

On January 18, 1848, Stratton left office to devote the last years of his life to agricultural pursuits on his farm in Swedesboro. He married Sarah Taggart of Philadelphia on February 1, 1854. Although he had no children, two of his nephews achieved fame. Thomas Preston Carpenter was an associate justice of the state supreme court, while Benjamin Franklin Howey served in the Forty-eighth Congress. Because of ill health, Stratton lived in Europe in 1857 and 1858. He died in Swedesboro on March 30, 1859.

Biographical Collection, Rutgers University Special Collections, New Brunswick, N.J.

Herrmann, Frederick M. "Stress and Structure: Political Change in Antebellum New Jersey." Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1976.

*Proceedings of the New Jersey State Constitutional Convention of 1844.* With an Introduction by John E. Bebout. Trenton: Federal Writers' Project, 1942.

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GEORGE FRANKLIN FORT (1809–April 23, 1872), physician, politician, and judge, who was the uncle of Governor John F. Fort (1908–10), was born near Pemberton, New Jersey. The eldest son of Andrew Fort, a wealthy farmer of New Hanover Township in Burlington County, Fort was educated in the common schools at Pemberton and at the University of Pennsylvania Medical College. After graduation in 1828, he entered the office of Dr. Jacob Eghert of Pemberton. Later that year, he moved to Dr. Charles Patterson's office in New Egypt, located then in Monmouth County. In 1830, Fort opened his own practice at Imlaystown, where he married

Anna Marie Wright, the daughter of Samuel G. Wright, an iron manufacturer and future Whig congressman. A year later, he returned to New Egypt and extended his practice to southern Monmouth and western Burlington counties, as well as the area which in 1850 became Ocean County.

George F. Fort's public career began when he was elected to the 1844 New Jersey constitutional convention as a Democrat from Monmouth County. His election was made possible by the county Democratic party organization's refusal to agree to the bipartisan ticket advanced in all other counties. This resulted in a thoroughly Democratic Monmouth delegation and gave the Democrats a voting majority at the convention. During the proceedings, Fort supported universal suffrage, open eligibility for office, abolition of the freehold qualification for public office, and the popular election of all state and county officials.

In the state elections of 1844, Fort was elected to the general assembly, well ahead of his ticket, with a majority of five hundred votes. After a term in the assembly, where he served on the judiciary committee, he was elected to the state senate and once more appointed to the judiciary committee. He also served on the committee for education and the Plainfield Bank Investigating Committee and acted as one of three commissioners for ascertaining the value of state lands under water at Jersey City. Fort's reputation as a reformer originated when he sponsored a bill to insure township support for public education and created the Manufacturing Incorporation Law, which eliminated private incorporation acts for specific industries.

In 1850, George Fort was widely endorsed for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, with the moderately influential *Monmouth County Democrat* advancing his name two months before the Democratic state convention. He was nominated on the fifth ballot over John Summerhill of Salem County, John Cassidy of Hudson County, and Henry A. Ford of Morris County. The Whigs nomi-

nated John Runk, a former congressman from Hunterdon County.

The state campaign focused on the power and influence of the Joint Companies, on the Democratic party of New Jersey and, through that party, on the state. In the first popular gubernatorial election in 1844, the Democratic candidate had been John R. Thomson, secretary of the companies. Thomson was the brother-in-law of Robert F. Stockton, the majority stockholder and president of the Camden and Amboy Railroad. Stockton supported Fort for governor in 1850 and was elected to the United States Senate in 1851. Thomson, the initial Democratic caucus nominee for the Senate in 1851, was elected to the seat when Stockton left it in 1853.

Fort was strongly associated with the monopoly interests. When the Camden and Amboy Railroad was incorporated, his father-in-law was named as a commissioner to sell stock in the company. During his administration, Fort suggested that the state government relinquish its right to purchase the works of the Joint Companies in return for a larger guarantee of revenue, arguing that an attempt to annul the exclusive privileges of the companies would constitute a violation of the state constitution. Seven weeks later, on February 28, 1854, Fort was named one of nine incorporators in an act incorporating the Camden and Pemberton Agricultural Railroad Company, a trunk line of the Camden and Amboy. The Whigs attempted to label Fort and other Democrats puppets to the interests of the Joint Companies. Their charges, in substance, accused the companies of subsidizing Democratic candidates for governor in return for the appointment of friendly judges to the state judiciary. Indeed, during Fort's administration, the anti-monopoly banner was constantly unfurled in elective battles with the Democratic party. During the 1850 campaign, as evidence of his antimonopoly sentiments, Fort and his supporters emphasized his sponsorship of incorporation laws.

The monopoly issue never proved effective in defeating the state's Democracy. More important in the 1850 elections for governor and congress was dissension within Whig ranks over the compromise measures of 1850. Leading Whig newspapers condemned the Fugitive Slave Law as "infidelity to the fundamental principles of the Constitution and Liberty, . . . an exhibition of faithlessness by Northern Representatives to the cause of Northern Rights." They portrayed the Democrats as allied with slave power, favorable to the unlimited expansion of slavery, and devoid of principle—demagogues "stimulating here a base and wicked Popular Prejudice against one portion of our inhabitants [blacks], refusing to consider them as entitled to the privileges of man."

The Democratic press countered, charging Whig leaders with "seeking to make the State of New Jersey an Abolition State." Democrats were not pro-slavery, and devoid of principle—demagogues "stimulating here a base and augural address when he argued that it was the duty of "every citizen to sustain and carry out" the Compromise of 1850. Fort maintained that the Fugitive Slave Act was binding on northern states because it was "in accordance with the evident intentment of the constitutional compact." Peace, stability, and union depended upon its enforcement in Fort's view, and if New Jersey was to remain loyal to the Union, her officials were compelled to enforce the provisions for the rendition of "fugitives from labor."

Procompromise Whigs found themselves closer to Democrats on the slavery extension issue than to fellow Whigs willing to take the stand in defense of the "Liberty" the *State Gazette* (Trenton) and the *Newark Daily Mercury* demanded. Some, like William Wright, the 1846 Whig gubernatorial candidate and a Democratic United States Senator from 1853 to 1858, simply switched parties. Their disaffection with the Whig party began in 1850 when Whig senators William L. Dayton and Jacob W. Miller

voted against the compromise, and they began the process of defection to the Democratic party by exhibiting apathy and lack of enthusiasm during the 1850 campaign.

Other procompromise Whigs attempted to develop a campaign theme that omitted the controversy over the expansion of slavery. The Morristown *Jerseyman*, for example, tried to convert the tired tariff issue into a nativist platform, arguing that the Democracy's tariff of 1846 was decidedly pro-European. "It is important," the editor wrote, "that we become independent of foreign nations," through a resurrection of protective features in the tariff of 1842 and the passage of stiffer naturalization laws. The schism between nativist sentiments and anti-slavery extension forces that would plague political opposition to the Democracy until 1860 had begun to work for the Democratic party even though no open conflict took place until 1854 with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

The Whig party's failure to unify the themes of its gubernatorial campaign in 1850 led to a stunning Democratic victory. Fort garnered 53.9 percent of the popular vote, the largest percentage any statewide Democratic candidate amassed before the Civil War. More important, Democrats triumphed in Camden, Mercer, Morris, Passaic, and Salem counties for the first time since the 1843 congressional elections, marking a major voter shift. The change secured statewide dominance for the Democratic party, which did not lose a state election until the 1856 victory of the "Opposition" party candidate for governor. In the senate, Democrats gained one member, in the assembly five, achieving a majority in the lower house for the first time in seven years. By 1854, the number of Whig legislators dwindled to twenty-one, while Democrats held fifty-three seats.

During the Fort administration, expenditures for common school education increased substantially, drawn from the income of dividends paid on state-owned Joint Company stock. Major reform legis-

lation created the ten-hour work day and protected child labor. A homestead exemption act was passed, exempting a family homestead from sale for debts totaling less than \$1,000. Administration bills for the regulation of banks were secured, consistent with the "hard money" position of the Democratic platform. The system of representation in the general assembly was altered to provide for a district system to replace the old county-wide general elections. General incorporation acts applying to banks, insurance companies, and plank roads were secured, but the old system of private acts to incorporate railroads was retained. The influence of the Joint Companies continued unchecked as two United States senators were elected at their behest, and the conflict over monopoly in a democratic, free-trade economy remained unresolved.

At the expiration of Fort's gubernatorial term, his Democratic successor, Rodman M. Price, appointed him a judge of the court of errors and appeals. After a term on the bench, Fort retired from public life and resumed the practice of medicine in New Egypt. He continued to serve on the board of trustees at Bordentown Female College, and he was a trustee of the Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church in New Egypt. He spent his last years writing a laudatory history of Freemasonry in the United States, published three years after his death on April 23, 1872.

Philip C. Davis



RODMAN McCAMLEY PRICE (May 5, 1816-June 7, 1894), naval officer and politician, the son of Francis and Ann (McCamley) Price, was born in Frankford Township, Sussex County. His forebears, migrating from Connecticut to the Sussex foothills