

**BOX**

**11**

**FOLDER**

**120**

**Licenses-Newstand Graft**

**1910-1913**

✓  
March 23, 1910.

My dear Miss Horowitz:

Your letter of March 22nd is at hand, and I shall be very glad to get you the license. Take this to the Alderman of your district, and I am sure he will help you, for he is a good man.

Very truly yours,

*M. J. Mayer*

Miss Nettie Horowitz,  
834, East 160th Street,  
New York City.

July 5, 1910.

To the Honorable, The Board of Aldermen of the City of  
New York:

✓ By sections 362, 363, 364 and 365 of the Code of  
City Ordinances, stands for the sale of newspapers, period-  
icals, fruits and blacking of boots may be licensed by  
authority of the Mayor, such licenses to be issued by  
the Mayor's Bureau of Licenses; but a prerequisite pre-  
scribed by the said ordinances to the granting of such a  
license is that the alderman of the district in which the  
stand is to be located shall give his assent thereto in  
writing. Without such consent it would seem that the  
Mayor cannot grant the license.

Shortly after I became mayor a woman who had a  
licensed news stand came to me and complained and made  
oath that she could not get the license renewed except by  
the payment of \$250 to the political district captain of  
the district in which the stand was. I investigated the  
matter and found her statement to be true. As I refused  
to grant the license to another person who was brought  
forward for it, she is in possession of the stand yet and

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2.

is likely to remain there. Shortly after many complaints  
began to come to me of the same extortion by district  
political leaders, both Democratic and Republican. Later  
on began to come complaints that the said district lead-  
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is likely to remain there. Shortly after many complaints began to come to me of the same extortion by district political leaders, both Democratic and Republican. Later on began to come complaints that the said district leaders would not permit the applicant to get a license until he first joined the political club of the district, Republican or Democratic, according to which party the alderman of the district belonged. I investigated this matter and found it to be apparently true. I annex hereto a report to the Comptroller made by one of his inspectors showing the practices to prevail, and also <sup>a</sup> letter of the head of the Bureau of Licenses thereon. *and request that both of them be read with this message.* I want to be understood as not even intimating that the members of your honorable body are implicated in this general extortion. It would seem that some of you are being imposed on. The fact remains, however, that these district leaders extort money for these licenses before they will consent to them, and in some way they then get the alderman of the district to consent to the issuance of the license, and then ~~in~~ ~~they~~ they get the chief of the Mayor's Bureau of Licenses to issue the license. The fact is that the members of your board and the Mayor's Bureau of Licenses, which really means the Mayor himself, are being delivered, as the

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phrase is, in the granting of these licenses for sums ranging from \$5 to \$500 in each case. I am sending this message to your honorable body to put your honorable members on their guard against consenting to any more of these licenses except in cases where it is entirely certain that no such extortion is being practiced by district leaders or other persons. Persons applying for these licenses cannot get them until they join a political club and pay that club a specified amount of money, or until they pay some political captain a prescribed sum of money. It is too infamous a thing to be permitted to continue, and I ask the privilege of uniting with the honorable members of your board in putting an end to it.

*It seems to me that this system of licensing is wrong and should be amended.*

Respectfully,

*M. J. ...*

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Respectfully,

*W. J. ...*  
M a y o r .

11-2-17  
Enc.

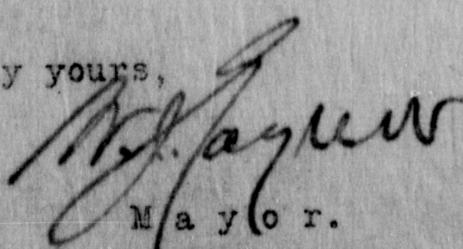
July 12, 1910.

Dear Sir:

I am very glad to comply with your request to write you this letter, and assure you, and the Newsdealers' Protective Association, that if you will all cease to pay outsiders in order to get your licenses, I will, as Mayor, protect you all, and see that you get your licenses without paying anything but the license fee. I learn from members of your Association that money is exacted from nearly all of you by middlemen, not to call them by any harsher name before you can get your licenses. I hope that none of you ever pay again. You need not fear that any one will hurt you for not doing so. Next winter, if necessary, we will have the law amended so as to have a department of licenses here for you to get your licenses of. Meanwhile you will all be protected in the stands which you now have. I want also to assure you that any of you who will come forward to this office and make affidavit of the payment of such money for licenses will be protected in every way from any persecution or oppression.

Very truly yours,

William Merican, Esq.,  
President Newsdealers'  
Protective Association.

  
M a y o r. ✓

August 4, 1910.k

S i r :

I beg to enclose to you three affidavits of money paid to Aldermen and others to get licenses. It seems to me that it will be most wholesome to indict and convict some of these people.

Very truly yours,

*W. J. Gay*  
Mayor.

Hon. Frank Moss,  
Acting District Attorney,  
New York County.

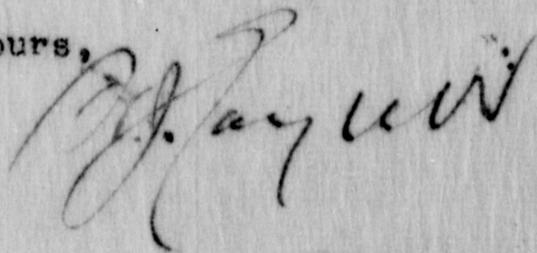
II-2-7

August 5, 1910.m

Sir:

I beg to enclose to you a complaint in  
the nature of bribery against Alderman Hickey.

Very truly yours,



Mayor.

Frank Moss, Esq.,  
Acting District Attorney,  
New York County.

11-2-P

WILLIAM LUSTGARTEN  
COUNSELLOR AT LAW

68 WILLIAM STREET

NEW YORK August 21, 1911

Hon. William J. Gaynor, Mayor,  
City Hall,  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

For more than twenty years the City of New York has permitted the licensing of stands within the stoop lines for the sale of soda water, fruits and newspapers. Although the owner of the building where such stand is to be located may give his permission for its construction a consent for the maintenance of such a stand must first be obtained from the alderman of the district in which the stand is to be located. The Ordinance prescribed that such stands must not be more than four feet wide and six feet long, and must not interfere with traffic on the streets or sidewalks. This has been the law for more than twenty years. Not one stand in a hundred complies with its provisions. Thousands of complaints and violations were filed annually with the Assistant Corporation Counsel in charge of the Bureau of Fines and Penalties and with the Mayor's License Bureau; experience had shown that it was impossible for the standkeeper to do business in a stand restricted to six feet in length. The standkeeper for years maintained his stand in violation of this provision of the Ordinance, and because of this violation of the Ordinance he became the fit subject for blackmail on the part of every one who had any official relation with him.

The Ordinance directs that to maintain a stand within a stoop line the consent of the alderman of the district must be obtained. In very few cases did or does the alderman come into contact directly with the standkeeper. A small coterie of men have sprung up in the City who control the destinies of the standkeepers and who have ruled them with an iron hand, as assuredly so, as the greatest autocrat has ever ruled a nation. There are in New York a half dozen or more of men engaged in the manufacture of fruit syrups. The greater part of their

WILLIAM LUSTGARTEN  
COUNSELLOR AT LAW

68 WILLIAM STREET  
NEW YORK

W. J. G.,

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Aug. 21, 1911

trade is with the standkeeper. These syrup men are as a rule friends of the alderman in the districts where they live. They make it their business to cater to the alderman at every opportunity. During the Aldermanic Elections they contribute liberally to their campaign funds. During the year they cash the I O U's, notes and checks of the alderman; in the case of one syrup man more than a thousand dollars of bad paper of the alderman has found its way into his safe. What is the quid pro quo for all this? The aldermen will issue permits to such men and women only whom the syrup man designates. The syrup man thereafter controls the trade of the particular stand for which he obtained the permit. If for any reason the standkeeper becomes rebellious and refuses to trade with the syrup man through whose instrumentality he obtained the permit, he is hounded day after day; police officers and inspectors of the Bureau of Licenses begin to pound him. Violations against his stand are filed and complaints against him are made. He is summoned to the district court where an unsympathetic judge will fine him an amount equal to his entire week's earnings. In such cases he is driven to the syrup man for help. He is unfamiliar with our courts and modes of procedure. The syrup man stands ready to help him upon the receipt of a sum from five dollars to figures running into the hundreds, always depending upon the desirability of the location of the stand. These sums are mulcted from the standkeeper usually in the name of the alderman, really most of it going into the pockets of these syrup men.

As I stated before, most of these complaints and violations that were made were because of the illegal length of the stands.

After enduring many years of this sort of treatment the standkeepers from various sections of the city began organizing themselves into one body; the aim and object being to obtain relief from these intolerable conditions. I was retained as attorney for this organization. My first suggestion was to get the aldermen to amend the Ordinance so as to legalize all the existing stands. If the owner of the building consented, and the stand did not in any way interfere with street traffic, what possible objection could

WILLIAM LUSTGARTEN  
COUNSELLOR AT LAW

68 WILLIAM STREET

W. J. G.

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NEW YORK August 21, 1911

there be for the stand to be ten feet long instead of six feet? If every stand were permitted to be ten feet long, more than one-half the troubles of the standkeeper would be over. When my suggestion was made known to the syrup men they bitterly opposed it. They advised the standkeepers with whom they were trading, and whom they had in their control, "To let sleeping dogs lie," that agitation for the betterment of their plight would lead to the abolishing of all the stands. The standkeeper realizing that he was a creature of the law, without any rights in the matter, hesitated before taking serious action. He realized that the Board of Aldermen could by repealing a number of sections of the City Ordinance drive him out of business, and he realized that the syrup man was in a position to put the screws on him, for it was <sup>ordinarily</sup> through the syrup man that he obtained his consent from the alderman. A number of mass meetings of standkeepers were held. They finally determined to take the risk of being put out of business rather than stand the intolerable conditions any longer. This was the first real act of rebellion on the part of the standkeepers against the mean and petty tyranny under which they existed for over twenty years.

I drafted an amendment to the Ordinance. The amendment was introduced at the request of the standkeepers organization in the Board of Alderman by the Chairman of the Committee on Laws and Legislation, who had in his own district almost 25% of all the stands in the City. A public hearing was held by the Committee on Laws and Legislation. A committee of more than four hundred standkeepers marched to the City Hall and were present at the hearing. For months the proposed amendment was permitted to sleep in the committee. Thereafter, and without my knowledge, the syrup men advised the standkeepers of the necessity of getting up a "Corruption Fund", for the passage of the proposed amendment. On obtaining this information I called to my office a number of the syrup men, who were engaged in "shaking down" the standkeepers, and the chairman of the standkeepers organization; I also called into my office one of my stenographers to make note of what occurred. I advised these men that if a single dollar was illegally used I would expose every one of them and lay whatever information was in my possession in the hands of the district attorney. In a written communication addressed to the chairman of the standkeepers organization I severed the relationship of attorney and client with the organization. Thereafter my work on behalf of the standkeepers was and now is purely personal; that of a citizen trying to help these poor and downtrodden humans to earn a living honestly

WILLIAM LUSTGARTEN  
COUNSELLOR AT LAW

68 WILLIAM STREET  
NEW YORK

W. J. G.

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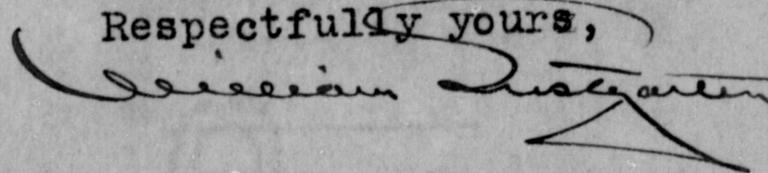
August 21, 1911

and without constant fear of the powers that be.

At this time the Borough President of the Borough of Manhattan caused an edict to be issued through his commissioner of Highways that all stands would have to be cut down to the legal limit. To the credit of the Borough President be it said that no amount of pressure was able to change him from his outlined policy, to wit, all stands must conform with the law, and that if the aldermen wanted the stands to remain as they were, it was up to the aldermen to change the law. At this juncture the committee on Laws and Legislation reported the proposed amendment to the Board of Aldermen and the amendment as proposed was passed with but two dissenting votes, one of them being the vote of the Commissioner of Public Works, voting as Acting Borough President of the Borough of Manhattan.

What was to be done with the "Corruption Fund" raised by the syrup men among the standkeepers? They have illegally spent almost a thousand dollars of it -- they are anxious to pocket the rest of it -- Will they? I wonder! What are New York public officials charged with enforcement of the law going to do about it? Are they at all interested in the constant mulcting of these poor unfortunates? Will they permit these poor men and women to remain subjects for blackmail? This subject is deserving of serious consideration.

Respectfully yours,



Aug. 7, 1912.k

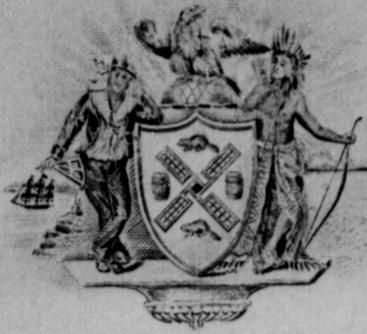
Dear Sir:

Your letter of August 7th is at hand. Of course I could not enter into any suggestion of trying to ask the newsdealers to vote for any political party, but on the question of the granting of the licenses to newsdealers, and the graft which is being collected in the granting of such licenses, I will go before a meeting of the newsdealers at any time you mention. I think a week from tomorrow will be the best day.

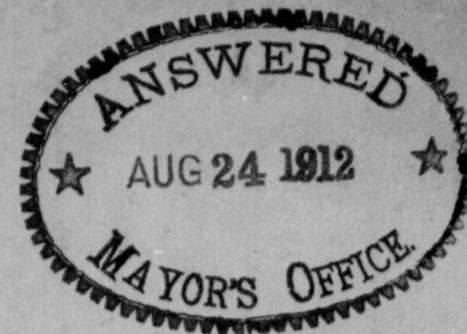
Sincerely yours,

*M. J. Quinn*  
Mayor.

William Merican, Esq.,  
443, Amsterdam Avenue,  
Manhattan.



CITY OF NEW YORK  
**Board of Aldermen**  
CITY HALL



New York, August 19, 1912.

NILES R. BECKER  
ALDERMAN 15<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT  
251 WEST 86<sup>TH</sup> ST., N.Y.

The Honorable The Mayor,

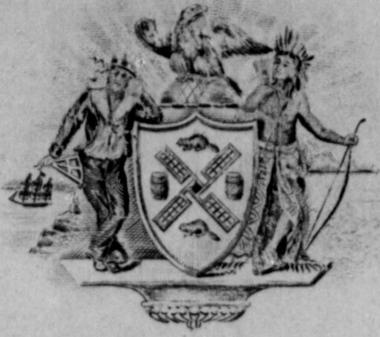
Sir:

The morning newspapers of New York City, printed Friday, August 16th, represent you as having stated the night before, at a meeting of newspaper dealers, in words or effect as follows:

"Two years ago it was brought to my attention that no one could get a license for a news stand without the intervention of a middleman or an Alderman. I said I would do what I could to do away with the graft, but I have been baffled so far. There are 7,500 news stands in this city. If each of these had to pay \$100, the total amount of graft would amount to \$750,000. But it has been brought to my attention that certain dealers have paid \$500 and \$200."

Following this statement, and after other statements of similar import, and after the statement that you "really believe that the graft"--in respect of news stand licenses--"amounts to at least an average of \$200, bringing the total up to \$1,500,000 a year", you are quoted as saying, in words or effect, "There was a case of a woman at 93rd Street and Columbus Avenue. She had paid \$200 every year. When the year was up she came to me. The wardman had come up and asked her for another \$250. That's Alderman Becker's ward."

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CITY OF NEW YORK  
**Board of Aldermen**  
CITY HALL

NILES R. BECKER  
ALDERMAN 15<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT  
251 WEST 86<sup>TH</sup> ST., N.Y.

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Entering here and now a positive denial that I, or any one in my behalf, then, or at any time, made any suggestion to this self-confessed bribe-giving woman, or any other person, to my benefit, or to any private or political benefit, in respect of money, and in view of the fact that your charges relate not only to me, or to my district, but are general and suggestive of a system of blackmail operated by the Board of Aldermen of this city, I demand that you call a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen, to be held as immediately as possible, under the powers conferred upon you by Section 37 of the Charter, which states that you may call a meeting at any time and that you shall do so upon the requirement of as many as fifteen members.

I do not know what difficulty I may encounter in obtaining the signatures of fifteen members to this call, but I do know that you have made the charges and that you can make the call. At such meeting I shall present a resolution for the appointment of a special committee to investigate these charges, and shall see to it that such resolution so provides that the committee so appointed should have your confidence and will certainly have the confidence of the public.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Niles R. Becker".

Alderman, 15th District, Manhattan.



CITY OF NEW YORK

**Board of Aldermen**  
CITY HALL

NILES R. BECKER  
ALDERMAN 15<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT  
251 WEST 86<sup>TH</sup> ST., N.Y.

August 26, 1912.

The Honorable the Mayor,  
City Hall, N.Y.

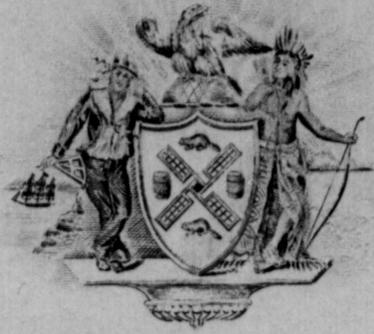
Sir:

I have your letter of August 24th. What you said at the Newsdealers' meeting, not having been present there myself, of course I don't know. But in this letter to me you say, - "graft seems to be brought right home to some individual members of the Board of Aldermen."

So grave a charge as this, proceeding, as it does, from the Mayor of the City ought to be investigated in the right way - not by a secret, partisan inquiry where witnesses, not all of them able to take care of themselves, and some of them, perhaps, animated by motives other than honest ones may, behind closed doors, be made to say things at variance with the truth, but in a fair, open, honestly conducted investigation.

Your statements at the Newsdealers' meeting, by their mention of my name and by their reference to a "wardman," (a somewhat technical and descriptive expression in the vocabulary of New York politics) - were phrased, if not intended to produce the public impression that money had been collected in my behalf or with my knowledge and consent for these newstand privileges in my district.

This was not true and the proof in the investigation of



CITY OF NEW YORK  
**Board of Aldermen**  
CITY HALL

NILES R. BECKER  
ALDERMAN 15<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT  
251 WEST 86<sup>TH</sup> ST., N.Y.

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your Commissioner of Accounts shows that it is not true. But that inquiry is not a fair one. It is going on secretly, without notice to the persons involved, in such flagrant disregard of the rules of evidence, and with so obvious a purpose on the part of the examiner to get something on somebody, somehow; that your Honor as a lawyer would not consider such tittle-tattle entitled to a moments consideration.

Even at that, and with those methods, no evidence against me has been adduced. Now, if it is true, as your Honor says, that "graft seems to be brought right home to some individual members of the Board of Aldermen," I submit that your Honor should send the proof of that fact to the district attorney, and that your Honor should join with me in an effort to obtain a full and open investigation of this whole matter.

Your Honor's letter does not answer my request that you call a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen to consider this matter. If you will do so, I will submit any form of resolution that you will suggest, provided only, that it is worded to secure a fair and open investigation.

I will thank you for a reply to this communication as promptly as possible.

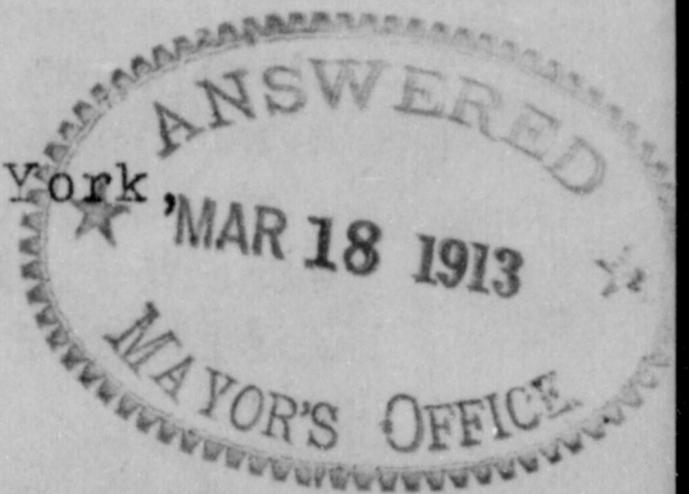
Very truly yours,  
*Niles R. Becker*

## CITY MAGISTRATES' COURT, FIRST DIVISION

3 DISTRICT

New York, March 17, 1913

Honorable William J. Gaynor,  
Mayor of The City of New York,  
City Hall.



My dear Mayor Gaynor:

In holding Court at the Third District City Magistrates' Court a condition of things has come to my attention which seems so unjust that I deem it my duty to report it to you, knowing your sentiments about graft and oppression.

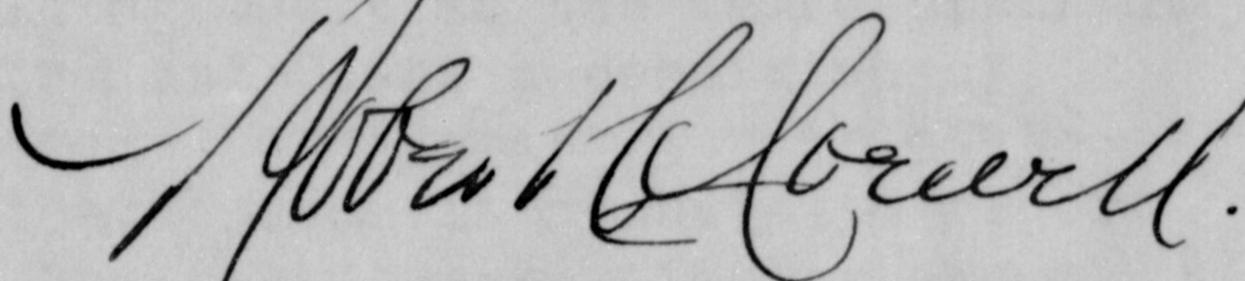
By Sec. 363, Article IV, of our Ordinances, in order to obtain a license for certain small stands, a man, otherwise entitled to it, must secure consent from the District Alderman before his application will be considered by the Bureau of Licenses. I have a record of cases which have been adjourned from time to time in order that the defendants might get the approval of the District Aldermen although they meet all the other requirements entitling them to the license permitting their operating the stands.

The testimony shows that when the

Alderman is asked for his approval, the applicant is referred to some Captain or District Leader, who puts him off from day to day and week to week, and in none of these cases has the permit been granted, and some of them have dragged along for months.

It seems to me that no good can come from Aldermanic interference in a matter which can best be regulated by our Bureau of Licenses, and I respectfully bring the matter to your notice.

Very truly yours,

  
City Magistrate.