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-then-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 previously 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-

tion, he came from an urban working-class background in Philadelphia. His father Ezekiel worked as a journeyman hatter by trade, while his mother, whose maiden name was Sarah M. Howell, operated a millinery shop. She originally came from a prominent but not well-to-do family in Mauricetown, New Jersey. Young Abbett grew up a poor boy in the streets of Philadelphia during the Jacksonian era. He attended Central High School, where he met boys like Henry George and Ignatius Donnelly, both of whom were to become famous public figures. Attendance at college was something which only the most privileged families could afford, and after graduating from Central High, Abbett studied law on his own. He served as a clerk in the firm of John W. Ashmead, who was the United States attorney for the eastern district of Pennsylvania. Abbett passed his bar examination in 1857, but he found Philadelphia to be a closed shop when it came to attracting clients. A year later, he moved to New York City in search of a more lucrative practice. There he soon formed a law partnership with William J. Fuller, a distinguished patent and admiralty lawyer. With the city's expanding commercial activity, the law firm of Abbett and Fuller became prosperous, and it remained intact unil Fuller died in 1889.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, Abbett returned to Philadelphia to marry Mary Briggs on October 8, 1862. She was the daughter of Amos Briggs, a city judge. The couple initially established their residence in Hoboken, which was just a ferryboat ride from Abbett's law office in Manhattan. In the seventeen years of their marriage, they had two sons and a daughter.

Encouraged by his law partner, Abbett entered politics in his newly adopted hometown in 1864, campaigning for General George B. McClellan in the presidential race against Abraham Lincoln. In the same campaign, he was elected to represent Hoboken in the general assembly. The Civil War overshadowed his early political career. He was an intensely loyal Democrat, aligned with the party's Copperhead wing, which vehemently opposed the war. A staunch states' rights advocate, he vigorously objected to the policies of the Lincoln administration, especially its Emancipation Proclamation. Although philosophically opposed to slavery, he went along with his party and voted against the ratification of both the Thirteenth and Fifteenth amendments. At the time, there were only eight Negroes living in Hoboken, and he did not favor their advancement. Opposing the use of federal power during the war, Abbett deplored the expanded role of that power during Reconstruction. He gained statewide recognition by defending United States Senator John P. Stockton, whom the radicals of the Republican party had expelled from Congress.

Seeking to broaden his political base in Hudson County, Abbett moved to Jersey City in 1867. He was reelected to the general assembly for the next two years, and his fellow state legislators chose him speaker. The speakership was an important leadership position which he used to great advantage. The key to his success lay in his instinctive ability to gauge what would be acceptable to his own party, to the opposition, and to Governor Theodore F. Randolph. During the 1870s he endorsed a conservative approach to public policy while devoting much of his energy to the task of building the party organization. No crusader, he was at this time a survivor. Thus he identified himself with the powerful Camden and Amboy Railroad and defended this monopoly whenever it came under attack by those outside New Jersey. Like most politicians who move into the front ranks, he discovered that the political system within which he had to operate was not only shaping his decisions but also formulating his options.

In the late 1860s, the immigrant Irish Catholics in Jersey City were gaining political power. Frightened, the militant Know-Nothing nativists subjected them to discrimination and abuse. Abbett was one of the few Protestant leaders willing

to share power with the Irish. As president of the local board of education in 1869, he openly courted them by assisting in their fight to soften the Protestant tone of Bible reading and prayers in the public schools. New Jersey politicians had played ethnic politics before the 1870s, but with the advent of mass political parties, Abbett developed the strategy to a high degree. He managed nominations and distributed patronage jobs to ethnics with a deliberate intent to woo them at election time.

Many more illustrations of Abbett's cooperation with the Irish could be cited, but one will suffice. Jersey City Republicans realized that the emergent Irish were outnumbering them. To put the municipal government beyond their reach, the Republicans persuaded the state legislature in 1871 to pass the "thieves' charter," which removed the Irish intruders from city office and replaced them with commissioners appointed by the legislature. Abbett spoke out against this ripper legislation, and in 1874 he got himself elected Hudson County state senator by promising to restore home rule.

During the 1870s, the Democratic party in New Jersey was rent by factionalism. The Theodore Fitz Randolph faction, otherwise known as the "State House Ring," abhorred the Irish courtship. Conversely, leaders like Abbett and John R. McPherson, who were interested in maintaining power, realized that to win elections the party must temper its nativism and enlist broad support. Breaking sharply and completely with the State House Ring in 1875, Abbett challenged Randolph's party leadership by supporting Robert Gilchrist for the United States Senate. This abortive effort failed, but greater success followed in 1877, when Abbett backed McPherson for the other Senate seat. Abbett continually clashed with the "State House Ring" both in personality and politics.

As a state senator, Abbett kept his campaign pledge and obtained the passage of a reform municipal charter restoring home rule to Jersey City. He played subtly on the religious and ethnic issue when he sponsored his "Liberty of Conscience" bill, which allowed Catholic priests access to the state penal and mental institutions. Elevated to the senate presidency in 1877, Abbett won the applause of organized labor by sponsoring a statute that required employers to pay their workers in cash rather than in paper scrip or company store merchandise. In a similar vein, he helped the employees of the bankrupt Jersey Central Railroad try to collect their back wages by drafting a statute that made their salaries a prior lien on the assets of the company.

Abbett first sought the governorship in 1877, but the State House Ring, in an episode fraught with party intrigue, conspired to assure the nomination for George B. McClellan. Though disappointed, Abbett showed his party loyalty by campaigning for McClellan. Personal tragedy then struck. His wife died of cancer in 1879 at the age of forty. He never remarried.

Stricken with grief, Abbett temporarily dropped out of politics. Some of his close friends thought that he had lost interest. But in 1880, when he learned that his arch rival Orestes Cleveland was seeking the governorship, he roared back. As chairman of the State Democratic Convention, Abbett single-handedly steered the nomination to George C. Ludlow, a state senator from Middlesex County, who went on to win the election.

Railroads were of paramount interest in New Jersey during the Gilded Age. Governor Ludlow would have liked to tax them, but he could not break through the stalemate of forces surrounding him. To battle the railroads over state and local taxation was Abbett's calling. It struck at the heart of laissez-faire capitalism and brought him into direct conflict with the established order, which saw railroading as the lifeblood of the state's economy. Concerned because the railroads paid few taxes or none, he actually began his fight against them while serving as corporation counsel for Jersey City from 1877 to 1883.

Finally, in 1883, Abbett was nominated for governor. With railroad taxation as his battle cry, he conducted a vigorous campaign, touring New Jersey from one end to the other. Yet his hometown, Jersey City, remained the center stage of the drama. The Republicans ran state supreme court judge Jonathan Dixon, who also lived there. Abbett did not let the voters forget that Dixon had drafted the infamous "thieves' charter," which deprived the Jersey City Irish of power in 1871. Dixon also had handed down court decisions that were construed as antilabor. Abbett's cultural affinity with urban workers and foreign immigrants accounted in large measure for his popular appeal. When the election returns were tabulated, he had defeated Dixon by 103,856 to 97,047.

Abbett's inauguration in 1884 at age forty-seven was a goal he had worked toward for twenty years. Impatient waiting and striving had whetted his appetite for the leadership opportunities that he saw in the office. Seizing the initiative, he made the rail tax issue the major thrust of his inaugural message, which the railroads interpreted as a declaration of war. During the ensuing battle, Abbett encountered all kinds of obstacles. When pressure against the passage of the tax bill intensified, he threatened to refuse to sign appropriations unless the measure was advanced. By skillfully publicizing the issue, he was able to get the bill passed—a feat that had seemed impossible. As soon as the statute had been signed into law, the railroads challenged its constitutionality in the courts. At one point, the opposition created a political smokescreen by impeaching Patrick H. Laverty, the state prison warden. Undaunted, Abbett persisted in his course of action, and the railroads finally capitulated, completely surrendering their tax-exempt status.

As governor, Abbett was one of the rare major party politicians who advocated the cause of New Jersey's black citizens. In an unusual display of gubernatorial prerogative, he intervened in a local incident of racial injustice. The body of Samuel Bass, an ex-slave, had been denied burial in an all-white cemetery in Hackensack. Abbett called for corrective action, motivated by compassion and social justice but evincing a fair and dispassionate consideration of the issues. He persuaded the legislature to pass the "Negro Burial" bill. But that was not all; he also secured the passage of the first public accommodations law. On top of this, he served as the godfather of a black child in Newark, who was baptized Leon Abbett DeKalb. An interracial baptism was an uncommon event in those days. Coming at a high tide of racism in America, these actions were particularly significant; they represented a dramatic reversal of Abbett's earlier attitudes toward blacks.

Several other reform bills were enacted to cope with the onrush of urban industrialism. The practice of using convict labor for private profit was abolished, while the laws regulating the working conditions of women and children were tightened. Aware of the disorderly and chaotic growth of nineteenth-century American cities, Abbett drafted legislation that enabled the bankrupt municipalities of Elizabeth and Rahway to regain their solvency. His appointments displeased civil service reformers. In Jacksonian fashion, he ousted holdover Republicans from office and replaced them with loyal Democrats whenever possible. In retaliation, a hostile Republican legislature stripped him of control of those appointments, but not without a fight.

Prohibited by the state constitution from succeeding himself, in 1887 Abbett sought to become a United State senator. That goal proved elusive. Retribution came, and its name was railroad power. It should be remembered that before 1913 senators were chosen by the state legislatures, not the voters. Conservative pro-railroad Democrats, who identified with the State House Ring, withheld their support from Abbett and elected Rufus Blodgett instead. Brooding, vituperative, bitter, Abbett took this defeat hard.

Meanwhile, he managed to stay alive politically. He became legal counsel for the liquor dealers' association, an important source of campaign money and financing.

Counting on his continuing popularity, party leaders prevailed upon Abbett to run for a second term in 1889. His instinct opposed seeking reelection, but he could not resist the insistence of his followers, especially since he had no attractive alternatives. After securing an agreement to raise the governor's salary from five to ten thousand dollars, he accepted the nomination. The Republicans ran Edward B. Grubb, a wealthy iron magnate and a Civil War hero. Abbett had little trouble defeating Grubb, compiling an unprecedented plurality of 14,253 votes. He would have won even without the ballot frauds perpetrated in his behalf in the Irish district of Jersey City, where the number of votes cast exceeded the number of registered voters.

Characteristically, Abbett seized the initiative and turned the election-fraud scandal to his advantage by demanding a ballot-reform law. From a friendly Democratic legislature he acquired greater control over the bureaucracy and regained the appointive powers that had been previously usurped. Never subordinate to the legislature, he now began to ask it for action on a wider and wider range of issues. He obtained a package of labor laws, free public libraries, scholarships for the agricultural college at Rutgers, highway improvements, money increases for public schools, and a department of banking and insurance. His key appointments were typically paradoxical: for some departments he chose men of high competence and integrity, for others he yielded to the demands of unsavory forces that eventually damaged his reputation. A product of the corrupt Hudson County machine, which was then run by Robert Davis, the governor could not escape being tarnished by its rampant public dishonesty.

Abbett also broke new ground in resolving industrial strife. In December 1890 a serious dispute between labor and management erupted at the Clark Thread Mills in Kearny. As it turned out, it was one of the longest and bitterest strikes in New Jersey history. Pinkerton detectives were hired as strikebreakers. Rather than exacerbate the conflict by calling out the National Guard, as governors in the Gilded Age were prone to do, Abbett cleverly defused the situation by deputizing the Jersey City police, who restored order. He then had the legislature create the first state police force and appointed John Parnell Feeney as its head. He also obtained a law that prohibited the use of private detectives in strikes.

Similarly, in 1891, the governor intervened in a labor dispute at the Oxford Iron and Nail Company in Warren County, where employees were being starved into submission by a lockout in the depth of winter. He translated the episode into the first law of any significance on mine safety. He further demonstrated his alignment with the working class by appointing labor leaders to key positions. He named Joseph P. McDonnell to the state board of arbitration and Robert O'Hara as his commissioner of mines. In truth, he never forgot his common origins or his city upbringing. He was the first urban-oriented governor in the state.

When put to the test, Abbett had the capacity to rise above politics and to do what was best for the public good. The two most controversial pieces of legislation during his second term involved legalized gambling at the horse-racing tracks and the incorporation of the Reading Railroad Coal Combine. When these bills were passed, the attendant pressures were transferred in all their intensity from the legislature to the governor. Worried about the potential adverse consequences of both bills, he vetoed them. Afterwards be successfully appealed for public support to sustain the vetoes.

But bargaining with party bosses like Miles Ross and James Smith proved costly, for they made Abbett pay heavily for his legislative vetoes. In 1893 the special interests he had antagonized once again

combined to defeat him for the United States Senate. Dejected by having failed to achieve his cherished goal, Abbett finished his career by serving as a state supreme court judge. He died in his home in Jersey City on December 4, 1894, after an attack of sugar diabetes. He was buried in the family plot in the Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn.

By any standard Abbett was one of the ablest and most intriguing men ever to be governor. The social and economic conditions that existed in 1884 made New Jersey manipulable for someone with Abbett's sources of machine power and leadership ability. Few of his contemporaries were comparably positioned. A lifetime in politics had made him wise and ruthless in political bargaining and compromising. This experience, coupled with his determination to lead rather than follow, made him formidable. With a personality well suited for the intense partisanship of his time, he displayed great zest for party politics and party organization. Furthermore, in many ways he was considerably in advance of the times. In this sense, he was an important forerunner of a type of governor that had not yet appeared on the American political stage.

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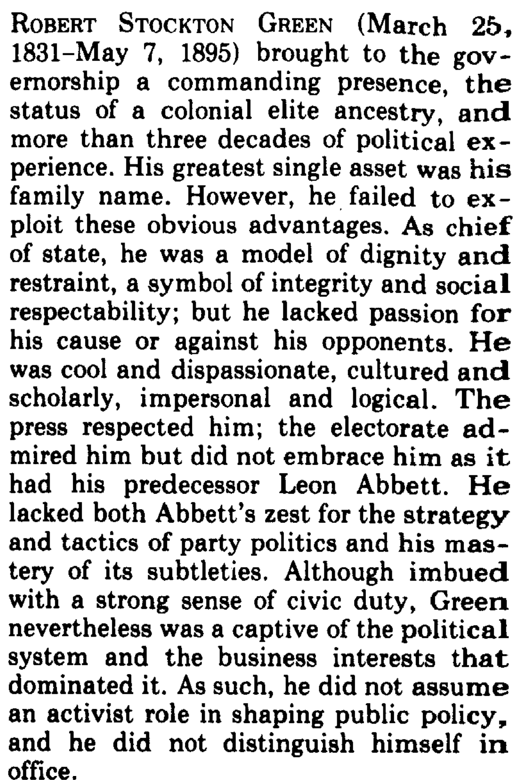
Richard A. Hogarty



ROBERT STOCKTON GREEN (March 25, 1831–May 7, 1895) brought to the governorship a commanding presence, the status of a colonial elite ancestry, and more than three decades of political experience. His greatest single asset was his family name. However, he failed to exploit these obvious advantages. As chief of state, he was a model of dignity and restraint, a symbol of integrity and social respectability; but he lacked passion for his cause or against his opponents. He was cool and dispassionate, cultured and scholarly, impersonal and logical. The press respected him; the electorate admired him but did not embrace him as it had his predecessor Leon Abbett. He lacked both Abbett's zest for the strategy and tactics of party politics and his mastery of its subtleties. Although imbued with a strong sense of civic duty, Green nevertheless was a captive of the political system and the business interests that dominated it. As such, he did not assume an activist role in shaping public policy, and he did not distinguish himself in office.

A patrician by birth and disposition, Robert S. Green could lay claim to a sterling Yankee background. He was descended from a long line of Presbyterian ministers and a family that had been politically active in New Jersey since the American Revolution. His great-grandfather, the Reverend Jacob Green, had served as chairman of the committee that drafted the first state constitution at the Provincial Congress in Burlington in 1776. His grandmother, Elizabeth Stockton, was the daughter of Commodore Robert F. Stockton, who had been a naval hero in the War of 1812; she was also a direct descendant of Richard Stockton, who had signed the Declaration of Independence. These family credentials gave Green impeccable native-born, blue-