

day—he died of a heart attack in Mercer Hospital in Trenton.

Records of Governor Edward C. Stokes, New Jersey State Library, Bureau of Archives and History, Trenton, N.J.

Noble, Ransom E. *New Jersey Progressivism Before Wilson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946.

Ransom E. Noble



JOHN FRANKLIN FORT (March 20, 1852–November 17, 1920), lawyer, state supreme court justice, thirty-third governor of New Jersey, was born at Pemberton, Burlington County, the only son and eldest child of Andrew Heisler and Hannah A. (Brown) Fort. With familial roots deep in America's colonial past, John F. Fort grew up in an atmosphere in which public service was a responsibility and elective office was the norm. His father had served in the state assembly and his uncle, George F. Fort, had been the Democratic governor of New Jersey from 1851 to 1854.

After spending his early years attending local private schools in Pemberton and Mount Holly, Fort was graduated from Pennington Seminary in 1869. He completed his formal education at Albany Law School, where he shared a house with Alton B. Parker, the Democratic candidate for president in 1904. Prior to receiving his LL.B. degree in 1872, Fort taught school in rural Ewanville and clerked for a number of prominent attorneys, including Edward M. Paxson, later chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court (1889–93).

Tall, handsome, and articulate, John Franklin Fort began his law career in Newark after being admitted to the state

bar in 1873. As the state's largest city and its unquestioned financial, industrial, and social center, Newark offered an ambitious young attorney the best opportunity for rapid advancement. The fact that Fort's maternal grandfather had once been a powerful force in Essex County Republican circles must also have been a factor in his selecting Newark as the site of his law practice. The Fort name soon provided access to political and financial circles denied young men with equal intelligence but less social standing. In 1874 he served as assistant journal clerk of the state assembly. As his income increased he thought of marriage. Charlotte Stainsby, a charming, intelligent, and vivacious young woman, daughter of William Stainsby, Essex County Republican leader, met Fort shortly after his arrival in Newark, and they were married on April 20, 1876. The Fort family ultimately consisted of two sons, Franklin and Leslie, and a daughter, Margretta.

Despite the fact that the Democratic party controlled the State House between 1868 and 1889, Fort's Republican ties did not prove a serious handicap. In 1878 Governor George B. McClellan appointed the twenty-six-year-old attorney judge of the First District Court of Newark, a position he continued to hold under the Democratic administrations of George C. Ludlow and Leon S. Abbett. He resigned from the bench in 1886 to return to private practice, but later served on a number of judicial commissions, including an 1895 panel investigating the need for a uniform set of laws governing divorce, bankruptcy and insurance. In 1899 he served as a member of an American committee studying European penology, and on his return he introduced the concept of indeterminate sentencing—an idea he would advocate for the rest of his life.

Fort's link to the Republican party dated back to his law-school days when he actively campaigned for Ulysses S. Grant in 1872. In 1884 he was selected as a delegate to the Republican National Convention, where he demonstrated his

awareness of the importance of party regularity by supporting the organization choice, James G. Blaine. His rising stature among New Jersey Republicans became evident in 1895 when he was selected chairman of the state Republican convention. The following year brought Fort back into the public eye when he nominated his state's favorite son, Garret A. Hobart for the vice-presidency at the Republican National Convention in Saint Louis. New Jersey's first Republican governor in twenty-eight years, John W. Griggs, then rewarded Fort by appointing him presiding judge of the Essex County Court of Common Pleas. He appeared to have reached the pinnacle of his career in 1900, when Governor Foster M. Voorhees appointed him to the state supreme court, which was assuming a position of prime importance as an alternative channel of policy combat and public decision-making.

Between 1880 and 1910 New Jersey was significantly transformed by intensified urbanization, industrialization and immigration. By 1880 the state's twenty cities made up more than one-half of the total state population. Its three largest cities, Newark, Jersey City and Paterson, had populations of foreign or mixed parentage comprising over 70 percent of their total inhabitants. By 1910 New Jersey ranked third among the states in population density. Unfortunately serious growing pains accompanied the state's demographic and industrial development. Corruption and moral bankruptcy characterized the state's Republican and Democratic organizations. Widespread recognition of the evils of concentrated wealth and calls for the restoration of economic democracy led many citizens to denounce the monopoly of the state's political and industrial sectors by an alliance of bipartisan political bosses and corporate magnates. Chief among the latter were the railroads, for though their real-estate holdings represented over one-quarter of the state's property values, they benefited from preferential tax laws at the expense of individual homeowners.

By 1900 the GOP had managed to emerge as the dominant political force in the state. This was partly the result of the election of 1896 and Republican success in attracting the new-stock ethnics disillusioned by the cultural breakdown within the state Democratic party over such issues as gambling, liquor, and aid to parochial schools. It was partly due, also, to the fruition of a sociopolitical alliance with representatives of the state's railroad and utility corporations, which represented a blatant disregard of the public interest and prompted a number of progressive Republicans to protest the inherent inequalities in railroad taxation, franchise limitation, and the complete absence of economic and political democracy. This "New Idea" faction led by George L. Record and Mark Fagan of Jersey City, Everett Colby and Frank Sommer of Essex and James Blauvelt of Passaic County demanded election reform through introduction of the direct primary; the initiative, referendum and recall; and the extension of the civil service system to include a broader range of government positions.

The Republican schism between "New Idea" progressives and their conservative "Old Guard" opponents approached crisis proportions in 1907 when disclosures of malfeasance within the administration of Governor Edward C. Stokes threatened the party's statewide hegemony. The most immediate consequence of this situation was a wide-open struggle for the Republican gubernatorial nomination. Although both conservatives and progressives offered their support to a number of candidates, only one man seemed capable of uniting the warring factions. John Franklin Fort appeared to possess many of the virtues deemed essential for the coming campaign: he had a reputation for integrity and probity; he was well known among party regulars; he had no connection with the Stokes administration; he was promised the support of influential "New Idea" leaders; and his record on the controversial issues of equal taxation and Sunday saloon-closing laws

was acceptable, though equivocal.

Although one segment of the "New Idea" movement supported Essex County Sheriff Frank Sommer, the outcome of the gubernatorial nomination was never in doubt as Fort outdistanced his rivals for an easy first-ballot victory. During the campaign that followed, both Fort and his Democratic opponent, Mayor Frank S. Katzenbach of Trenton, favored the creation of a public utility commission, the enactment of civil service reform and the adoption of direct primaries. If the election turned on one issue, it was the enforcement of the so-called Bishops' Sunday saloon-closing act. Katzenbach remained publicly noncommittal, though Democrats, particularly in the industrial, immigrant and urban counties of Hudson, Essex and Passaic, forcefully denounced the law. Judge Fort, who seemed to be speaking as often from the pulpit as from the platform, ultimately came out in favor of enforcement. His advocacy seemed to diminish, however, as he campaigned closer to the state's urban centers. In spite of the burdens of a divided party and charges of Republican corruption, Fort managed to squeeze into office by a slim plurality of eight thousand votes.

In his inaugural address Governor Fort proposed to implement campaign proposals for an effective rate-making utility commission, the extension of civil service reform, the adoption of direct primaries, the enforcement of the antisaloon laws, and the creation of three new departments of motor vehicles, public reports and accounts. The governor-elect further supported legislation to eliminate the retrogressive county tax boards and institute jury reform, judicial reorganization, redistricting of the state assembly, and expansion of public roads. Unfortunately, the governor would present this ambitious and comprehensive program in each of his annual messages to the legislature only to have it rejected every time.

Indeed, the history of the Fort administration chronicles the failure of reformers as they met defeat on almost every major

issue. This was due partly to the obstructive tactics of conservatives within the governor's party, and partly to Fort's equivocal leadership. For although conservatives suspected his progressive leanings, reformers had similar doubts about the degree of his commitment to economic and social change. Yet Fort proved a persistent and, at times, courageous leader, sure of his convictions and cognizant of political realities. He appeared most combative and most successful in attacking gambling and liquor violations and less heroic and certainly less effective in dealing with the railroads and utilities. His willingness to accept the token compromises the conservatives offered angered the progressives, who rejected the notion of politically motivated piecemeal reforms.

The Fort administration's most noticeable failure lay in its inability to create a strong public utility commission. Here, however, the governor faced overwhelming resistance from the Public Service Corporation, the state's utility giant, and united opposition from the conservative-controlled state senate. The Public Utility Act, which was ultimately passed by the 1910 legislature, proved to be of a quality so diluted that it required complete revision one year later. A similar lack of success accompanied efforts to abolish the county tax boards, which remained bastions of undervaluation and effectively nullified earlier tax reforms.

Fortunately, there was more progress on issues such as railroad property valuation, child labor, civil service reform, workmen's compensation, factory safety inspection, old age pensions, and direct primaries. Among Fort's secondary achievements one would have to include opening an inland waterway between Bay Head and Cape May; constructing a highway linking the state's resort areas; conserving New Jersey's water resources, and maintaining a treasury balance of over one million dollars. When viewed against the successes of reformers in other states, the achievements of the Fort administration pale. Yet the years from 1908 to

1911 were not a time of inertia but a formative period that awakened public opinion to the need for an expanded economic and political democracy. In that respect John Franklin Fort's greatest contribution as governor may have been to lay the foundation on which Woodrow Wilson would build.

Fort left the governor's office in January 1911. He spent the last nine years of his life engaged in a variety of business, political and public service activities. During the 1912 presidential campaign he served as chairman of the state Progressive Committee. Though Fort was pledged to Theodore Roosevelt, he had close ties with President Woodrow Wilson that kept him in public life. In 1914 and 1915 he served as a special envoy to Santo Domingo, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, investigating the financial and political difficulties that troubled those nations. In March 1917 Wilson named him chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, a post he held until ill health forced his resignation in November 1919. After a prolonged illness John Franklin Fort died in his South Orange home at the age of sixty-eight, on November 17, 1920.

He left a legacy of moral rectitude, honesty and hard work. During a period in New Jersey history when corruption and an arrogant disregard of the commonweal characterized government, John F. Fort gave expression to those citizens demanding meaningful social change. His dilemma was simply that he could not be all things to all people. Late in life he was fond of characterizing his term as governor by telling the story of the little girl who returned from school to ask her mother the difference between hope and expectation. "Well," said the mother, "I hope to meet your father in Heaven, but I do not expect to."

Records of Governor John F. Fort, New Jersey State Library, Bureau of Archives and History, Trenton, N.J.

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Eugene M. Tobin



THOMAS WOODROW WILSON (December 28, 1856-February 3, 1924), thirty-fourth governor, was born in Staunton, Virginia, the son of the Reverend Joseph Ruggles Wilson, D.D., and Janet Woodrow Wilson. His paternal grandparents were James and Anne (Adams) Wilson, who emigrated from northern Ireland in 1807; his maternal grandparents were the Reverend Thomas and Marion (Williamson) Woodrow, who emigrated from Carlisle, England, in 1836.

Presbyterianism, with its Calvinistic emphasis on the sovereignty of God and its covenanter tradition, was a dominant influence on Woodrow Wilson from his boyhood. His father was a leading southern Presbyterian minister, and the son almost literally grew up in the bosom of the church. His home was also a place where education and matters of the mind were highly valued. From his "incomparable father," as Woodrow called him, the boy received intellectual stimulation, the desire to excel, and his best instruction.