

design a new constitution. Unanimously elected convention president, he fought hard to replace the constitution that had limited him as governor with one creating a more balanced government by increasing the power of the governor and diminishing the authority of the legislature. The governor would serve a term of three years instead of one, he would be elected by the people, and he would have veto power over legislative acts.

Illness forced Williamson to resign just before the close of the convention to "prevent any delay occasioned by my absence." He expressed "great confidence" in the new constitution, which would supersede the "radically defective" 1776 document. On July 10, 1844, only a few weeks after his resignation from the convention, he died at the age of seventy-seven in Elizabethtown. His son Benjamin, who continued his successful legal practice, was himself appointed chancellor of New Jersey in 1852 under the revised system of government.

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Frank J. Esposito



PETER DUMONT VROOM (December 12, 1791–November 18, 1873), governor of New Jersey (1829–32; 1833–36), was born in Hillsboro Township, Somerset County, New Jersey, the son of Colonel Peter Dumont Vroom and Elsie (Bogert) Vroom. Colonel Vroom (1745–1831), of Dutch and French-Huguenot descent, moved to New Jersey from New York. During the revolutionary war, he served in the Second Battalion of the Somerset County militia. Subsequently, he occupied almost all the offices in the county, including those of sheriff, justice of the peace, member of the General Assembly (1790–98; 1813–17) and member of the Legislative Council (1798–1804).

The colonel's son received his education at Somerville Academy, and in 1808 he was graduated from Columbia College, New York. After reading law in Somerville, he was admitted to the bar in 1813. He practiced in Sussex and Hunterdon counties and gained some eminence as a lawyer before moving back to Somerville, where Attorney General Theodore Frelinghuysen appointed him prosecutor of the pleas. Vroom married twice: on May 21, 1817, Ann V. D. Dumont; and after her death, Senator Garret D. Wall's daughter Maria Matilda, on March 4, 1840.

Like his father, Peter D. Vroom began as a Federalist. During Vroom's early adulthood, however, Jeffersonian-Republican domination of the state left him little chance of achieving anything more than a local office in Somerset County. But the election of 1824, which split the Republican party, changed that. Like a number of other Federalists in the state, including ex-governor Aaron Ogden, James Parker, and Garret D. Wall, Vroom supported Andrew Jackson. As a Jackson partisan and the advocate of state construction of a canal from the

Delaware River to the Raritan, Vroom was elected to the general assembly from Somerset County in 1826 and 1827. Following Jackson's victory in the election of 1828, his supporters (called Democrats after 1834) in New Jersey dominated the state politically through 1837. When, in 1829, they gained control of the legislature, Garret D. Wall was elected governor. He refused the position, and Peter Vroom was elected, ending the thirteen-year rule of Isaac Williamson.

An able governor, Vroom achieved considerable popularity during his six years in office (1829-32; 1833-36). He believed in increasing the powers of the executive branch to make it coordinate in power with the legislature. To accomplish this goal and stay within the limitations of the 1776 constitution, Vroom reintroduced the practice of regularly sending a message to the legislature and meeting with his party's legislative caucus to influence its decisions on legislation and patronage. His efforts gained his administration an impressive list of accomplishments, especially in the areas of prison and militia reform, education, and internal improvements.

After becoming governor, Vroom worked to improve New Jersey's penal system. Responding in his first message to reform groups who criticized the New Jersey prison at Lambertton, Vroom proposed building a new institution modeled after the Eastern Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. Although the legislature withheld its approval until Samuel Southard's term in office, the prison was completed during Vroom's second tenure as governor. Vroom also proposed the abolition of imprisonment for debt, another concern of reformers. The legislature enacted a partial repeal during his first term, though it did not enact total repeal until 1842. Governor Vroom also urged the legislature to reform the militia system, under which every able-bodied man between eighteen and forty-five had to train regularly with a unit. The training meetings, which accomplished little, ended in 1834 at Vroom's urging. Vroom also pushed the

legislature toward school reform. During his first term, the legislature distributed part of the money in the school fund to local townships to support public education. Although the law was inadequate and Governor Vroom consistently sought to reorganize and secure greater public financing for public education, the 1829 act was a milestone in the development of public education in New Jersey and the first step in the creation of a state-supported school system.

During Vroom's administration nothing generated more controversy than the construction of a canal and a railroad through central New Jersey. At the beginning of the 1829 session of the legislature, Vroom proposed chartering a private company to build the Camden and Amboy Railroad and left the method of building the canal to the legislature. Consequently, the Delaware and Raritan Canal Company was chartered at the same time as the Camden and Amboy Railroad Company. One year later, to secure financing for the canal, Vroom supported merging the railroad and the canal into the so-called Joint Companies. The charter guaranteed the companies a monopoly over all canal and rail transportation between New York City and Philadelphia, but even this measure failed to secure capital for the canal, and Vroom proposed taking the necessary money from the school fund and lending it to the canal company.

After 1834, the growing concern among political leaders about the power the Joint Companies exercised in the state led Vroom, during his last term in office, to suggest that the state purchase them to eliminate them as a partisan issue. However, the companies' president, Robert F. Stockton, made an offer that Vroom and most legislators found unacceptable. The sale went unconsummated and the state had a political issue that periodically caused great controversy. But despite the political problems that they created, the canal and the railroad, both operating by Vroom's last term in office, contributed greatly to the state's economic develop-

ment. A transit duty the Joint Companies paid the state also reduced state taxes and defrayed the construction costs of the Trenton Prison.

Despite his support of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Company, Vroom generally acted with the anticorporation wing of his party. As governor, he urged the legislature to desist from issuing new bank charters in the state and from granting other corporate charters that did not contain strong safeguards. Until his last term in office, Vroom generally succeeded in persuading the legislature to restrict the other uses of the corporate form. Nonetheless, during his last year in office, a combination of Whigs and procorporation Democrats succeeded in creating a number of banks.

As governor, Vroom also served as chancellor of the court of chancery. Because the opinions of the earlier chancellors were unpublished, Vroom's decisions set important precedents for future courts. His decisions on corporations, which were playing an increasing role in New Jersey's economic activities during his administration, were especially significant. In *Suydam v. Receivers of the Bank of New Brunswick*, Vroom ruled that legislative acts regulating banking corporations could be applied to previously chartered institutions without being considered *ex post facto*. In several cases Vroom ruled that the state legislature, to perform public services, had broad powers to delegate its rights of eminent domain to private companies. (See *Scudder v. Trenton Delaware Falls Company* and *Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures v. Morris Canal Company*.) But Vroom's most controversial case, *Joseph Hendrickson v. Thomas L. Shotwell*, grew out of a schism between Hicksites and Orthodox Quakers. In an opinion that had political as well as legal ramifications, Vroom upheld the decision of Chief Justice Charles Ewing and Justice George K. Drake of the supreme court, awarding the school property of the Chesterfield Meeting to the Orthodox Quakers as the sect having the greater theological link to the original Friends who founded the

Chesterfield Meeting. Hicksite resentment over the decision led the branch to seek redress from the legislature. Finding their greatest support in Vroom's party, the Hicksites secured the passage of a law dividing church property equally in the case of a schism.

In 1836, after his party had won control of the joint meeting, Vroom declined to stand for reelection on account of ill health. Fellow Democrat Philemon Dickerson replaced him.

Vroom continued to alternate between private legal practice and governmental service. In 1837 President Martin Van Buren sent him to Mississippi as a commissioner to adjust land claims arising from the removal of the Choctaw Indians from the state. In 1838, as one of the five Democratic candidates for Congress, he became involved in the famous "Broad Seal War." Conflict over the accuracy of Monmouth County's returns caused the House of Representatives to challenge Governor Pennington's certification of a Whig victory. The House of Representatives, with a small Democratic majority, seated Vroom and the rest of the Democratic ticket. This allowed them to choose a Speaker and to control committee appointments.

After his defeat for reelection in 1840 Vroom remained in active Democrat. He assumed the role of an elder statesman in the party, generally supporting a moderate view against the threats to the union from abolitionists on one side and secessionists on the other. In his elder statesman role, Vroom ran as an elector for Pierce in 1852 and for Breckenridge in 1860. During the Civil War, Vroom urged moderation and played a large role in preventing disturbances in New Jersey over the draft law, an act which he regarded as unconstitutional. His desire to seek moderate solutions led him to give strong support to General McClellan against Lincoln in 1864.

After 1840, Vroom also served in a number of important governmental positions. He played an active role in the New Jersey Constitutional Convention of 1844. Relying on his experiences in office, he

urged the convention to increase the power of the executive, especially by providing for the governor's direct election, increasing his patronage powers, and giving him a limited power of veto over legislation. At this convention Vroom also stated again the anticorporation and anti-banking sentiments he had expressed as governor.

In 1846 Vroom, with Chief Justice Henry W. Green, Stacy G. Potts, and William L. Dayton, revised the statutes of the state to bring them into compliance with the new constitution. In 1853, President Franklin Pierce appointed him ambassador to Prussia, where he remained until 1857. Serving in Prussia during the Crimean War, Vroom dealt with a number of issues arising from the conflict, but his major problem as an American minister developed out of the large German emigration to the United States during this period. Vroom served early in 1861 as a commissioner to the peace conference called by Virginia to try to avert a civil war. In 1865, he replaced his son, John P. Vroom, who had died several months earlier, as a law reporter of the New Jersey Supreme Court, and served in this capacity until his death in 1873.

In summary, Peter Dumont Vroom left an important mark on the politics of New Jersey. He helped restore the governorship to a position of prominence; he helped to codify the laws in the state; he was one of the founders of the New Jersey Democratic party; and he helped rewrite the state constitution.

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Herbert Ershkowitz



SAMUEL LEWIS SOUTHARD (June 9, 1787-June 26, 1842) was governor of New Jersey for barely four months. His service was a brief though eventful interlude in a lengthy, varied, and distinguished political career. He was born in Basking Ridge, Somerset County, to Henry Southard, one of the founders of the Jeffersonian-Republican party in New Jersey, and Sarah (Lewis) Southard. Educated in a classical school run by the Reverend Robert Finley in Basking Ridge, he entered the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) in 1802. Following his graduation in 1804, Southard taught school in Mendham, Morris County. Less than two years later, a Virginia congressional colleague of his father's, John Taliaferro, offered Samuel a position as tutor to his sons and nephews. He accepted and for five years lived at the Taliaferro plantation, "Hagley," in King George County. There he studied law with the eminent Fredericksburg jurist Francis T. Brooke. In 1809 Southard was admitted to the Virginia bar, and in 1811 he returned to