

It was George T. Werts's misfortune to preside over the dismantling of the Democratic party, which had dominated New Jersey politics between 1869 and 1896. Though the governor had scrupulously avoided any personal taint of illegality, his party's corruption contributed to its repudiation by the voters. Democratic supremacy in the post-Civil War period had resulted from efficient machine control at the local level. But the 1893 legislature had shocked even the most jaded citizens with its sordid behavior in legalizing racetrack gambling. The onset of the depression only accelerated a voter realignment toward the GOP that reflected a national trend and culminated in the election of William McKinley in 1896. It is clear that the vaunted Republican majorities of that year in New Jersey had actually been over three years in the making.

The governor's failure to provide leadership and his willingness to let the focus of power rest in the legislature characterized the Werts years. While the public was trying to cope with the most severe industrial depression of this generation, Governor Werts was leaving as his most enduring legacy a budget surplus of almost \$1 million. His administration was notably deficient in rebuilding the integrity of state government. Once his term ended Werts retired to private life and his Jersey City law practice. He died on January 17, 1910—the very day that Governor-elect Woodrow Wilson inaugurated a new period of Democratic control.

Records of Governor George T. Werts, New Jersey State Library, Bureau of Archives and History, Trenton, N.J.

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JOHN WILLIAM GRIGGS (July 10, 1849–November 28, 1927) had many political admirers in a life that included service as New Jersey's twenty-ninth governor, United States attorney general, and member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. William E. Sackett saw him as a masterful and overpowering personality, "an intellect in a mold of ice." Walter E. Edge recalled, in *A Jerseyman's Journal*, that Griggs was "an attractive man—of fine appearance, an eloquent orator, a keen thinker . . . [with] a fine sense of humor and every attribute of warmth and understanding."

Griggs was a scion of a farming family that had been settled in New Jersey since about 1733. The youngest son of Daniel and Emeline Johnson Griggs, he was born at the family homestead on Ridge Road near Newton, the county seat of Sussex County. He attended the Collegiate Institute in Newton, then matriculated in 1864 at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. Although he had participated a year before graduation in an unruly protest against the abolition of student fraternities, he was graduated in 1868, and he returned to Newton, where he studied law as Robert Hamilton's clerk until May 1871. To complete the prescribed three-year apprenticeship, he served with Socrates Tuttle in Paterson. He received his license as an attorney in November 1871, and three years later he was admitted as a counselor. After two years of independent practice, he opened a law office with Tuttle. By 1879 he had

established a clientele large and important enough to warrant opening his own office. Robert H. McCarter wrote in his memoirs that as a lawyer Griggs showed a "wonderful power of clearing up difficulties that arose in the course of protracted trials." Not surprisingly, Griggs's practice prospered.

Griggs entered state politics in 1875 as the Republican candidate from the first assembly district of Passaic County, and he was elected over the Democratic incumbent with 51.9 percent of the vote. Although at twenty-six he was the youngest member of the assembly, he served on several committees and played a key role in restructuring the election laws under the constitutional amendments approved in 1875. He was reelected in 1876 but defeated for a third assembly term in the Democratic year of 1877. During the next five years he cultivated his legal practice and served as counsel of the Passaic County Board of Chosen Freeholders (1878-79) and city counsel of Paterson (1879-82).

In 1882 Griggs returned to Trenton as a state senator, having defeated the Democratic candidate, Judge James Inglis, Jr., by only 182 votes. He spent six years in the senate serving as chairman of eight regular committees, including Railroads, Canals and Turnpikes, and Revision and Amendment of the Laws. His principal achievement came in 1884, when he was organizer and chairman of a six-member joint committee on corporate taxation. Living up to his reputation for fierce partisanship, Griggs overcame Governor Leon Abbett's "thoroughly equitable bill" for the taxation of railroads and other corporations, framing legislation he considered less punitive. Griggs's taxation bill, which became law and survived judicial review, considerably enriched the state coffers. He made an unsuccessful bid to become president of the senate in 1885 and was elected to the position in 1886.

Griggs began to set his sights on higher distinctions. In 1888 he served as a delegate-at-large to the Republican National

Convention, where he nominated New Jersey Congressman William W. Phelps for vice-president. In 1889 he hoped in vain that his railroad taxation work might win him the Republican gubernatorial nomination in New Jersey. Early in 1892 President Benjamin Harrison seriously considered naming him to fill the United States Supreme Court vacancy created by Joseph P. Bradley's death. As Griggs's confidential correspondence with William T. Hunt, editor of the *Newark Sunday Call*, reveals, Griggs enlisted the aid of Senate President Garret A. Hobart and others to influence Harrison in his favor. He also tried to curb stories that criticized him in the local Democratic press. Nevertheless, he was not selected, and his political ambitions were temporarily frustrated.

The Republicans in 1895 had their work cut out. Not since Marcus L. Ward's election in 1865 had New Jersey chosen a Republican governor. On the third ballot of the 1895 Republican State Convention, Griggs finally overcame the challenge of John Kean, Jr., and received his party's gubernatorial nomination.

Throughout the subsequent campaign against the Democratic candidate, Alexander T. McGill of Jersey City, Griggs waged a battle "for honesty, for retrenchment, for reform." His campaign rhetoric charged the Democrats with eleven years of prodigal and corrupt administration perpetuated by voting fraud in Hudson County. Specifically, he pointed to the Democrats' attempts to pass the Coal Combine Bill and to their abuses in racetrack gambling; he also accused them of staffing the state prison and the state hospital at Morris Plains with political hacks. On national issues he spoke openly for the gold standard, protectionism, and a cessation of Chinese immigration. But he rarely injected such issues into the New Jersey campaign.

Public disaffection from the incumbent party joined with dissension within the Democratic ranks to pave the way for a solid Republican victory. On November 5, 1895, Griggs was elected with 52.5

percent of the 311,609 ballots cast. He had a plurality of 26,900 votes and carried seventeen counties. Interviewed after his victory, he promised "honest government, honest officials, reduction of expenses, reduction and simplification of legislation." His victory initiated a succession of Republican governors broken only by the election of Woodrow Wilson fifteen years later.

In his inaugural address at Taylor's Opera House in Trenton on June 21, 1896, Griggs called on the legislators to consider "a restriction in the volume of legislation," especially about the unmanageable mass of statutes dealing with municipal corporations; to pass no law "unless there is some public necessity demanding it"; to enact reforms for "the protection of life, limb and health" against danger from public use of the highways and streams, specifically to prevent civilian injuries from trolley cars and to guard against the pollution of New Jersey rivers by urban sewage; and to keep the state's charitable and penal institutions free from political control.

The new governor directed his first efforts toward removing recalcitrant Democratic state officials. He replaced Secretary of State Henry C. Kelsey, who had held the post for twenty-five years, with George Wurts of Paterson. Other officeholders whose careers were ended by the reform-minded administration included the "lay judges" of the courts of common pleas. On March 19 state Senator Foster M. Voorhees introduced a bill to eliminate them and reduce the salaries of county court judges; the legislature approved the bill a week later, vacating forty jobs and saving perhaps \$100,000.

Griggs turned his attention to the problem of grade crossings, and an act approved on March 25, 1896, eliminated the public menace of grade crossings in Newark and Jersey City. The legislators departed from the spirit of Griggs's inaugural message and produced a series of bills that made it more difficult for the victims of trolley accidents to sue the

North Jersey Traction Company and other operators of surface lines in Essex and Hudson counties. In line with Griggs's views, in 1897 the legislature prepared a constitutional amendment proscribing all forms of gambling, especially horse-track gambling, though that had received legislative sanction only three years earlier; but the amendment was barely approved at public referendum.

Griggs, an avid hunter and fisherman, felt strongly about conservation, and during his two years in Trenton the legislature passed a series of laws preventing water pollution and protecting fish, shellfish, and wildlife. His most important environmental effort was an act approved on February 26, 1896, to curb the pollution of the Passaic River and establish a general sewage system for the area. The act authorized an expenditure of \$10,000. Writing to his friend William T. Hunt on December 19, 1897, Griggs said that the real danger lay "in the indifference of the local communities outside of those that actually get the smells. They are afraid of the expense, and are not spurred by the sense of immediate necessity." The preservation of public health and safety demanded state rather than local pollution controls. Under this act, Griggs named Hunt and two physicians to consider the problem, hire consultants, and make recommendations. Fifteen years and four commissions later, however, the effort had accomplished nothing of substance.

On January 11, 1898, in his last message to the legislature, Griggs surprised both parties by recommending an investigation of criminal law administration and other allegedly corrupt Democratic practices in Hudson County. Before an investigative committee could be set up, however, Griggs resigned the governorship to become the United States attorney general. On January 25 he had signed into law an act determining the order of succession to the office of governor, and therefore there was no constitutional crisis. On February 1, 1898,

Foster M. Voorhees, president of the senate, was sworn in as acting governor until the fall elections.

Griggs had been offered the post of attorney general at the recommendation of Vice-President Garret A. Hobart, his political mentor from Paterson. He was sworn in on February 1, 1898. He shared President McKinley's political outlook, and as early as April 9, 1896, he had spoken before the McKinley Club of Hartford, Connecticut—the first McKinley club in the nation. He fully supported the McKinley administration's imperialistic policies. In fact, near the close of the Spanish-American War, he accompanied the president, the vice-president, and the secretary of war on a visit to Theodore Roosevelt's victorious Rough Riders in Cuba. His most important achievement in the cabinet was arguing the "Insular Cases" before the United States Supreme Court. These cases determined the constitutional status of the conquered lands. In them, as he later wrote to Charles Bradley, Griggs relied heavily on the "broad national views of the Constitution" that Associate Justice Joseph P. Bradley had evinced in the case of the *Mormon Church v the United States*. Griggs remained in the cabinet until McKinley's assassination in 1901.

Though he continued to make his permanent home in Paterson, Griggs turned to corporate law as a member of Griggs, Dill, and Harding in New York City. Soon he accepted an appointment to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, where he served from 1901 to 1908. Yet there was still time for politics. When Senator William J. Sewell died in December 1901, Griggs emerged as a leading candidate to replace him. The Republican state legislators, however, selected John F. Dryden over him. Six years later Griggs was once again passed over for the GOP senatorial nomination from New Jersey. On October 13, 1904, he addressed a Republican campaign meeting in Paterson and exhorted party members to take up a "progressive conservative" ideal. He was hostile to New

Jersey progressivism, which in 1906 he satirically termed the "New Idea." Service at The Hague did not dim his political interests, but his brand of conservatism was losing some of its popular appeal.

In 1908 Griggs once again resumed legal practice. He became a senior member in the law firm of Griggs, Baldwin and Baldwin, in New York City. His business interests included directorships of the New York Telephone Company, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, the American Locomotive Company, and the Marconi Wireless Company. During the battle in 1908 for a public utility commission in Trenton, he testified before a senate committee against the regulation of telephone companies. He devoted the remainder of his active life to corporate law and business interests in New York City and Paterson, and he died on November 28, 1927, leaving a \$1-million estate. He was married to Carolyn Webster Brandt in 1874 and to Laura Elizabeth Price in 1893. He had seven children.

Manuscript Collections, New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, N.J.

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

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