained the enmity and open antagonism of the powerful Public Service Corporation and all its affiliates by opposing certain of their demands. At that time, the influence of the Public Service Corporation was so great in New Jersey that it overshadowed almost everything; both party machines of the City and State Government were absolutely subservient to the will of this company. Nearly everyone, who fought against all of their demands, was retired from public office or taken into the employ of the Public Service Corporation. Mr. Gillen fought them openly and also fought the Pennsylvania Railroad on fare rates. Challenging them to combat, he ran for office time and again; he was elected and reelected by the people on that issue. In these fights, he was also opposed by the powerful Democratic and Republican machines who were very friendly to Public Service Companies. At the end of his first term, the Democratic machine refused to renominate him. It was tied up with the Public Service and other big interests that were under the control of the Public Service, with the Republican machine and a paving ring, which controlled all of the paving contracts. He denounced all these interests, made a smashing campaign, was reelected by a great vote. He won in spite of the full force and antagonism of the Democratic organization. His victory terminated the rule of the powerful

Democratic boss, Joseph R. Nugent. In later years, he helped to lead the Democrats in many of its campaigns. Serving as Mayor during the war, he assumed the leading part in all activities of the city to help the Nation in the World War. His administration during the war and the three years following was filled with a multitude of activities of all kinds made necessary by extraordinary conditions existing during that period. As Commissioner, he fought incessantly against all extravagances. He did everything in his power to prevent the large number of public improvements undertaken by his fellow commissioners, which were not necessary, on the grounds that the city would be forced to borrow so much money for these unnecessary improvements that it would reach the stage of bankruptcy. The improvements, he fought against were passed over his vote and were made at a cost to the city of approximately \$40,000,000. These expenditures impaired the city's credit and eventually got the city into all sorts of financial difficulties from which it is now trying to free itself. Mr. Gillen's stand on these matters has been fully vindicated.

Like many other Irish-Americans, he took a leading part in all movements to bring about Irish freedom. He heard Charles Stewart Parnell at his own home in Ireland when he was a small boy. His father was an ardent Irishman, who remembered seeing Daniel O'Connell when he was a child. He welcomed many of the famous Irishmen who came to Newark on various missions for the aid of the Emerald Isle, including Eamon deValera, the Prime Minister of Ireland. In his business and social relationships, he became acquainted with many of the prominent Irish-Americans of Newark of the last half-century, those included such well-known citizens as James Smith, Junior, United States Senator and Democratic Leader of New Jersey for so many years and sponsor of Woodrow Wilson, Dr. Thomas Dunn English, Congressman and author of "Alice, Ben Bolt" and other famous compositions; newspaper men such as, Thomas Kinney owner and publisher of the Newark Daily Advertiser, predecessor of the Star Eagle, T. Edward Burke, one of the original editors of the Newark Evening News,

John Farrell, John and Peter O'Toole, Francis A. Higgins, editor of the Star Eagle; manufacturers such as, Patrick and John Reilly, Thomas Preston, Matthew Caffery, Edward Marhen, Richard C. Jenkinson, Anthony P. Smith, Owen McCabe, John and Bernard M. Shanley, the leading contractors of New Jersey, William Connolly, James Moran, Edward M. Waldron and Hugh Gilligan; James M. Riley, main-stay of the Board of Trade for so many years and one of the early planners of Newark; lawyers such as, Michael T. Barrett, Frank M. McDermitt and William J. Kearns; other business men such as, Joseph M. Byrne, James Maguire and John Mullins, Michael McLaughlin, John L. Carroll, William McManus Philip C. Walsh, Arthur Devine, Captain John J. Berry, Doctors Ogorman Elliott and Mulcahy. Clergyman like Bishop O'Connor, Dean Cody, Monsignor White, Monsignor Wheelan, Monsignor McCue, Father Toomey, Father McKeever, Father Richmond, Monsignor Carrol and Father Fleming. With these men and many others of the Irish race, most of whom are gone to their rewards, Mr. Gillen had many dealings and was associated in many movements for the upbuilding, progress and growth of the community.