

The Governors of New Jersey: Biographical Essays**Michael J. Birkner (Editor), Donald Linky (Editor), Peter Mickulas (Editor)****Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2014. 440 pp., 27 illustrations, \$35.95 cloth.****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v1i1.6>**

This volume presents essays about each governor, organized by the fundamental law under which they served. Each successive charter--colonial documents from 1665 to 1776 and the three constitutions of 1776, 1844, and 1947-- increased the executive's power. The editors persuasively argue, however, that leadership ability can trump formal authority, for each era has produced governors who overcame great challenges; who failed spectacularly; or who left virtually no mark.

Most experts would agree on a list of the most noteworthy leaders. In the colonial period, Lewis Morris waged a battle to become the first governor who did not have to be shared with New York. William Livingston, who served under the 1776 constitution for fourteen years, presided over the reconstruction of civil government after the Revolutionary War. Despite the still modest powers granted the governor in the 1844 constitution, Woodrow Wilson rode the waves of Progressivism in New Jersey and nationally to compile a stunning record that carried him to election as U.S. president. The 1947 constitution, which immensely strengthened the office, has produced its share of failures, but Alfred Driscoll, Richard Hughes, Brendan Byrne, and Thomas Kean all left their mark on New Jersey politics and policy.

Readers learn much about each individual along the way, but as one browses the essays, continuing patterns also emerge. A partial list would include:

A unique career ladder. The Garden State is virtually alone in electing no statewide officials other than the governor and lieutenant governor conjointly. Elsewhere, judges, attorneys general, treasurers, and others run separately, build independent political bases;

and aspire to gubernatorial candidacy. Before the advent of the 1947 constitution, with few exceptions New Jersey candidates served in the legislative leadership, the congressional delegation, or both, and this still describes seven of the eleven people elected since then.

A breeding ground for both machine politics and reform movements. Political machines arose here along with political parties. Frank Hague of Hudson County is legendary, but George Norcross of today's Camden County resembles Hague more than a little. Yet Democrats Woodrow Wilson and Brendan Byrne both came to office as reformist foes of the bosses of their own party.

Recurring policy initiatives. One cannot live in New Jersey and be unaware of the centrality of tax policy, and how it makes and breaks gubernatorial reputations. Brendan Byrne and Richard Hughes' political skill in achieving passage of broad-based taxes contributes to their stature; the opposite may be said of Harold Hoffman and Jim Florio. Transportation concerns stretch from the railroad and canal issues occupying governors throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, to the problem of how to fund bridges, tunnels, and highways that bedevils them to this day. Conflicts with and resentment of New York began in the colonial period and also continue.

Other discoveries abound in these essays. Many remember that Jon Corzine, after leaving office, headed a firm that embezzled money from its clients. But who recollects that Harold Hoffman embezzled money from the state? We recall that between 1990 and 2005 New Jersey had four governors, only two of them elected, but did we know that three governors of the 1840s served a year or less? We reside in towns named for essay subjects Berkeley, Carteret, Morris, Livingston, Pennington, Bloomfield, and Paterson. We live in a state that had strong southern

sympathies during the Civil War, but that also passed a bill prohibiting discrimination in any place of public accommodation sixteen years before the federal civil rights act. In short, *The Governors of New Jersey* can be read with pleasure on many levels and by many different audiences.

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