

The Steam Mill and Jacksonian Politics:***The Career of William N. Jeffers*****By Bruce A. Bendler****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i2.124>**

Political and economic transitions reshaped New Jersey as they did throughout the United States during the 1820s. By the end of that decade an emergent second party system, centered on support of or opposition to Andrew Jackson, defined both national and state elections. The “Market Revolution” had begun to transform the nation’s economy. Industrialization and improvements in the transportation network led to the eclipse of purely local markets by national ones. Politicians and entrepreneurs at the local level sought to adapt to such transitions. William N. Jeffers of Salem County, New Jersey, so adapted his approach to both political and economic relationships. Jeffers furthered his political ambitions by identification with the Jacksonian movement in New Jersey. He sought to advance his economic ambitions by obtaining a charter for a bank and for a steam mill to take advantage of Salem County’s agricultural economy.

William Nicholson Jeffers was born in New York about 1785, the son of George and Martha Nicholson Jeffers. By 1810, he had become a lawyer and was practicing law in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he evidently ran afoul of the law. According to accounts published years later, Jeffers allegedly defrauded a certain Samuel Perry of 375 dollars to secure a patent of land with Jonathan Meigs, then a United States Senator from Ohio. According to those accounts, written in 1831 under politically charged circumstances, a grand jury in Hamilton County

indicted Jeffers on two counts of forgery. In response, Jeffers reportedly left town. By one of the accounts, the indictment was “still pending” in the Ohio court in 1831.¹

It was in Salem County, New Jersey, that Jeffers made a name for himself in the business and political arenas. He entered politics at a time of political transition, the 1820s, as the first party system in the United States dissolved and the second party system emerged. Indeed, William Jeffers’s career sheds light on the difficulties of precisely defining the new political allegiances that emerged during that decade. In his study of the career of Governor Peter Vroom, Michael Birkner argued that Vroom, a Federalist-turned-Jacksonian, set forth “a coherent political creed,” one that feared “unfettered capitalism” and sought to restrain “rampant acquisitiveness and speculation.”² Birkner took issue with historians such as Richard P. McCormick and Herbert Ershkowitz who focused on the “continued efforts of tough-minded and not terribly principled politicians to gain power and govern.”³

McCormick and Ershkowitz both downplayed the role of ideology in the formation of the Second Party System. McCormick pointed out the important role of ex-Federalists in the Jackson camp; they gained the opportunity to lead a party which, unlike the Federalist party, could contest and win statewide elections. The emergence of Jacksonian democracy was thus not a “class revolt” or a “popular crusade.”⁴ Ershkowitz pointed to the crucial role of “rival ambitions of rival political leaders and their personal antagonisms rather than a realignment based upon principles.”⁵ William N. Jeffers, though never a Federalist, saw the Jacksonian party as the one

¹ Daily National Journal, Washington, D. C., October 5, 1831. For a biographical sketch of Jeffers, see Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society VII (Newark: Martin N. Dennis & Co., 1872), 464-6.

² Michael Birkner, “Peter Vroom and the Politics of Democracy,” in Paul A. Stelhorn, ed., Jacksonian New Jersey (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1979), 11-38.

³ Birkner, 11.

⁴ Richard P. McCormick. “Party Formation in New Jersey in the Jacksonian Era.” Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society (July 1965): 161-173.

⁵ Herbert Ershkowitz, The Origin of the Whig and Democratic Parties in New Jersey Politics, 1820-1837 (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1982), 61. Ershkowitz later accepted a greater role for

most likely to succeed, sought and accepted its support, and advanced within its ranks. Like the ex-Federalists, political ambition, not an ideological agenda, motivated Jeffers.

Birkner's efforts to define Jacksonian politics must also be evaluated in the light of research by Philip C. Davis. Davis argues that New Jersey politics continued to be dominated by "patrician style family connections" up until the 1850s. While conceding the emergence of a new "political professionalism," Davis maintained that even many of the professional politicians were themselves heirs of old New Jersey families long involved in the state's politics. "Webs of social associations" did, however, "absorb newcomers and provide limited opportunities for young politicians less fortunate in ancestry." But the old families remained preeminent.⁶

William N. Jeffers was one of those "young politicians less fortunate in ancestry." He was not the scion of an elite political family in New Jersey, nor did he ever espouse a rigorous political ideology. Indeed, Jeffers's political activity focused on finding the winning side in the political realignment of the mid-1820s. For a time, he developed a close relationship with Samuel L. Southard, who started his career as a Jeffersonian and ended up a Whig.⁷ By 1827, Jeffers and Southard had moved in opposite political directions, with Jeffers becoming a "Jackson man." By that time, he had also set forth his ambitions for higher political office as well as his ambitions in the business world. This confluence of politics and business furthermore revealed an unscrupulous side to Jeffers; he employed his political clout to protect and advance his business ventures in Salem County.

ideological differences in Jacksonian politics in New Jersey. See Michael Birkner and Herbert Ershkowitz. "'Men and Measures: The Creation of the Second Party System in New Jersey.'" *New Jersey History* 107 (Fall-Winter 1989): 41-60.

⁶ Philip C. Davis, "Political Oligarchy, Egalitarianism, and Continuity in New Jersey, 1840-1860," in Stelhorn, *Jacksonian New Jersey*, 41-74.

⁷ For an account of Southard's career, see Michael Birkner, *Samuel L. Southard: Jeffersonian Whig* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984).

Jeffers's political maneuverings thus introduce another factor into the still-unresolved equation of Jacksonian New Jersey politics: that of the role of ambitions other than those purely political. Jeffers initiated his efforts to open a bank and construct a steam mill in Salem as he sought to ascend the political ladder. Before 1832, his correspondence and polemics gave little indication of concern with Jacksonian political ideology. Indeed, that correspondence evinced greater concern with legislation relevant to his business ventures and his ambitions for higher office. Furthermore, his published political polemics were more concerned with numerous aspersions on his character than with matters of policy. Even a speech Jeffers gave to a devoutly Jacksonian audience questioned the rationale for the President's hostility to the Bank of the United States, although that speech did defend Jackson's veto of the bill to renew the Bank's charter.⁸

Jeffers participated at the local level in the "market revolution" then transforming the United States. His efforts to establish a bank and construct a steam mill in Salem had the potential to expand the markets of a rural county, especially given Salem County's location along the Delaware River and its proximity to Philadelphia. For Jeffers, entrepreneurial ambitions became entangled with political ones, and his entrepreneurial ambitions reflected changes occurring not only in New Jersey, but also in adjacent mid-Atlantic states.⁹ Jeffers's efforts, both economic and political, did not prove successful. Even so, they foreshadowed the political and economic transformation of the Garden State by the mid-nineteenth century.

⁸ "Speech of William N. Jeffers Delivered at the Great Festival of the Friends of Jackson and Van Buren" (Salem: Hickory Club of the County of Salem, 1831), Special Collections, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, New Jersey (hereafter: RUSC).

⁹ For discussions of concurrent changes in Pennsylvania and New York, see Randall M. Miller and William Pencak, *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), 165-6 and Anthony Gronowicz, *Race and Class Politics in New York City before the Civil War* (Boston: New England University Press, 1998), 52.

By 1814, Jeffers had settled in Salem County, New Jersey, not long after his brother John E. Jeffers had established himself in adjacent Cumberland County. In late February 1814, William N. Jeffers was admitted to the New Jersey bar and opened a law office in Salem. Soon thereafter, Jeffers began to purchase property in and around the town. On September 18, 1816, Salem County Sheriff Richard Craven sold Henry Freas and Jeffers a lot in the town of Salem.¹⁰ He purchased more property in the ensuing years. In 1817, he purchased another town lot in Salem and two five-acre tracts of woodland in Upper Alloway's Creek Township.¹¹ Jeffers expanded his landholdings even more in 1822, purchasing over five hundred acres in Upper Penn's Neck Township.¹²

Even before purchasing land in his adopted county, Jeffers had become a force to be reckoned with in Salem County politics. By 1816, he had allied himself with Samuel Southard, at the time a rising star in New Jersey politics. Southard contemplated a run for governor when the incumbent Mahlon Dickerson resigned the office to serve in the United States Senate. On December 16, 1816, Jeffers reported on his efforts to get the Salem and Cumberland county delegations in Trenton to support Southard's candidacy. Jeffers found that Southard had some support. All of the Salem delegation was "disposed" to Southard, although Jeremiah Dubois voiced concern about electing a new governor under the circumstances, stating that, constitutionally, the President of the Council should inherit the job. Jeffers believed that he had removed Dubois's doubts on the matter with an explanation of the state constitutional provisions for such a succession.¹³

¹⁰ Salem County Deeds T:399, Court House, Salem, New Jersey.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, U:356; V:366; V:370.

¹² *Ibid.*, AA:268; AA:271.

¹³ William N. Jeffers (hereafter: WNJ) to Samuel Southard, December 16, 1816, Southard Papers, C0250, Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, Box 6, Folder 5, (hereafter: RBSCP Southard).

Even so, Samuel Southard did not win the election. He ran third in a field of three candidates, trailing Isaac Williamson of Elizabeth and Joseph McIlvaine of Burlington. Five of Southard's six supporters switched their support to Williamson and provided his margin of victory. Despite whatever commitments Salem and Cumberland legislators had made to Jeffers, all but one of them supported Joseph McIlvaine rather than Southard. Williamson's victory made manifest the fluid nature of New Jersey politics after the War of 1812. After a brief resurgence during the war years, the Federalist party fell again into minority status. But it did retain enough political clout to ally with factions within the Democratic Republican party, and thus diehard Federalists were not without influence in state politics. The election of Williamson, an ex-Federalist, revealed such influence.¹⁴

Nonetheless, Jeffers's political influence in Salem County increased. In 1819, he and Southard, a state Supreme Court justice at the time, were advancing a bill to establish the office of "prosecutor of the pleas" (a district attorney) in each county, and Jeffers sought to persuade the Salem delegation to support it. Two members of the delegation, Jeffers assured Southard, supported the bill; the other two were "doubtful." But Jeffers added, "When it comes to the point I think they will fear to vote against me." The Cumberland County delegation would also vote for the bill "and for me." But Jeffers advised Southard to "let things remain as they are for the present year." Changes "favorable to our views and to the republican cause" would ensue from the October elections.¹⁵ As events turned out, the bill passed the Assembly but died in the

¹⁴ Birkner, *Southard*, 37-45. In addition, Birkner points out the "partisan confusion and local factionalism," as well as the "personality conflicts and emerging issues" that characterized New Jersey politics during and just after the so-called Era of Good Feelings. See Birkner, "New Jersey in the Jacksonian Era" in Maxine Lurie and Richard Veit, *New Jersey: A History of the Garden State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 125. At the time, the General Assembly elected New Jersey's governors.

¹⁵ WNJ to Southard, February 11, 1819, RBSCP Southard, Box 7, Folder 6.

Council. It did not become law until 1822, and upon its passage, Jeffers became the first Prosecutor of the Pleas for Salem County.

Jeffers also encouraged the use of political patronage to sustain party strength and morale. For example, he lobbied diligently against the removal of James Sherron as Salem's postmaster and his replacement by Robert Van Meter. Sherron was a "good and fast friend," and his removal "would have an injurious effect upon the political concerns of our party." Van Meter "is called a republican" but Federalists, especially Robert G. Johnson, stood behind his appointment to replace Sherron; "Van Meter is what Johnson makes him."¹⁶ Jeffers's pleas for Sherron revealed the intricacies of and intrigue in Salem County politics. Jeffers revealingly noted the growing importance of patronage. "And if no regard is paid to the wishes of republicans by those who hold the power of appointment, the inevitable consequence is that republicans will no longer have an object to contend for." Political strife raged in the county; "the era of good feeling" was "an invention of the enemy." Indeed, those supporting both Sherron and Van Meter bolstered their cause with petitions. But Jeffers noted that Sherron's supporters included "every man of business [in Salem] not hostile" to him. Van Meter had to rely, according to Jeffers, on Johnson's tenants and laborers, coerced into supporting Johnson's ally. Jeffers saw his efforts as a duty to a friend and to his party.¹⁷

Jeffers's ambitions went above and beyond the trench warfare of local politics. In 1822, he narrowly lost a bid to become attorney general of New Jersey when the legislature elected Theodore Freylinghuysen to that office by a vote of 28 to 23.¹⁸ While seeking state office, he also embarked on the most noteworthy and controversial business venture of his career: construction of a "steam mill" and incorporation of a bank in the town of Salem. In November

¹⁶ WNJ to Southard, April 8 and 30, 1822, RBSCP Southard, Box 9, Folder 12.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bridgeton Observer, Bridgeton, New Jersey, November 2, 1822.

1822, the New Jersey legislature passed a bill chartering the Salem Steam Mill and Banking Company. The concept of a steam mill appeared well suited to the flat terrain in the vicinity of Salem, New Jersey, where sites suitable for water-powered mills were few and far between. A mill operated by steam power would prove a dependable substitute. The bank would provide capital, not only for the mill, but for other local enterprises.¹⁹

On November 13, 1822, the *Salem Messenger* reported that the bill to establish the Salem Steam Mill and Banking Company had become law. Construction of the mill would “very considerably increase the business and advance the interests of this town and surrounding country.”²⁰ A week later, the *Messenger* printed a public notice that subscription books for the capital stock of the new company would be opened on December 2, 1822, at two hotels in Salem and one in Upper Penn’s Neck Township, one of which was the hotel operated by Jeffers’s political ally, James Sherron.²¹ An election for corporate directors was set for February 6, 1823.²²

The leadership of the company—Jeffers was its president and William T. Mulford was cashier of the bank—proceeded with some alacrity to construct the bank and mill. Jeffers himself sold a lot in Salem to the company on March 5, 1823, for construction of the bank,²³ but the newly-organized company had also advertised on February 12 its need for “a suitable lot of ground” on which to build the mill between the “old bridge” and the meadow below old Wharf Street with “rights and advantages of navigation.” The advertisement noted that five townships

¹⁹ The proposal for a steam mill provides a manifestation of the market revolution at the local level, a “growing embrace of the market place and technological innovation,” as pointed out by Birkner. In addition, the Jeffers proposal points out that political figures involved in such ventures landed in both the Jackson and anti-Jackson camps. See Birkner, “New Jersey in the Jacksonian Era,” 116, 126.

²⁰ *Salem Messenger*, Salem, New Jersey, November 13, 1822.

²¹ *Ibid.*, November 20, 1822.

²² *Ibid.*, January 1, 1823.

²³ Salem County Deeds, AB:101.

in the county did not have a mill seat and the new steam mill would be of “immense advantage” to them.²⁴

Nevertheless, almost a year elapsed before the company purchased the property desired for construction of the mill. Finally, on January 27, 1824, it purchased one and a half acres of “land and marsh” in Salem, near the new bridge completed in 1810, at the end of what was then known as Bridge Street along the Salem Creek.²⁵ The land was well suited for the mill’s purposes, located on a navigable waterway and close to roads connecting it to surrounding farmland.²⁶

Delays in land acquisition and emerging new technology compelled the company to postpone the mill’s projected completion from 1824 to 1825, for which it needed legislative consent. In October of 1823, the company submitted the design of a new steam engine to Trenton to justify its appeal for more time to complete construction. The petition argued that the request was reasonable and “cannot be opposed by any, unless maliciously, for running the company an unnecessary expense.”²⁷ By December 1823, the legislature had acceded to the request but not without some opposition; the bill passed the Assembly by a vote of twenty-seven to sixteen.²⁸

Opposition centered on the relationship between the steam mill and the bank. Critics charged that proponents focused on the bank at the expense of the steam mill. Farmers of Salem County “care not a groat for the bank,” but were “induced to apply for it solely to procure the mill.” Opponents of the bank and the mill argued that its proponents, waiting for “ingenious” technology, sought a delay, “though we cannot think it [the delay] ingenuous.” The supposed

²⁴ *Salem Messenger*, February 12, 1823.

²⁵ A reference to the bridge from Salem to Penn’s Neck, constructed in 1810.

²⁶ Salem County Deeds, AC:3.

²⁷ *Salem Messenger*, October 19, 1823.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, November 19, 1823; December 24, 1823.

availability of new technology was seen as a ploy since such technology was not known of “on this side of the Atlantic until quite recently.” The writer quoted the Trenton *Emporium*; “it is likely our friends of Salem will make a push to get clear of the steam mill which hangs at the tail of their bank.” He thought it more likely that the farmers and mechanics of Salem County wanted the bank in the “tail’-race of the mill—if such a thing were practicable.”²⁹

Indeed, Jeffers himself hinted at the extent of that opposition in another letter to Samuel Southard. On January 26, 1824, he reported that he was “deeply engaged in political affairs for others” and “in legislative business on behalf of our company,” but he rejoiced that he “had a great triumph over my political and personal foes.”³⁰ Jeffers also had to contend with doubts about whether or not the mill would be completed. Lucius Q. C. Elmer of Cumberland County noted the skepticism in Salem. Writing Southard on February 23, 1824, Elmer remarked that “the Salem people I know are in considerable agitation about their steam mill bank.” He noted that Jeffers “had succeeded in placing himself at the head of it,” but in so doing, had made political enemies.³¹

As he worked to complete construction of the steam mill, Jeffers also sought to be appointed United States attorney for the district of New Jersey. He asked Samuel Southard, now Secretary of the Navy, to submit his name to President James Monroe for appointment to that office. Jeffers trumpeted his political “attachment” to Southard himself and to the Monroe administration, stating that it flowed “from the heart and not from mercenary motives.” He then implored Southard to “add your good offices to those of my other friends.” In spite of Jeffers’s

²⁹ *Bridgeton Observer*, November 1, 1823.

³⁰ WNJ to Samuel Southard, November 16, 1823, RBSCP Southard, Box 12, Folder 6.

³¹ Lucius Q. C. Elmer to Samuel Southard, February 23, 1824, RBSCP Southard, Box 11, Folder 14.

self-promotion, Lucius Q. C. Elmer of Cumberland County won the appointment, in part by suggesting that Jeffers had “lowered his standing by his concern with the bank.”³²

The presidential election of 1824 overshadowed this and all other political contests, at least for a time. The steam mill would remain an issue, as would other local political controversies. But by the late summer of 1823, politicians became more and more preoccupied with the question of who would succeed President James Monroe and how to choose that successor. William N. Jeffers was no exception, and as of September 1823, his first choice was Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, at the time a strong nationalist. Jeffers preferred Calhoun over two potential competitors: Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford of Georgia. At this point, Andrew Jackson had no significant support in New Jersey. Jeffers praised Calhoun’s “transcendent worth,” adding that the South Carolinian “alone can save our country from falling into the hands of demagogues on the one side and aristocrats on the other.” He did not specify who he regarded as demagogues or aristocrats.³³

By late 1823, Andrew Jackson’s candidacy did become a factor in New Jersey. By that year’s end, Ebenezer Elmer observed that Jackson was “gaining ground for the presidency” and wondered if Old Hickory’s growing support would “interfere with Mr. Calhoun.”³⁴ As Calhoun’s candidacy failed to gather the expected support, Jeffers switched his support to William Crawford, as he had a “considerable number of the democratic party.” On March 14, 1824, Lucius Elmer remarked that Jeffers “is or will be a Crawfordite.” However, many New Jersey party leaders questioned Crawford’s selection by the Democratic Republican party caucus

³² WNJ to Samuel Southard, November 16, 1823, RBSCP, Southard 12-6.

³³ WNJ to Samuel Southard, September 12, 1823, RBSCP Southard, Box 12, Folder 6. For a full account of the election of 1824, see Herbert Ershkowitz, “The Election of 1824 in New Jersey,” Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society (April 1966): 113-132.

³⁴ Lucius Q. C. Elmer to Samuel Southard, December 24, 1823, RBSCP Southard, Box 11, Folder 14.

in the United States Congress, preferring John Quincy Adams. For example, Ebenezer Elmer thought that nominating a pro-Adams ticket of electors at a convention in Trenton could very well lead to the Secretary of State's success in New Jersey.³⁵ Even so, Jeffers remained in the Crawford camp, but the contest in Salem County, and across the state, developed into one between Adams and Jackson. By the time the votes in Salem County were counted, Adams defeated Jackson there with only a small minority of the voters favoring William Crawford.³⁶

Jeffers's business endeavors proved more successful than his political ones in 1824. Construction of the steam mill moved forward so well, that by May of that year, even the previously critical *Bridgeton Observer* printed a favorable account of events. On May 8, it reported that the company had acquired a lot near the "New Bridge" on Salem Creek and had contracted with a Baltimore firm to construct a three-story stone structure to house the mill, which would be operated by a forty-horsepower engine. The *Observer* even repeated the *Salem Messenger's* assertion that the bank was "in as good credit as any banking institution in the state." Evidently, the commencement of the mill's construction dispelled doubts about the veracity of William Jeffers and his fellow entrepreneurs.³⁷

1825 thus began on a more auspicious note for Jeffers. He celebrated the long-awaited completion of the steam mill. The mill neared completion in March, when the *Salem Messenger* described the facility. The building was three stories tall, exclusive of its basement. Steam power raised the grain to the third story where the process of grinding it into flour began. The mill could grind 150 to 200 barrels of flour in twenty-four hours. A Baltimore firm, Streppel and

³⁵ Lucius Q. C. Elmer to Samuel Southard, March 24, 1824, RBSCP Southard, Box 14, Folder 12.

³⁶ Ershkowitz points out that most Crawford supporters in New Jersey threw their support to John Quincy Adams. Jeffers was clearly an exception. Ershkowitz, *Origin*, 62.

³⁷ *Bridgeton Observer*, May 8, 1824.

Maynard, built the plant, and the *Messenger* crowed that its completion made the project “worthy of the public confidence.”³⁸

By May, the mill was in operation and even advertised “flour, meal, bran and feed” for sale. It served four townships, with 5,000 inhabitants, without a waterway “sufficient to turn a mill.” In a statement heralding the mill’s opening, Jeffers gave top priority to “country work,” the production of flour for local use. He attempted to dispel any doubts about the management or solvency of the enterprise, claiming that there were no “unwarrantable expenditures of capital.” Operating the mill, and that alone, was the “primary objective of the company.”³⁹

Jeffers still had to dispel ongoing doubts, including those of Samuel Southard, still his political ally. Writing to the Secretary of the Navy on May 20, Jeffers stated that he had “not ceased to remember your question when we last met: Do you really intend to build the steam mill?” He then mentioned “my official notice of the grand event.” Parodying the biblical injunction about a millstone around the neck, Jeffers asked, “What then think you has been the suffering of a poor fellow who has had eight millstones hanging about his neck for more than two years?”⁴⁰

Jeffers’s political efforts proved less successful that year. Federalists in the county still mounted credible challenges in Salem County as late as 1823 when Lucius Q. C. Elmer noted that “Salem has been anti-bank and put in all Federalists with Robert G. Johnson leading the ticket.”⁴¹ In 1824 and 1825, Jeffers ran unsuccessfully on a “Democratic Republican” ticket, opposing slates of “independent electors.” In the former year, Jeffers fell about two hundred

³⁸ *Salem Messenger*, March 20, 1825.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1825.

⁴⁰ WNJ to Samuel Southard, May 20, 1825, RBSCP Southard, Box 19, Folder 1.

⁴¹ Lucius Q. C. Elmer to Samuel Southard, October 17, 1823, RBSCP Southard, Box 11, Folder 14. Federalists did not always so label themselves. Sometimes, they ran as an “Independent Ticket” or, on other occasions, they ran a “Union Ticket” with disgruntled Democratic Republicans.

votes short of victory but, in 1825, he lost by only thirteen votes. In neither year did “straight party” ticket voting manifest itself; voters chose individuals rather than supporting a straight party ticket.

Unrealized local ambitions did not long deflect Jeffers’s attention from national politics. After John Quincy Adams’s disputed election as President, Jeffers expressed support for the new President. He informed Samuel Southard, who remained head of the Navy Department, that he found “much to praise and nothing to condemn” in the President’s first address to Congress in December 1825.⁴² He admitted that Adams had not been his first choice in 1824, but he conceded that Adams had been “fairly and constitutionally elected,” distancing himself from Jacksonians and their charges of a “corrupt bargain” between Adams and Clay. The new President would “have my support while his conduct accords with his late message.”⁴³

Indeed, Jeffers felt quite content at the beginning of 1826. He told Southard that “after three years of active war, I am, thank God, triumphant...” He hoped to “enjoy in repose the fruits of my victory.” Jeffers was certainly able to relish a hard-fought victory in the political trenches in Trenton. The legislature had voted, at his urging, to separate the steam mill from the bank, incorporating the Salem Steam Mill and Manufacturing Company by the end of November 1825.⁴⁴ Despite twice failing to win a seat in the state Assembly, he remained highly influential in Salem County politics. He also maintained important connections at higher levels, exemplified by his relationship with Samuel Southard.⁴⁵

Political changes in 1826 eroded Jeffers’s seemingly secure position. Early in the year, Jeffers felt confident enough about his political standing to seek a seat in the United States

⁴² WNJ to Samuel Southard, December 10, 1825, RBSCP Southard, Box 19, Folder 1.

⁴³ WNJ to Samuel Southard, January 25, 1826, RBSCP Southard, Box 22, Folder 13.

⁴⁴ *Washington Whig*, Bridgeton, New Jersey, December 10, 1825.

⁴⁵ WNJ to Samuel Southard, January 25, 1826, RBSCP Southard, Box 22, Folder 13.

Senate to succeed Joseph McIlvaine. Jeffers's rival for the appointment as United States attorney in 1823, Lucius Elmer, writing to Southard, noted that Jeffers had mentioned his ambition in a way "too plain to be mistaken." Elmer still did not hold a high opinion of Jeffers; he would not support him for any office until "convinced that my estimate of his talents and character is erroneous." Additionally, Elmer's friend Ephraim Bateman, also from Cumberland County, sought the Senate seat, and Elmer refused to oppose one "who had always been my friend."⁴⁶

Elmer believed that Jeffers would resort "to every scheme and bargain" to gain the Senate seat. Nonetheless, the Cumberland Countian did not believe Jeffers would attain his goal.⁴⁷ Indeed, Elmer's good friend Bateman did win the contest. Jeffers even offered to back Elmer for another prestigious position: a seat on the state Supreme Court. Jeffers expected Elmer to return the favor by supporting Jeffers's bid for the open Senate seat. Elmer "paid no attention to him."⁴⁸

The party realignment taking place after 1824 also had a negative impact on Jeffers's political ambitions. Jeffers's role in 1824 became the subject of controversy in 1826. "Adams men" and "Jackson men" now contested elections rather than Democratic Republicans and Federalists. William Jeffers found himself at the vortex of a political storm that demolished once and for all the old party system. Jeffers's position was, for a time, uncertain, but he ultimately identified with the Jackson movement. His political maneuverings during this time of transition would become the subject of a good deal of controversy. For example, Jeffers faced accusations of having supported Federalists in 1823 and not clearly stating his preference of either Andrew Jackson or John Quincy Adams in subsequent years.

⁴⁶ Lucius Q. C. Elmer to Samuel Southard, April 7, 1826, RBSCP Southard, Box 22, Folder 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid. October 20, 1826.

⁴⁸ Lucius Q. C. Elmer to Samuel Southard, November 22, 1826, RBSCP Southard, Box 22, Folder 1.

Jeffers had indeed vacillated as to his preference for the Presidency in 1824. After first supporting Calhoun, then Crawford, in 1824, he later intimated support for John Quincy Adams in his letter of December 10, 1825, to Samuel Southard. In the fall of 1826, the *Village Herald* of Woodbury identified Jeffers as “friendly to the present administration.”⁴⁹ In his dealings with Salem County political leaders, he was evidently less forthcoming. Clearly, he had higher ambitions, such as election to the United States Senate. At a time of political reconfiguration, Jeffers was looking for the winning side. In his efforts not to offend anyone, he did just the opposite.

All pretense of unity among Democratic Republicans ended in September 1826. The party had scheduled a convention to nominate a ticket for New Jersey’s six seats in the House of Representatives. The convention could not even formally organize itself because of the schism between supporters of Adams and Jackson, who then met separately and nominated their own tickets. Even though both sides supported George P. Holcombe for one of the six congressional seats, New Jersey politics now reflected the divisions wrought by the presidential contest to be fought in 1828 with competing Adams and Jackson tickets.⁵⁰

In this context, Jeffers continued his political song and dance. But in 1827, he clearly gravitated toward Jackson, when the “Jackson party” nominated him for a seat in the Assembly. Jeffers, on his third attempt, won election to that body in 1827. But election returns revealed that party loyalty had not solidified. “Jackson men” won two of the county’s three Assembly seats; “Administration men” won the Council seat and the other Assembly seat. But across New Jersey, “Administration men” won a decided majority in the legislature, 26 to 17 in the Assembly and 10 to 4 in the Council. In a letter to Samuel Southard, Lucius Horatio Stockton

⁴⁹ *Village Herald*, Woodbury, New Jersey, October 25, 1826.

⁵⁰ Peter D. Levine, *The Behavior of State Legislative Parties in the Jacksonian Era: New Jersey, 1829-1844* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977), 29.

noted that local tickets in all of New Jersey's counties were "openly determined" by the presidential question.⁵¹

Indeed, Jeffers gained the attention of two of the state's political luminaries by seeking office on the Jackson ticket. Stockton intimated that Adams men in Salem County had sought out Jeffers, but he refused to commit himself to supporting the President. The administration men would not put him on their ticket without such an explicit commitment. Then the Jackson men, "without asking of him any pledge took him on their ticket." Stockton insisted that Jeffers "is an honorable man" who wound up on the Jackson ticket because of "local divisions."⁵²

Lucius Q. C. Elmer continued to hold a much more jaded view of Jeffers, and he made note of Jeffers's presence on the Jackson ticket in a letter to Samuel Southard. Jeffers ran on that ticket, "was voted for in the district most exclusively Jacksonian, as a Jackson man, and would not otherwise have succeeded." Elmer, unlike Stockton, could find no honor in what Jeffers had done. "It is moreover true, and this is no news, that he is destitute of political or any other sort of principle."⁵³

Even so, Jeffers seemed to be doing well early in 1828. He represented his county in the Assembly, and the steam mill seemed to be faring well. Indeed, on October 1, the *Salem Messenger* reported that the mill "was prosecuting the object of [its] charter with great spirit." In fact, its operations were expanding to include a cotton mill, to be in operation by November

⁵¹ Lucius Stockton to Samuel Southard, October 20, 1827, RBSCP Southard, Box 28, Folder 6. Stockton's made this assertion in spite of election returns that did not reflect straight ticket voting.

⁵² Lucius Stockton to Samuel Southard, October 7, 1827, RBSCP Southard, Box 28, Folder 6. Ershkowitz asserts that Jeffers "accepted Jacksonian aid" but "did not declare publicly" his support for Jackson's second bid for the Presidency. Ershkowitz, *Origins*, 68.

⁵³ Lucius Q. C. Elmer to Samuel Southard, October 19, 1827, RBSCP Southard Box 26, Folder 3.

1828.⁵⁴ Indeed, the legislature had revised the steam mill's charter, incorporating the Salem and Philadelphia Manufacturing Company, and the company had begun to issue its own banknotes.

With his business seemingly sound and growing, Jeffers again sought to ascend the political ladder. In 1828, he ran for Congress on the Jackson ticket, but went down to defeat with the rest of that ticket. Jeffers then reached the pinnacle of his political career in the fall of 1829. After winning a second term in the Assembly that fall, he came very close to being elected governor. The Jackson-dominated legislature first elected Garret Wall to replace Isaac Williamson. Jeffers was one of five members of the legislature to sign a letter informing Wall of the honor.⁵⁵ Wall, however, declined, and the legislature had to reconvene in joint session to choose another individual. Now holding large majorities in both houses of the legislature, Jacksonian members caucused to choose another nominee.

Published accounts of the proceedings of that caucus revealed a very close vote. Members of the caucus cast at least four ballots before settling on Peter D. Vroom as the nominee. The Newark *Sentinel* reported that "the struggle was a hard one" with the deadlock broken only on the fourth or fifth ballot. Vroom and Jeffers "had on one or two ballots, a tie; and the dye was only cast at last by one vote." That newspaper also decried the role of "King Caucus" in choosing the governor of New Jersey. But when the formal election took place in the State House, the Jackson members of the legislature had united behind Vroom.⁵⁶ Jeffers accepted defeat gracefully; he "promptly came forward and pledged his cordial support to his competitor," an act that "strongly endeared him to his friends and the whole of his party in New Jersey."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Salem Messenger*, October 1, 1828. The opening of a cotton mill provides further evidence for the impact of the market revolution in rural Salem County.

⁵⁵ William J. Emley, James Cook, William N. Jeffers, Stacy G. Potts, and Peter D. Vroom to Garret D. Wall, October 28, 1829, RUSC.

⁵⁶ *Sentinel*, Newark, New Jersey, November 10, 1829, also reported in the *Washington Whig*, Bridgeton, New Jersey, November 14, 1829.

⁵⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, Richmond, Virginia, November 14, 1829.

In the 1829-30 session of the Assembly, Jeffers supported the Jacksonian cause. In addition to accepting Vroom's election after Wall declined the honor, he opposed a series of resolutions supporting the Tariff of Abominations, enacted in 1828, the last full year of the Adams administration. Proponents argued that the tariff would protect emerging industry in the state. Opponents of the resolutions countered that giving instructions to New Jersey's congressional delegation was unconstitutional. In addition, it would hamstring President Jackson, on record as favoring a "judicious" tariff, without specifying what "judicious" meant. Jeffers spoke in opposition to the resolutions and helped prevent their enactment by supporting a successful motion to postpone their consideration until the following year.⁵⁸

But as his political fortunes crested, the Salem and Philadelphia Manufacturing Company collapsed and with it William Jeffers's political career. The company still appeared solvent as late as mid-1829, continuing to expand its plant, even building a new wharf. The *Salem Messenger* presented an almost idyllic account of its operations. The mill itself and a cotton factory were in operation and a woolen mill was under construction. Employees enjoyed decent working conditions. "Spiritous liquors" were forbidden, and child laborers seemed healthy. One steam engine powered the entire operation.⁵⁹

Even so, members of the Assembly evidently suspected chicanery as early as 1828, when that body established a committee to require the Attorney General to investigate the company's operations and press charges if necessary. Of particular concern were the banknotes issued by the company, which had become worthless. By late 1829, the mill had gone bankrupt, and the county sheriff, Isaac Johnson, seized its assets on January 14, 1830. Sheriff Johnson sold the mill property to Jeffers on May 26 of that year. Jeffers paid 2,000 dollars for the land, the mill, a

⁵⁸ *New Jersey State Gazette*, Trenton, New Jersey, December 5, 1829.

⁵⁹ *Salem Messenger* June 7, 1829.

cotton factory, a miller's house, and "all appurtenances thereunto belonging." Furthermore, at the November 1829 term of the New Jersey Supreme Court, Jeffers personally recovered three judgments against the company, a total of 16,000 dollars.⁶⁰

Jeffers's political opponents immediately questioned these transactions. For years, Jeffers had been closely connected with the mill and his purchase of its assets at a low price raised suspicions. For at least a couple of years to come, the steam mill dominated political discourse in Salem County. Jeffers faced charges that he had personally been involved in the mill's demise. Jeffers spent all of his political capital in a vain attempt to disassociate himself from the "steam mill" and its operation.

Charges stemmed mainly from questions over the legality of the bank notes issued in the name of the Salem and Philadelphia Manufacturing Company. At first Jeffers seemed unscathed by the turn of events; he won election to the Assembly in 1829 and had only narrowly lost the governorship to Peter Vroom. But a committee of twelve Salem Countians met in February and March of 1830 and issued a report on the administration of the steam mill. After summarizing the history of the debacle, the report did not implicate Jeffers by name, but it did raise legal and ethical questions in a series of resolutions. The report pointed out that the company had no authority to issue banknotes, being incorporated for "manufacturing purposes alone." Those banknotes were, in the committee's estimation, a "palpable and deliberate fraud." The report also charged that the company had never properly organized itself, never having received subscriptions for its stock. Another resolution condemned "those who style themselves President and Treasurer" for never disclosing the authority under which they served. The committee concluded that the guilty parties had to be "exposed and punished."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Salem County Deeds, LL:326.

⁶¹ *Salem Messenger*, March 24, 1830.

William N. Jeffers interpreted the committee's report as an attack on his own honesty and integrity. Within a month, he published "An Address to the People of the County of Salem," in which he sought to vindicate himself and impugn his accusers, perceiving a personal attack coupled with an attack on his Jacksonian politics. Jeffers accused his political opponents of seeking to "injure" him with "hope of political effect upon the party to which he belongs." He attributed the attack to "shameless deception" by the *Salem Messenger*, "a press of the most licentious character," comparing its judgments to those set forth by Haman in the biblical account of Queen Esther.⁶²

Controversy over the steam mill also became intertwined with another matter of growing concern to Salem County voters: railroad construction. The Jacksonian legislators elected in 1829—including Jeffers himself—came under harsh criticism for not supporting construction of the proposed Atlantic Railroad that would connect "the western shore of the Hudson River nearly opposite to the city of New York, through Newark and Elizabethtown, New Brunswick, Trenton and Camden in the county of Gloucester, and from thence to some point on the Delaware in the county of Salem." This proposal stood in opposition to another one to build a railroad between Camden and the Raritan River near Perth Amboy, first set forth in 1828.

Railroad construction thus became another point of contention between Jacksonians and their opponents. The Jacksonian delegation sent to Trenton from Salem County in 1829 favored the Camden and Amboy line over the so-called Atlantic Railroad, and voted to effectively kill the bill chartering the Atlantic line. Opponents of the Atlantic line viewed it as an expensive boondoggle, derisively calling it the "Sea Serpent." Its supporters viewed it an economic boon to Salem County, a means of linking the county to regional, perhaps even national, markets. The

⁶² William N. Jeffers, "An Address to the People of Salem County," April 1830, 1-2. Original at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

anti-Jackson *Salem Messenger* went so far as to claim that the Atlantic Railroad charter would have been enacted had it not been for William Jeffers.⁶³

James Newell, a candidate for Council in 1830, went a step further. He had gone to Trenton to lobby the county's legislative delegation there, taking with him a petition signed by a "great number" of Salem Countians. Jeffers, according to Newell, averred that the people of Salem County "did not know what they did want." Jeffers then stated his preference for an extension of the Camden and Amboy line into Salem County. Newell countered that Jeffers's objections to the Atlantic railroad bill could be answered by amendments to that bill.⁶⁴

Controversy over the railroad and the steam mill brought about Jeffers's defeat in 1830. Voters chose the Railroad Ticket, as advocates of the Atlantic Railroad styled themselves, by solid majorities in Salem County. In particular, they punished Jeffers; he ran well behind his running mates with 667 votes, compared with 804 for David Hurley and 730 for Jacob Wick.⁶⁵ The Newark *Sentinel* reported that disagreement between pro-railroad and anti-railroad factions defined Salem county politics in that election. That newspaper article made specific note of the defeat of Jeffers, who was "condemned by the voice of his own county, and has leave to stay at home during the present winter."⁶⁶

Even this rebuff did not dampen Jeffers's political ambitions. After his defeat in Salem County, he immediately launched a campaign for Congress on the Jacksonian ticket. Jeffers and the entire Jackson ticket went down to defeat, but Jeffers trailed his running mates because voters in South Jersey "cut" him when they voted. In Upper Alloway's Creek Township in Salem County, he received only 107 votes compared with an average of 171 for the rest of the ticket. In

⁶³ *Salem Messenger*, October 11, 1830.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* The privileged status of the Camden and Amboy Railroad became an issue in New Jersey politics through much of the antebellum era.

⁶⁵ *Salem Messenger*, October 14, 1830.

⁶⁶ *Newark Sentinel*, October 19, 1830.

Pittsgrove Township, he received only 152 votes while the others received an average of 190.⁶⁷ In Gloucester County, he ran about 120 votes behind his running mates, and in Cumberland County, he received only 191 votes while the other Jacksonians averaged nearly 700 votes.⁶⁸

Indeed, discontent had surfaced even in Jacksonian circles with Jeffers's candidacy. The Newark *Sentinel* reported on December 26, 1830, that party members in South Jersey had wished to substitute Benjamin B. Cooper of Gloucester County and Isaac W. Crane of Cumberland County for Jeffers and John W. Mickle of Gloucester County on their tickets. The paper also reported on a meeting in Salem held on December 17 that adopted resolutions strongly condemning Jeffers. One resolution called support for Jeffers "a gross prostitution of the right of suffrage." Another charged that Jeffers had "made every exertion in order to be placed on the Administration (Adams) congressional ticket" in 1828 and he did not declare his allegiance to Jackson until after the General's election seemed a sure thing. A third resolution called Jeffers "the chief agent in the perpetration of the frauds" of the steam mill company.⁶⁹

Pro-Jackson newspapers saw the assault on Jeffers as a political ploy. The Trenton *Emporium and True American* described the anti-Jeffers activity as a means to elect at least one anti-Jacksonian to Congress. The anti-Jackson party's strategy, according to the *Emporium*, was to "strike off Mr. J. and permit one of their men to slip in over his shoulders." As events turned out, the entire "Clay ticket" won election, but anti-Jeffers sentiment left the Salem Countian dead last in the overall vote totals among major party candidates.⁷⁰

After two successive defeats at the polls, Jeffers did receive some encouraging news early in 1831. Samuel Southard, now Attorney General of New Jersey, issued a report on the steam

⁶⁷ *Salem Messenger*, January 19, 1831.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, January 12, 1831.

⁶⁹ *Newark Sentinel*, December 26, 1830.

⁷⁰ *Emporium and True American*, Trenton, New Jersey, December 25, 1830.

mill controversy. His report concluded that the Salem and Philadelphia Manufacturing Company had not acted improperly in issuing bank notes. They had been paid out in discharge of debts and he found no evidence that the company or any of its officers had discounted the notes or performed other acts “appropriate [only] to banking.” Further investigation proved difficult. The Company’s president had died, and its cashier had left New Jersey. Southard, though no longer Jeffers’s political ally, concluded that “further proceedings in the cause are unlikely to be productive of beneficial effects.”⁷¹

Even so, Jeffers’s connections with the company cost him a federal appointment. President Andrew Jackson had appointed Jeffers United States Charge d’Affaires to the new republics in Central America. Anti-administration newspapers immediately expressed concern about Jeffers’s dealings with the “swindling concern known by the name of the Philadelphia and Salem Manufacturing Company,” as well as the indictment of 1810 against him in Cincinnati.⁷² Jeffers actually had travelled to Guatemala City to assume his duties, but he returned to Washington by November to refute those charges of misconduct.⁷³ Possibly under pressure to do so, Jeffers resigned this position.⁷⁴

In this context, Jeffers understandably wanted full exoneration. On December 2, 1831, he sent a memorial to the Council in Trenton remonstrating against the report of the self-appointed committee in Salem County that had investigated the steam mill company in 1830. The Council referred that memorial to a joint legislative committee empowered to issue subpoenas and obtain documents relevant to the case.⁷⁵ The legislative committee finally issued

⁷¹ Journal of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of New Jersey, 1st Sitting, 56th Session (Woodbury: Joseph Sailor, 1832), 41-2.

⁷² *Daily National Journal*, Washington, D. C., July 22, 1831.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, November 26, 1831.

⁷⁴ *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, Baltimore, Maryland, December 10, 1831.

⁷⁵ Journal of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of New Jersey, 1st Sitting, 56th Session (Woodbury: Joseph Sailor, 1832), 77.

its own report in March of 1832, finding that the Salem committee's report was "not supported by affidavits and testimony...so as to incriminate the said William N. Jeffers, or to show that he participated in the transactions of the Salem and Philadelphia Manufacturing Company." The legislative committee even commended Jeffers for inviting "the utmost scrutiny" and waiving "all objections to the evidence taken by the commissioners."⁷⁶

Jeffers offered a political valedictory on November 21, 1832. He spoke to the Hickory Club of Salem County, which had convened to celebrate the reelection of President Jackson. Jeffers publicly renounced "all claims and pretensions to office." He was there only to celebrate Jackson's victory. He praised the President's military and political careers, especially praising Jackson's retirement of the national debt and his reductions in taxation and government spending.

If Jeffers differed at all with the President at all, it was on the issue of the Bank of the United States. He recounted a good working relationship with that bank when he was president of the Salem Bank. "Whatever oppressions may be complained of elsewhere, we have none," Jeffers recalled. Nonetheless, the persistence of Jackson's opponents, and their insistence on an early renewal of the charter, had forced the President's hand. Jeffers recalled a time in English history when the "proudest minister" had to submit to the terms of the Bank of England. Jeffers argued that "principles dear to every heart" outweighed "a mere corporation."

Jeffers also alluded to the impending crisis over South Carolina's threat to nullify federal tariff legislation. He expressed full confidence in the President, calling charges that Jackson would vacillate on the matter "absurd." Such vacillation would destroy the President's legacy and "diminish his glory." Jeffers cited Jackson's remark that "the union must and shall be

⁷⁶ Votes and Proceedings of the 56th General Assembly of the State of New Jersey (Newton: Grant Fitch, 1832), 224-5.

preserved,” and foresaw that the President would willingly put down rebellion if necessary. Events proved Jeffers correct on this matter.⁷⁷

Having abandoned his quest for elective office, William Jeffers moved from Salem to Camden by 1838, where he opened a law practice. But Jeffers continued to work for the Democratic cause. In a letter erroneously dated September 31, 1840, R. D. Thompson wrote Garret Wall about the latter’s plans to campaign in the “western counties” of New Jersey. From Jeffers, Thompson heard that Wall planned to be in Cape May Court House on October 10. Thompson hoped that Wall would also stump in Cumberland County where the “excellent” Democratic ticket confronted a “miserable” Whig one. Jeffers still retained political connections across South Jersey and employed them in behind the scenes work for the Democratic party.⁷⁸ He also mentored promising young Democrats such as Isaac Mickle of Camden.⁷⁹

Jeffers lived in Camden until his death in 1853, even regaining an appointive political office in 1843, when he became Prosecutor of the Pleas for Gloucester County.⁸⁰ Writing some nineteen years after Jeffers’s death, his oftentimes opponent Lucius Q. C. Elmer characterized him as a man who made “warm personal friends” and “equally violent opponents.” Elmer also noted that Jeffers was “one of the first who engaged personally in the canvass for votes,” something “considered unbecoming” before the Age of Jackson. Jeffers certainly was ambitious and channeled his ambitions in many directions at once: a law practice, politics, and a major—though failed—business venture.⁸¹

⁷⁷ “Speech of William N. Jeffers Delivered at the Great Festival of the Friends of Jackson and VanBuren” (Salem: Hickory Club of the County of Salem, 1831), RUSC.

⁷⁸ R. D. Thompson to Garret Wall, September 31 (?), 1840, Garret Wall papers, RUSC, MC 1003.

⁷⁹ See entries in Philip English Mackey, ed., *A Gentleman of Much Promise: The Diary of Isaac Mickle, 1837-1845* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977).

⁸⁰ He won this appointment just before the establishment of Camden County in 1844.

⁸¹ Lucius Q. C. Elmer, *Constitution and Government of the Province and State of New Jersey* (Newark: Margin J. Dennis and Co., 1872), 464-6.

Jeffers's life made manifest some of the changes in American society and politics in the Age of Jackson. He did represent a "new generation" of politicians, not connected with any of the "old families" of Salem County or New Jersey. He actively promoted his own cause, seeking to expand his political influence in Salem County, but his ambitions extended beyond that rural, South Jersey county. He sought statewide office three times, cultivating the friendship of state political leaders such as Samuel Southard, even though the two went in different directions when Andrew Jackson emerged on the national political scene. Ambition guided Jeffers more than ideology as he sought his own place in this new political order.

Jeffers participated in the "market revolution" transforming America's economy, evidenced by his role in establishing the Salem Bank and Steam Mill Company. He employed, apparently without hesitation or scruple, political connections to advance his business objectives. Certainly, opportunism characterized Jeffers's career. Though he identified with the Jackson party, some of his peers questioned his Jacksonian principles. Indeed, his commitment to those Jacksonian principles could be legitimately questioned.⁸² His ambition clearly eclipsed his ideological commitment. Ironically, Peter Vroom, who defeated Jeffers in his bid for governor in 1829, more forthrightly committed himself to Jacksonian principles. Jeffers was a talented man, but he was also a man of his times. Ultimately, misjudgments, and perhaps misfortune, kept him from realizing his highest political and entrepreneurial ambitions.

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⁸² Richard McCormick sees a dearth of principled action across the board in New Jersey politics, pointing out that parties did not organize "around a set of principles" and "did not adopt any body of doctrine." Jeffers certainly fit well into such a political environment. See McCormick, "Party Formation," 172.

Battlefront Meets the Home Front. He is also a frequent contributor to the quarterly newsletter of the Salem County Historical Society.