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Governing New Jersey: Reflections on the Publication of a Revised and Expanded Edition of 'The Governors of New Jersey'

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Abstract

New Jersey's chief executive enjoys more authority than any but a handful of governors in the United States. Historically speaking, however, New Jersey's governors exercised less influence than met the eye. In the colonial period few proprietary or royal governors were able to make policy in the face of combative assemblies. The Revolutionary generation's hostility to executive power contributed to a weak governor system that carried over into the 19th and 20th centuries, until the Constitution was thoroughly revised in 1947. Before that date a handful of governors, by dint of their ideas and personalities, affected the polity in meaningful ways. Derived from a lecture delivered at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute on March 11, 2014, this essay focuses on the long history of the executive office, assessing individual governors and delineating the qualities that made them noteworthy, for good or ill.

Keywords

New Jersey, Governor, Executive Office

Disciplines

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Comments

This article is written about the author's 2014 book, *The Governors of New Jersey: Biographical Essays*.

Governing New Jersey: Reflections on the publication of a revised and expanded edition of *The Governors of New Jersey*, edited by Michael J. Birkner, Donald Linky, and Peter Mickulas (Rutgers University Press, 2014)

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Abstract

New Jersey's chief executive enjoys more authority than any but a handful of governors in the United States. Historically speaking, however, New Jersey's governors exercised less influence than met the eye. In the colonial period few proprietary or royal governors were able to make policy in the face of combative assemblies. The Revolutionary generation's hostility to executive power contributed to a weak governor system that carried over into the 19th and 20th centuries, until the Constitution was thoroughly revised in 1947. Before that date a handful of governors, by dint of their ideas and personalities, affected the polity in meaningful ways. Derived from a lecture delivered at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute on March 11, 2014, this essay focuses on the long history of the executive office, assessing individual governors and delineating the qualities that made them noteworthy, for good or ill.

Commencing my observations about the office of the governor and the people who have inhabited it in New Jersey over the past three and a half centuries, I'm reminded of a comment made by Governor Thomas Kean at a symposium three decades ago at the capitol marking the publication of the first edition. Kean had been in office only a few weeks when he attended a national governors' conference and learned that the outgoing governor of Tennessee had just

been remanded to state prison for corruption.¹ To judge by the laughter his remark provoked, it lightened the atmosphere at the symposium. It is possible that some of the crowd that day may have missed the point Kean implicitly made: the governorship is a public trust.

Having examined the governor's office and its occupants from a distinctive angle—in effect watching governors parade by, from the 1660s to Chris Christie—I have noticed highs and lows of performance and popularity, as well as patterns in the governors' exercise of power.

In my remarks today I'll focus on three main themes. Those are first, *the powers of the office* as they have evolved over time; second, the *quality of the New Jersey governors*, especially as we consider the governors of the *modern era*; and finally, the *prevalence of corruption in one or another form*—this is, after all, New Jersey.²

First, powers, with a detour into scandal. When I was invited to coedit the original edition of the governors' book, as a young PhD student back in the late 1970s, I knew little about New Jersey governors of the colonial era, but undertook the project assuming they were powerful figures. After all, the Proprietary Governors were key players in East Jersey and West Jersey, respectively, men of means who had the right connections. Further, the Royal governors who served from 1702 to 1776 were governing with the imprimatur of the monarch across the ocean, representing royal authority in his majesty's colony. So surely they were powerful executives also.

Wrong. Or at least mostly wrong. On closer examination it turns out that the most operative words in evaluating most governors in the century from New Jersey's founding into the

¹ For a transcript, see [Three Decades of the Governor's Office: A Panel Discussion](#) (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1983). Kean's remark is on page 22.

² In a stunning example of cognitive dissonance, early in 2012 the Center for Public Integrity released a report detailing the risk of corruption and lack of accountability in all fifty states, ranking New Jersey as the *least* corrupt state according to its metrics. These included tough ethics and anti-corruption laws, transparency of accounting, and the "hard work" of good government groups and legislators. Anyone who follows New Jersey politics closely is likely to notice a disconnect between the center's conclusions and reality on the ground. For the Center for Public Integrity analysis, see <http://247WallSt.com/special-report/2012/03/22/Americas-least-corrupt-states/>

Revolutionary era are “frustrated,” “disengaged,” and “tormented by local elites who were determined to have their way.” It is true that several governors who served New Jersey in the colonial era were diligent and, for certain periods at least, reasonably effective. Lewis Morris, Francis Bernard, and William Franklin fit this description, though Bernard served only two years and Franklin’s effectiveness lasted only until resistance to the British tax and regulatory policies (what the British called “equity and efficiency”) transformed into outright rebellion.

New Jersey’s governors in the colonial era were, in the main, people who had the right political connections, men who hoped to parlay those connections and their role as governor into financial benefit. It did not work out that way for most of them. Some, like Edmond Andros, tried to enhance their influence with the crown by clamping down on the proprietors’ freedom from paying duties to the King. That did not work out well. Neither did his campaign of persecution of proprietor Philip Carteret, who had served as the colony’s first governor. But by and large it did not matter whether a governor was forceful or not. Patricia Bonomi has reminded us that in an age before party politics had taken hold either in Britain or the American colonies, local elites played a game of politics without rules, using any tools available to resist and, if necessary, tear down executive authority that might impinge on their local interests.³ Therein lies a tale.

Probably the most famous—or infamous—New Jersey governor of the colonial era was Edward Hyde, Lord Cornbury, who for about three centuries has been best known as the state’s transvestite governor, because he allegedly dressed in women’s clothing so as better to represent his sovereign, Queen Anne. Cornbury’s road to the governorship of New Jersey was

³ Patricia U. Bonomi. *The Lord Cornbury Scandal: The Politics of Reputation in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

unexceptional. He was well born in England, had military experience and excellent royal connections, and needed money. When in 1702 the proprietors of East and West Jersey surrendered their charters to the crown, Queen Anne combined them into a single royal colony and appointed Cornbury as governor. So far, nothing out of the ordinary. Cornbury's objective ostensibly was to assert royal authority in New Jersey, but like many of his successors, he was more interested in enhancing his personal finances. He was not successful on either track, thanks in part to the consistent, debilitating opposition of Lewis Morris and other local power brokers. Opposition to Cornbury in both New York and New Jersey drew on charges against him in the London press. By 1708 the Lords of Trade in London concluded that Cornbury had to go, and he was replaced by a military man, John Lovelace. Lovelace lasted less than a year before dying in office.

It was in context of the hardball game played against Cornbury, which included allegations of bribery against him, that the transvestite issue was raised. Cornbury's supposed cross-dressing was first bruited by his political opponents, who said he enjoyed wearing his wife's clothes while walking about town. In one account of the story that you can readily find on the internet, four letters, written by three different people, all enemies of Cornbury's, around the time of his recall to England, mention this supposed habit. The identification of Cornbury as a cross-dresser continued right into the first edition of the *Governors' book*. In that volume Paul Stellhorn and I published a copy of an oil painting of a person alleged to be Cornbury, wearing woman's clothes. We said nothing about this being a "supposed" portrait of him. Indeed, the essay on Cornbury we published in 1982 affirmed that Cornbury was a cross-dresser.

There are problems with this attribution, starting with the fact that none of Cornbury's political friends or detached observers ever mentioned that he cross-dressed. The oil painting, as

Professor Bonomi determined after rigorous investigation, has no meaningful provenance aside from its exhibition in 1867 at the New York Historical Society and a label affixed on it at that time. In her book, The Lord Cornbury Scandal, Bonomi portrays her subject as neither the corrupt executive depicted by his political foes nor a transvestite. He was, quite simply, unpopular with local elites, and in that he was not much different from his successors. In Bonomi's account, he was not a tyrant, eccentric, or corrupt leader, but rather a conscientious and reasonably effective proponent of imperial power over the colonies—and the unfortunate target of a nasty Whig press back in London. Such is the depiction of Cornbury in Marc Mappen's essay for The Governors of New Jersey.

And yet: there is rarely a last word in history. Reviewing Bonomi's book for The New Republic, Alan Taylor suggested that Bonomi's revisionism regarding Cornbury was in need of revising. In his essay Taylor argued that Bonomi ignored the "most sordid aspect" of Cornbury's governorship: exploitation of his land grant-making power.⁴ "To enrich himself with fees and his political cronies with massive tracts of frontier land," Taylor notes, Cornbury "sacrificed the interests of Indians and common settlers—and violated instructions from the Crown to limit each new land grant to 1000 acres." Taylor's verdict on Cornbury? He was "a royal governor of mediocre talents and morality. He was neither the paragon of imperial duty depicted by Bonomi nor the utter blackguard of his enemies' accusations." As for Cornbury as transvestite, Taylor is agnostic. "Not proven," he observes, "is not the same as not guilty." Future scholars will have an

⁴ Taylor's review essay originally appeared under the headline, "Devil in a Blue Dress," in the August 3, 1998 number of The New Republic. It has been reprinted in Taylor's collection of essays, Writing Early American History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 120-127.

opportunity to weigh in as new evidence will perhaps afford yet another fresh take on this intriguing episode in New Jersey history.

Whatever one's thinking about Lord Cornbury, the fundamental point remains: colonial governors were not nearly as powerful as you might expect. They were caught between the dynamics of provincial politics, which was usually factional and intense, and the imperial patronage system. Those who view the governorship as a power base do not need to envy the colonial governors.

For that matter, they do not need to envy the governors who followed.

The American Revolution is well known as a movement against taxation without representation and executive authority. Generations of scholars, perhaps none more influentially than Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, delineated the ideology of the Revolutionary elite and their fears of unchecked executive power.⁵ They traced the intersection of this ideology with the American rebels' organized activity against the British crown beginning in the early 1760s. It is no surprise in this context that under the Constitution of 1776 in New Jersey, as in most other states in the new republic, legislatures, not governors, were believed to be the proper institutions of authority. Hence from 1776 until circumstances led to a major constitutional revision in 1844, the governor had no specific executive responsibilities and few patronage powers. He had no formal influence in the making of legislation, no powers of fiscal control, no meaningful veto of bills he did not like. The governor commanded the largely inert state militia; served as presiding judge of the highest appeals court, and could cast tie-breaking votes, as needed, in the legislative

⁵ Both Bailyn and Wood have written extensively on this subject, including Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967) and Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

council. But he was not responsible for carrying out the legislature's programs and policies or enforcing its laws.⁶

Is it any surprise that under such an arrangement, some individuals of real ability chose not to pursue the office? Indeed, one leading politician who was elected to the position, Garret D. Wall, actually turned it down in 1829, the only person in state history to do so. Wall was more interested in serving as U.S. attorney for New Jersey, a federal patronage job in the gift of President-elect Andrew Jackson, for whom he had vigorously campaigned in 1828. Although Jackson did not carry New Jersey that year, he soon made the appointment.⁷ Just a few years after Wall turned down the governorship, the anti-Jacksonian party leader, Samuel L. Southard, resigned months into his term as governor to accept election to the U.S. Senate. In the early 19th century, unlike today, the governorship offered few opportunities for constructive leadership, as Southard and Wall both appreciated.⁸ The U.S. Senate, as Southard reminded his political friends, was where the action was. How matters have changed!

All the same, as any serious student of politics knows, political power does not necessarily lie simply in constitutional arrangements. Governors can be effective leaders even working within the constraints of a constitutional system that stacks the deck in the legislature's favor. William Livingston, the first governor under the 1776 Constitution, led by dint of his character and forceful style. So did Joseph Bloomfield, governor for nine one-year terms early in the 19th century, on largely the same grounds—though it must be added that Bloomfield was able

⁶ See, for example, Charles R. Erdman, Jr., The New Jersey Constitution of 1776 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929). For good brief explications of the new constitutional arrangement, see Richard P. McCormick, Experiment in Independence: New Jersey in the Critical Period, 1781-1789 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950), pp. 70-74 and idem., New Jersey From Colony to State, 1609-1789 (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), pp. 122-124.

⁷ On Wall's decision to decline service as governor, see Duane Lockard, The New Jersey Governor: A Study in Political Power (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), p. 50.

⁸ The circumstances surrounding Southard's taking and leaving the governorship are discussed in Michael Birkner, Samuel L. Southard: Jeffersonian Whig (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), pp. 134-142.

to exert his influence only in conjunction with the Jeffersonian Republicans' formidable legislative caucus. From a different angle, that of vigorous party leader, Peter Vroom also served for six one-year terms (1829-1832, 1834-1837), demonstrating that a governor could be active in his party caucus and effective in shaping policy. He exerted influence even as his Democratic allies divided over the transportation monopoly (the Camden & Amboy Railroad and Delaware and Raritan Canal "joint" company) that Vroom himself had originally supported, yet ultimately decided needed to be checked. By 1832 Vroom joined President Andrew Jackson in fighting the "Monster" Bank of the United States, and he remained a foe of the Bank until it was finally left for dead.⁹

Over time, as immigration accelerated, New Jersey's population grew and cities like Newark and Paterson led the way toward a more balanced and integrated economy. Under new conditions the constitutional order of 1776 proved inadequate to the state's needs. Governor Vroom, among other political notables, contended that the governor's office needed to be strengthened, so that it was less the cat's paw of the legislature. That could be accomplished by taking the election of the governor from the legislature and giving it to the people, and also by enhancing the governor's authority to veto legislation.

Peter Vroom also sought to separate the governor's office from the judiciary by ending the governor's tenure as Chancellor, hence moving New Jersey's governance toward a true separation of powers. The movement for a new constitution succeeded in 1844. Yet as Duane Lockard has noted, there was no dramatic change in the relationship between the governor and the legislature. For the most part, the legislature continued to dominate policymaking. Only the

⁹ For elaboration, consult the essays on these individuals in [The Governors of New Jersey](#).

exceptional governor made much of an impact on policy making in New Jersey. Indeed, during the next century, the New Jersey governorship was, if not toothless, at best an office where placeholders predominated. Strong executive leadership was uncommon.¹⁰ Among the exceptions was Leon Abbett, the champion of immigrant interests and regulation of railroads. Abbett served two non-consecutive terms in the late 19th century and forged an enviable record. Although he was not quite the reform-minded paragon his biographer Richard Hogarty makes him out to be, I would readily include him on a list of the state's top ten governors.¹¹

Perhaps no governor made more impact in a shorter time frame than Woodrow Wilson (1911-12), who showed in his brief tenure that the governor of New Jersey could press an ambitious legislative agenda and make things happen. Wilson was so effective as a champion of progressive issues, as Arthur Link has shown, that his governorship served as springboard to his successful presidential candidacy in 1912. To this day Wilson enjoys pride of place as the only New Jerseyan elected president.

It was not until 1947 that we reach the era of the modern governorship, the office infused with new authority, thanks in good measure to the efforts of Alfred E. Driscoll. A recent article about Chris Christie in The New Republic calls the governor of New Jersey the "most powerful" in the nation.¹² Other observers, including the late Alan Rosenthal and political scientist Thad Beyle, are more restrained but still recognize that the governor of New Jersey has formidable tools for effective governance. They place New Jersey among the top six states with strong governors. By Beyle's calculation, the others were Massachusetts, Alaska, Maryland, New York,

¹⁰ Duane Lockard, The New Jersey Governor: A Study in Political Power (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), chapters 3-5.

¹¹ Richard A. Hogarty, Leon Abbett's New Jersey: The Emergence of the Modern Governor (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2001).

¹² Alec Macgillis, "Woke Up This Morning and All That Love Had Gone: The Rise and Fall of Chris Christie," The New Republic, March 3, 2014, pp. 14-25. It is worth noting that in Ryan Lizza's recent, coruscating account of Governor Christie's political career, he quotes Thomas Kean calling the New Jersey governorship "the most powerful in the country." Lizza, "Crossing Chris Christie," The New Yorker, April 13, 2014, p. 46.

and West Virginia.¹³ Whether “most powerful” or “one of the most powerful” executive offices in the land, it is evident that the New Jersey governor has a great opportunity to exert influence, if the constitutionally mandated authority is combined with political skill.

What makes the current governor’s office powerful? The New Jersey governor nominates the attorney general and the state treasurer. The governor also determines the size of the budget, fills hundreds of well-paying slots on the state’s many commissions and authorities, and doles out aid to its hundreds of towns and cities. In the words of the journalist Alec Macgillis, “no governor in modern memory has worked these levers as skillfully as [Chris] Christie.” A reader of the latest edition of The Governors of New Jersey might reasonably take issue with that statement. Since 1947 New Jersey has produced a remarkable crop of governors—I refer now to elected governors—and one effective governor who was not elected: Richard Codey. If I were to play a parlor game in evaluating the governors since 1947, not counting Christie, who is still in office, it would play out something like this. I would place the post-1947 governors in four categories: *outstanding*, *strong but deficient in certain respects*, *mediocre*, and *distinctly disappointing*. I’d then make a case that out of the state’s ten elected governors since 1947, five were outstanding, three strong but deficient, one mediocre, and one distinctly disappointing. Further, in terms of the sixty years between 1948 and 2008, in thirty-nine of them the governor was outstanding. I’m referring to five two-term governors: Driscoll, Meyner, Hughes, Byrne, and Kean. Cahill, Florio and Whitman were strong executives, but deficient in certain respects, Corzine was mediocre, and McGreevey disappointing.

¹³ Alan Rosenthal, The Best Job in Politics: Exploring How Governors Succeed as Policy Leaders (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2012); Thad Kousser and Justin H. Phillips, The Power of American Governors: Winning on Budgets and Losing on Policy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

I'd go a step further and suggest that the five governors I list as outstanding are easily among the ten best governors New Jersey ever had, joined in that elite category by Woodrow Wilson, Leon Abbett, William Livingston, Peter Vroom, and Joseph Bloomfield.

For details on the modern governors I refer you to the essays in The Governors of New Jersey. Living in New Jersey for part of Brendan Byrne's governorship, I did not have an exalted view of Byrne at the time. My image was of a governor who enjoyed playing a lot of tennis and hobnobbing with celebrities more than spending time at the office. But that was perhaps as misleading an image as the notion that Dwight Eisenhower's presidency was defined by his love of golf. Thanks to modern scholarship we now know that Eisenhower was one of the craftiest and most effective presidents of the post-World War II era. As regards Byrne, read Don Linky's essay about him in our new book and you will appreciate the significance of his accomplishments. Read the essays on Driscoll, Meyner, Hughes, and Kean and you will feel state pride, seeing how these different personalities inhabited the office in the best sense, setting priorities and making things happen. Compare the governorship of New Jersey even in the hands of lesser individuals than these and you will notice that the office conveys potential for active leadership that you will not see in states like Texas and South Carolina. I must immediately add, in light of what I've said about governors who served prior to 1947, that there is opportunity for someone with political savvy and skills to make an impact even in a weak governor state. But having the tools to work with to advance an agenda is a meaningful advantage. The New Jersey governor has those tools.

Before closing I thought it worthwhile to share some observations about which governors *I like the most*, which I found *the most intriguing*, and which I *did not either like or warm up to*.

So far as liking governors I would give pride of place to three very different characters: Vroom, Abbett, and Hughes. Growing up in a Federalist household, and often tagged as a conventional partisan during his years in the political trenches from the 1820s through the 1850s, Vroom had another dimension. He re-invented himself as governor, fighting the good fight for the average citizen against corporate interests at a time when it would have been easier for him to cooperate with Robert Stockton and his associates who had a major stake in the so-called Joint Transportation Companies. Vroom's identification with Andrew Jackson's policies, particularly the war against the Bank of the United States, seems to have generated new thinking about corporate power in New Jersey. While Vroom never succeeded in uncoupling the state from its agreement with the Joint Companies, he challenged orthodoxy in both parties and put special interests in New Jersey on the defensive.¹⁴ He also demonstrated that by using the bully pulpit and making specific legislative recommendations, the governor could direct attention to a program and build support for it.

Leon Abbett was also a fighter, in his case, for the rights of immigrants—notably Irish immigrants—and his support for working men's causes, among them his sponsorship of a law requiring employers to pay their workers in cash rather than in paper scrip or company store merchandise. His greatest crusade was to tax the railroads, the leading corporate power in the state for decades. The railroads saw Abbett as their enemy and fought him tooth and nail. But they lost their tax-exempt status. In this sense Abbett was a harbinger of the progressive movement. In his second term Abbett pressed for new labor laws, free public libraries, scholarships for Rutgers College students, highway improvements, money for public schools,

¹⁴ For elaboration, see Michael J. Birkner, "Peter Vroom and the Politics of Democracy," in Paul A. Stellhorn, ed., *Jacksonian New Jersey* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1979): 11-38. Helpful context for the anti-corporation movement is provided in Herbert Ershkowitz, *The Origin of the Whig and Democratic Parties: New Jersey Politics, 1820-1837* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), chapter 8.

and the creation of new departments of banking and insurance. Presaging Teddy Roosevelt's leadership during the coal strike of 1902, Abbett stepped forward in 1890 as a mediator between labor and management in several major New Jersey labor disputes. Abbett was hardly perfect, particularly in his association with the noxious boss of Jersey City, but his overall record was admirable, especially when compared with the governors who preceded and succeeded him.¹⁵

No discussion of New Jersey governors should ignore Richard Hughes, a genial jurist who was considered a throwaway candidate for governor in 1961, running against one of the stronger members of the Eisenhower administration, former Secretary of Labor Jim Mitchell. A progressive Republican sympathetic to organized labor, Mitchell was the odds-on favorite to win the governorship back for the GOP in 1961. But elections are not won on the basis of pundits' predictions. Hughes out-campaigned Mitchell and benefited from the popularity of the Kennedy administration in winning an upset victory by fewer than 35,000 votes. During the next eight years Hughes forged a remarkable record—in some respects, a smaller scale Great Society. His notable achievements included the rapid expansion of New Jersey's system of higher education and negotiating a complex deal that ensured the survival and improvement of a crucial commuter rail line in the Newark-Hudson County area (the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad, now PATH). Hughes supported urban renewal programs and a sales tax to pay for expansion of government services. This expansion included creating a Department of Community Affairs and various state criminal justice agencies, as well as departments of consumer protection and transportation. Construction of the Garden States Arts Center in Holmdel and the first ever funding for Public Broadcasting in New Jersey and the New Jersey Symphony were Hughes' initiatives. He was

¹⁵ Hogarty, Leon Abbett, passim.

critical to the establishment of the Hackensack Meadowlands Commission, which would plan the development of that vast tract of land in the most northeastern part of the state. Hughes also staunchly supported the Tercentenary Celebrations of 1964, the single most important initiative ever in building knowledge of the state's history and pride in New Jersey.¹⁶

The two most intriguing governors from my perspective were Walter Edge and A. Harry Moore, though for different reasons. For those following with interest the still somewhat murky Bridge-gate scandal, one of the most amusing sidebars was learning that Port Authority functionary David Wildstein's *nom de plume* as a blogger was "Wally Edge." In using this moniker Wildstein playfully assumed the persona of the Princetonian who served two non-consecutive terms as governor, first during World War I and second during World War II. By most accounts, including Joseph Mahoney's essay in our book, Edge was an able governor, fiscally conservative but concerned about something more than balancing budgets. We need to credit Edge for at least three things beyond specific measures enacted during his governorships: first, his consistent support for constitutional reform; second, advocating the nomination of Alfred Driscoll as his successor; and third, his crucial role in the creation of the Port Authority, which proved so essential to the development of Bergen County in the 1920s and beyond.¹⁷ Edge had another dimension that did not appear in his memoir, *A Jerseyman's Journal*, or in the first edition of *The Governors of New Jersey*. I'm referring to his close association early in his career with Nucky Johnson, the colorful boss of Atlantic City who has been brought to exuberant life in the ongoing television series, "Boardwalk Empire." It turns out Walter Edge played his politics

¹⁶ For this approach to Hughes's governorship, I am indebted to Stanley Winters' essay in *The Governors of New Jersey* and most especially to John B. Wefing, *The Life and Times of Richard J. Hughes: The Politics of Civility* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ As Jameson Doig has shown, Edge showed in his efforts to create the Port Authority that he had a broad vision of how northern New Jersey could develop through regional cooperation. In this he offered a sharp contrast to the narrow and suspicious views of Governor James Fielder and other political leaders of this era. Doig, *Empire on the Hudson: Entrepreneurial Vision and Political Power at the Port of New York Authority* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 42, 47-48.

in private on a different track from his public persona. Much later, when Nucky Johnson was sent to prison, Edge airbrushed him out of his own life story. No surprise there, but intriguing all the same.

Along the same lines, I will put in a word for A. Harry Moore, who would surely win the “Miss Congeniality” award among New Jersey governors if there were one. If Will Rogers never met a man he didn’t like, you could say that there wasn’t anyone who didn’t like Harry Moore. That helps explain Moore’s consistent success in elective politics. He ran three times for governor and once for the U.S. Senate without suffering defeat. Had he run again for governor in 1943, as Frank Hague urged him to do, Moore likely would have won again. The strong backing of Hague in his heyday as boss of Hudson County didn’t hurt. It’s said of Moore that he had a special phone installed in his office in Trenton just to take calls from Hague. I cannot verify that, but it’s almost as good as the line in Ken Burns’s biopic about Huey Long in which the narrator asserts that Long’s minion and successor as governor, O.K. Allen, signed anything that came across his desk, including a leaf that flew in through an open window. I would not call Harry Moore a lackey of Frank Hague, but Moore’s career demonstrated that as popular as he was, he was closely aligned with the Jersey City boss. As the state’s chief executive, he lacked vision. Nor was he in sync with the zeitgeist of the 1930s and the popular leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Moore may well have been the most conservative Democrat in the U.S. Senate in the 1930s. That said, Harry Moore was a charming man. There wasn’t a service club he wouldn’t visit or a charitable cause he wouldn’t support. He gives the lie to Leo Durocher’s dictum that nice guys finish last.

Governors I couldn’t warm up to are numerous. In the latter decades of the 19th century, all too many of the governors were creatures of political machines, allies of corporate interests,

and, in some instances, all too forgettable. One memorable figure, George Brinton McClellan, was a disappointment in the governor's office. He did the basics in offering a legislative program but rocked no boats. As his biographer notes, McClellan "tended to stress issues on which most people could agree." He was barely a factor in legislative deliberations. At the close of his term in 1881, McClellan wrote, he was glad it was over, "as it was becoming a nuisance to be obliged to go to Trenton." So much for the attractions of high office.

Let me say a word or two about corruption, since the whiff of scandal is clearly affecting our current governor's standing in New Jersey and his presidential prospects.

For a state that is often viewed as a political cesspool, historically speaking the governorship itself has *not* been a hotbed of scandal. As I've already noted, the so-called Cornbury scandal may not have been a scandal at all, but the outcome of a nasty political environment. No New Jersey governor has been impeached for crimes and misdemeanors, though it is possible James McGreevey might have been had he not resigned once news broke of the appointment of his gay lover to a position for which he was clearly unqualified.

In broader perspective, if association with business people and political allies who were themselves unethical or borderline criminal were a criteria for talking about scandal in the governor's office, then dozens of New Jersey governors would probably fit under that umbrella, among them the current governor, who earned his political spurs by prosecuting corrupt officials, but who, according to journalistic accounts, did so mainly to replace one set of bosses with another set with whom he could forge profitable alliances.

I do not say that to pass judgment on Chris Christie, because we don't have all the facts and it's far too soon to write him off politically. I will say that I am glad my co-editors and I were in agreement that it would be unwise to commission an essay on Christie for our book

while he was still in office. Perspective is essential. Three decades ago, when the first edition of the Governors book was published and the book launch took place in the capitol, Brendan Byrne got in what I took as only a semi-facetious jab at Paul Stellhorn and me for not including him in that volume. But would an essay about Brendan Byrne written in 1982 have done him justice? I think Governor Byrne today will be pleased by how history treats him in this edition. When next there is call for a new edition of The Governors of New Jersey, I trust Chris Christie will get his just deserts, whatever they may turn out to be.

In closing, I hope you sustain your interest in New Jersey's governance and that as citizens you demand the very best.¹⁸

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