

best defense against government corruption, and in 1879 a Republican member of the senate introduced a law echoing these sentiments; the financial accounts of local officeholders were made subject to examination by experts whenever twenty-five freeholders should request such a step.

However, few concrete measures resulted directly from McClellan's actions as governor. He tended to stress issues on which most people could agree; abolishing the state tax and improving the condition of the National Guard were recommendations that met with wide popular approval. His major contribution involved suggestions for economic prosperity that in a loose sense constituted a program to foster development; few of his predecessors thought in such overall and comprehensive terms. On the other hand, his ideas in this regard, had they become reality, would no doubt have increased the level of state expenditure greatly. Although he seemed to recognize this fact, McClellan did not address himself to the problem of raising additional revenue; indeed at one point he lamented the fact that teachers, who were crucial to his plans for development, received such small compensation for their labors, but he suggested no remedy for their condition. His messages to the legislature mentioned no issue that might arouse controversy; consequently, he did not concern himself with such topics as taxing the railroads and restraining the political power of corporations. He made little effort to exert an active influence on the deliberations of the legislature, and where his suggestions became law it is highly likely that the measures would have passed without his support; the establishment of a Bureau of Labor and Industries, for example, needed little executive support. At best, his record as governor was mixed.

When his term expired in 1881, McClellan retired to private life. Apparently he found the experience as governor somewhat taxing, for he wrote that he was glad it was over "as it was becoming a

nuisance to be obliged to go to Trenton in all matters." He died in 1885 of heart trouble at his home in Essex County.

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

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Jerome C. Reddy



GEORGE CRAIG LUDLOW (April 6, 1830–December 18, 1900) was born in Milford, Hunterdon County, New Jersey. In 1835 his family moved to New Brunswick, where he lived for the rest of his life. He was graduated from Rutgers College in 1850, and he opened a law practice in 1853. Both his father, Cornelius Ludlow, and his grandfather, Benjamin Ludlow, had been active in the affairs of the Democratic party, and he followed their example; over the next two decades he held a variety of municipal and county governmental positions. As a prominent local member of the party, he was elected to the New Jersey senate in 1876 and chosen its president in 1878. He received his party's nomination for the governorship at the convention of 1880. Although he had the background and experience to warrant the nomination in his own right, his actual selection was largely the result of an alliance between Leon Abbett, one of the most important Democratic politicians in the state, and the so-called "State House Ring," a group of office holders in Trenton determined to prevent the convention from selecting a political rival of Abbett's. The closely contested election was heavily influenced by railroad interests. Ludlow, a private counsel for the Pennsylvania Railroad,

defeated his Republican opponent, Frederic A. Potts, an influential stockholder in the Jersey Central Railroad, by only 651 of the nearly 250,000 votes cast.

That was the closest gubernatorial contest in New Jersey history, and Ludlow entered office with certain handicaps. First, the Republican party controlled both the senate and the assembly during his first year as governor, and for the remaining two years of his term it had a majority in the senate. Second, although Ludlow had a widespread reputation for integrity and honesty, many felt that his connection with the Pennsylvania Railroad might unduly influence his decisions as governor; indeed, immediately following his narrow victory, rumors, probably unfounded, circulated that the railroad had thrown the election to Ludlow by ordering its employees to vote for him. Moreover, he owed his nomination in part to the "State House Ring" and quickly reappointed two of its members to lucrative positions in state government. Finally, since he was in no sense a leader of his party, he had no power base or following in the legislature to rely on in any political struggle that might develop during his term. He had little hope of providing strong executive leadership.

Those who feared that Ludlow might be too subservient to the railroads were proved wrong, for he attempted to frustrate corporate plans by using his veto power on two important occasions. During the 1882 legislative session, friends of the Central Railroad of New Jersey pushed through both houses a bill designed to allow the board of directors to increase the corporation's capital stock without obtaining the shareholders' approval; the measure was aimed at removing control of the railroad from the stockholders. When the bill reached Ludlow for his signature, he vetoed it, denouncing it as immoral and unjust. He had insufficient power, however, to make his veto stand against the wishes of the Central Railroad, and both senate and assembly voted to override by very large majorities.

During the same session, the Pennsyl-

vania Railroad quietly gained senate approval for a bill that would limit public access to large areas of the Jersey City waterfront. The state had awarded the railroad grants of land lying under water and the railroad had engaged in extensive filling operations and had constructed terminals and warehouses on the property. Erecting fences around the facilities, the railroad refused Jersey City the right to build roads over its holdings to the waterline. When challenged in court by Jersey City, the company asked the assembly to sustain it by approving the bill. When the newspapers pointed out what the bill would accomplish, a furor resulted, but despite public outcry the railroad's scheme gained the approval of the assembly. When the bill reached his desk, Ludlow defied intense pressure from the corporation and refused to sign it. In a stinging veto message, he denounced the bill as "an abuse of legislative power and a violation of the principles of fair dealing and justice." Nevertheless, the senate quickly overrode the veto by a comfortable margin. Only bribery charges and a legislative investigation prevented the assembly from taking similar action, for the session ended before a vote could be taken.

More positively, Ludlow had to struggle with the problem of balancing the state budget, and in the process he helped to pave the way for reform. Since he believed that the individual citizen and property owner labored under a tax burden that was too heavy, he called for the curtailment of all unnecessary expenditures; aggravating his problem, his predecessor had ended the state tax, a small revenue measure that had helped to fund the ordinary expenses of the government, and reinstating it would have run counter to Ludlow's beliefs and proven politically hazardous to the Democratic party. As a result, in his first message to the legislature in 1882, Ludlow advocated a host of measures designed to bring expenditures and anticipated receipts into balance by cutting costs. Unfortunately, the legislature did not adhere totally to

his recommendations, and in the following year Ludlow noted that the state had spent \$280,778.28 more than it had received in revenue.

In 1883, however, Ludlow placed greater emphasis on increasing the state's receipts than on cutting its expenditures, and he focused on the need to tap new sources of revenue. For years, many citizens had complained that corporations in New Jersey, especially the railroads, did not pay a fair share of the cost of municipal, county and state government. Railroads, moreover, paid taxes directly to the state and were by and large exempt from local taxation; in a sense, therefore, by removing valuable property from the local tax lists they increased the tax rate of the individual citizen. A special assembly committee appointed during the 1882 legislative session to inquire into the problem of railroad taxation issued its report just prior to the opening of the 1883 session.

Recognizing that additional income was needed to balance the state budget, and perhaps sensing a good issue when he saw one, Ludlow gave special attention in his annual messages of 1883 and 1884 to the need for railroad taxation. He noted that railroad property was taxed proportionately far less than the property of private citizens; it would be unjust, he said, to subject the people to a state tax until all other options had received consideration. While some advocated drastic actions against the railroads, he declared that the problem could be resolved through a few simple measures. First, the law of 1876, which taxed railroads for state purposes at a rate of one-half percent on "true value," needed changing, and Ludlow urged the legislature to define precisely what considerations would determine the true value of a railroad. He called for the creation of a special board totally independent of the railroads to assess this value, establish the tax payments and keep up-to-date records to avoid the problem of outdated valuations. Second, he asked the legislature to repeal the law that exempted

certain railroad systems from the "true value" tax. Ludlow believed that these measures, coupled with prudence in expenditures, would produce enough revenue for the state to carry out its tasks without resorting to a direct tax on the people. During the session of 1883, the legislature considered several plans to tax the railroads, but no law resulted from these deliberations. Ludlow lacked the political power to force the reluctant legislature to deal with his objective of equitable taxation for the railroads.

During his term, several other important developments took place. The first governor to devote substantial attention to the problem of keeping the water supply of the populous northeastern section of the state pure and healthy, Ludlow appointed a commission to investigate the matter. He asked the legislature to establish a Council of State Charities and Corrections to oversee the asylums, prisons, jails and alms houses in New Jersey, and he appointed the council's first members. During his term other important legislation was passed, including a law that grouped municipalities into four classifications.

Overall, Ludlow's administration can be characterized best as honest and diligent but basically unproductive. Prominent but not particularly powerful in New Jersey politics before his nomination, Ludlow had little chance of influencing a legislature divided between the parties and dominated by special interests. Like many of his predecessors, Ludlow tended to devote the bulk of his messages to the legislature to summaries of the lengthy reports of minor government officials. By using his veto power he set a moral tone that many felt New Jersey needed in the 1880s, but few positive achievements can be directly attributed to him. His most noteworthy deed was giving the sanction of the governor's office to the growing movement for equitable taxation of the railroads; by this he helped set the stage for the passage of a more effective railroad-taxing system under his successor, Leon Abbett.

Although Ludlow's administration accomplished relatively little, his actions, especially his vetoes, earned him the animosity of powerful interests. After he left the governorship, he resumed the practice of law, but he lived in relative obscurity. Contemporary opinion laid the blame for his less-than-prosperous condition during this period at the doorstep of the railroads. In 1894 he served on the special twenty-member commission established by the legislature to recommend changes in the New Jersey constitution. In 1895 Governor George T. Werts appointed him a justice of the supreme court. Five years later, he died in his home town, New Brunswick. He was survived by his wife and two sons.

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

Jerome C. Reddy



LEON ABBETT (October 8, 1836–December 4, 1894) was a formidable man. He was undoubtedly the most powerful person in New Jersey during the late nineteenth century. Twice elected governor, first in 1883 and again in 1889, he proved to be a very effective leader and accomplished much while in office. An ardent Democrat in the Jacksonian spoils tradition, Abbett voiced the sentiments of the common man beset by the intransigent forces of special privilege. Affectionately known as the "Great Commoner," he was considered a man of the people. He reached out for contact, and indeed for confrontation. An eloquent speaker in the flamboyant style of his time, he charged the political atmosphere and helped produce striking policy changes that had previous-

ly been considered impossible. He was a man of action, ambitious for his state as well as for himself.

Abbett combined opportunism with principle to advance his cause. As a machine politician he often combined the admirable with the obnoxious. Not for any altruistic reasons, but for practical ones, Abbett much to his credit promoted public participation in politics. True Jacksonian that he was, he rewarded loyal Democrats with the spoils of victory. Coming to power as he did during the heyday of machine politics, he built a strong party organization and used it as a convenient excuse for centralizing power in the governor's office. With this power, he did things that none of his predecessors had ever attempted to do. His performance infuriated his critics and those people with rigorous Victorian moral standards and roused passionate hatred. Loved with equal passion, seeking improvement for the downtrodden, using his charm and wit with a flourish, he was a difficult man to beat. Yet despite the political hegemony that he and his followers established, he failed to achieve his lifelong ambition of advancing to the United States Senate.

In physical appearance, Abbett was short and stocky. Standing only five feet eight inches and weighing about 175 pounds, the governor was an image of energy, combativeness, and courage. He had a round face with a high forehead, broad shoulders, brown wavy hair, bright blue eyes, and large bushy eyebrows. Early in his career, he grew a full beard and a wide moustache to make himself look more mature. As a successful New York City lawyer might be expected to do, he dressed in a manner befitting his professional status. He usually wore a dark double-breasted suit with a vest and bow tie. In cold weather, he donned a fashionable Prince Albert overcoat and a brown derby hat.

Abbett's rise to the governorship is a classic American success story. In a day when recruitment to political office depended much on wealth and high posi-