

porters as a bunch of "Clod Hoppers" who boasted "not a man of Talents or of understanding among them." This proved unforgivable in a self-made man who owed his political success to the support of New Jersey's farmers—who, after all, constituted the vast majority of voters in an agrarian state.

After the end of the war in 1815, ideological divisions in New Jersey, which had most recently been exacerbated by foreign policy issues, began to diminish. At the same time Governor Pennington, who had done much to close the rifts caused by party confrontations, found his popularity among rank-and-file Republicans decreasing, his hold on Essex County undermined, his support in the caucus threatened. In short, Pennington was almost certain to lose the next election. The party found a way out: President Madison nominated Pennington a judge in the United States District Court for the district of New Jersey and the governor accepted. By gracefully arranging this "elevation," New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans avoided a messy public struggle and allowed an old party wheelhorse to save face.

As for the retiring governor, he found himself in a berth that was "almost a sinecure." There were four court terms during the year but as the historian John Whitehead has noted, "they rarely lasted . . . more than a day. No grand jury was ever sworn in [Pennington's] court, nor were any indictments found." He held the office until his death in 1826. Perhaps there was some justice in his enjoying a tranquil position for the last decade of life after having paid so dearly for his successful efforts to bridge the enmities of a generation of party combat during the era of the first party system. A kind of vindication occurred posthumously when his son was elected governor in 1837.

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MAHLON DICKERSON (April 17, 1770–October 5, 1853), was born in Hanover Neck, Morris County, the first child of Jonathan and Mary (Coe) Dickerson. During his life, he demonstrated a diversity and longevity in political leadership and achievement that no other native son appears to have equaled.

Dickerson received his only institutional education as one of the twenty members of the class of 1789 of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), where the Reverend John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was president. Before attending college he had been tutored by educated citizens in and around Morristown. His teachers included Caleb Russell, who in 1797 established the *Morris County Gazette* (Morristown). In 1776 another tutor, Dr. Jacob Green, had argued forcibly against slavery in America. Dr. Green served at one time as acting president of the College of New Jersey, and he was the father of the college's longtime president, Ashbel Green.

After being graduated from Princeton, Dickerson read law in Morristown with his former tutor Caleb Russell, and in 1793 he was admitted to the New Jersey bar. The following year, during the Whiskey Rebellion, he rode as a volunteer

cavalryman in the New Jersey militia. The militiamen saw little military action during the expedition over the mountains to Pittsburgh, but the state militia's fairly quick response confirmed the wisdom of Dickerson's lifelong reliance on citizen militias rather than standing armies.

From 1797 to 1810, Mahlon Dickerson practiced law and gained political experience in Philadelphia, then the largest and most sophisticated of American cities. While there he developed a close personal friendship with Meriwether Lewis, wrote extensively for William Duane's Jeffersonian newspapers, and was admitted to the prestigious American Philosophical Society. He was also elected to the Philadelphia Common Council, and Governor Thomas McKean appointed him recorder of the city and adjutant general of the state of Pennsylvania.

In 1810, Dickerson moved back to New Jersey, where he began to establish himself in the mining industry and in state politics. He took over his dead father's iron mine and made it one of the most productive in the nation. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century it provided ore for an estimated hundred forges from High Bridge to Hamburg. On a hilltop near Succasunna he built an estate, with a mansion that he named "Ferromonte" (Mountain of Iron), probably emulating Jefferson, who had named his Virginia estate "Monticello."

In New Jersey politics, Dickerson rose rapidly. In 1811 he was named orphans' court judge in Morris County. Like his father, Jonathan, and his brother, Silas, he was elected three times successively—from 1811 to 1813—to the assembly from Morris. In that last year, the legislature appointed him a justice of the state supreme court, a post he filled for two years. During that time his major activity, according to his diary, was holding court at Trenton and riding circuit, mainly to the northern county seats. Unfortunately, no official record exists of his activities as a justice because, on constitutional grounds, he declined a concurrent ap-

pointment as court recorder. When he was elected governor on October 26, 1815, he resigned his post as justice. Samuel L. Southard succeeded him on the bench.

Among the political issues in New Jersey during Dickerson's governorship were governmental action to combat the economic dislocations of the postwar period; the state's role in banking and internal improvements; and public education. Dickerson responded to the first by urging the passage of national tariffs to protect infant American industries. He saw them as necessary because after the Treaty of Ghent in 1815 had ended the War of 1812, the British had increased the severity of the postwar depression by "dumping" their low-priced industrial products on the American market. At the time, Dickerson was deeply involved, both as a private citizen and as governor, in the state's growing iron industry. The American iron industry, which was relatively inefficient, was particularly hard-hit by the British dumping tactics. It was not surprising that the legislature responded to Dickerson's message with a strongly worded resolution to the Congress in Washington, urging passage of protective tariffs for the iron industry. The recommendations to this end in Dickerson's first substantial gubernatorial address were his first official expressions on the topic, and they became his hallmark. Dickerson was one of the leading protariff spokesmen on the national scene for over a quarter of a century.

In the area of internal improvements, Dickerson proposed immediate attention to improving the state's roads. New Jersey's reputation for having the worst roads along the Atlantic seaboard gave the proposal a certain urgency. Instead of asking the state to build or improve roads, the new governor suggested that it encourage the further formation of private turnpike companies, which had proved successful in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and other states since the 1790s. Dickerson also pointed out the need for a canal across the state between the Raritan and Delaware rivers. Though the

legislature responded by forming a public stock company, the public failed to follow with subscriptions. The canal was finally built after a private company was chartered in 1830.

As governor, Dickerson played an important role in establishing New Jersey's public school system. In the early nineteenth century the citizens of New Jersey had demonstrated a growing sentiment for the establishment of a state-financed system of public education. The first successful action toward such a school system—the passage in 1817 of a bill creating a fund for the support of free schools—took place during Dickerson's administration. An act passed in 1829 finally established the first common schools, which were partially supported by an annual appropriation of \$20,000 from the income of the 1817 fund.

The most traumatic developments during Dickerson's gubernatorial years resulted from a natural catastrophe: droughts and killing frosts led to a great shortage of grass and grain. Even during July and August ice formed in the Hudson River and in waters throughout the state. Because of the unique weather and the resulting widespread distress, 1816 was known well into the twentieth century as "the year without a summer." As a Jeffersonian dedicated to minimal governmental activity, Dickerson could not contemplate official action to relieve the public distress. In a message to the legislature, he noted the shortages but looked for a positive element: he piously hoped that the rising prices would discourage distillers from making "poison" out of what was "intended by the bounty of Heaven to man for his nourishment." In 1817 the weather returned to normal.

Dickerson left the governorship for the United States Senate in 1817. Twice reelected unanimously, he served sixteen years. In Washington he made his presence felt mainly by his stands on the tariff. At that time, Americans saw the tariff issue as equal in importance to the increasingly troubling issue of slavery. Toward resolving the latter issue

Dickerson could contribute little. As the 1832 presidential election approached, he was seriously considered to replace the out-of-favor vice-president, John C. Calhoun. But the shrewd and politically adroit Martin Van Buren was selected as Andrew Jackson's second vice-president and, subsequently, as the eighth president of the United States.

Jackson, however, rewarded Dickerson for faithful service to him and to the Democratic party by offering him the cabinet post of secretary of the navy; he accepted, and served for four years remaining in office during part of the Van Buren administration. His performance as a cabinet member clearly reflected his personal charm and his ability to work with people individually. Again, as during his years in the Senate, he demonstrated his dedication to public service by seldom being absent from his duties. Ironically, he may have performed most notably in calming Baltimore and Washington in the early 1830s when antiblack riots completely disrupted the two cities. Because he was on the scene while the secretary of war and President Jackson were absent, Dickerson took charge as acting secretary of war. His years in the cabinet were marked by his success in maintaining law and order during the racial disturbances, his frequent demonstration of personal attractiveness, and, mainly, his command of administrative routines which had fallen into near chaos.

Dickerson was sixty-eight years old when he retired as secretary of the navy. Through the last fifteen years of his life he remained interested and active in politics. His iron-mining business was affected by the economic depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s, but it prospered even in those years, mainly through his personal efforts and attention. After he returned from Washington, he continued to be an outstanding spokesman for protective tariffs. He was elected president of the protectionist American Institute in 1846, and he gave speeches, wrote articles, and published newspaper propaganda for the cause of higher tariffs.

Dickerson never married. The name most commonly linked to his is that of Philemon, his younger brother, who served as Democratic governor in 1836 and 1837. The elder Dickerson served as judge of the United States District Court for New Jersey from August 1840 to February 1841, and when he resigned his friend President Van Buren appointed Philemon to the vacant seat.

Mahlon Dickerson performed his last public service in 1844 as a member of the state constitutional convention in Trenton. He was elected vice-president of the convention and appointed chairman of the committee on the governor's powers of appointment and tenure of office. He died October 5, 1853, and is buried in the Presbyterian churchyard in Succasunna, New Jersey.

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ISAAC HALSTED WILLIAMSON (September 27, 1767-July 10, 1844), governor of New Jersey from 1817 to 1829, was born in

Elizabethtown, the youngest son of Matthias and Susannah (Halsted) Williamson. In 1808 he married Anne Crossdale Jouet and they had two sons, Benjamin and Isaac Halsted.

Although he received only a common school education, he studied law as an apprentice to his brother Matthias, a well-known lawyer in the state. After his admission to the bar in 1791, he began a practice in Essex County that flourished and soon extended to Morris County, growing with his reputation for a thorough understanding of the law.

Initially a Federalist, Williamson broke with the party over its formal opposition to the War of 1812. When elected in 1815 as a Democratic-Republican to the general assembly, he proved himself to be an able legislator. Legislative leaders indicated their respect for his legal acumen by choosing him to serve on committees that dealt with complex legal questions, including proposals concerning laws for indebtedness and the status of free blacks. During his term in the assembly Williamson also made recommendations on divorce, which was handled by the legislature at that time. He served in the assembly for part of the 1816-17 term, but when Mahlon Dickerson's resignation created a vacancy in the governorship, the legislature chose Williamson as his successor. The support which other representatives from eastern New Jersey gave Williamson was a crucial factor in his selection over his main competitor, Joseph McIlvaine, a Burlington County lawyer who was West New Jersey's candidate in the election.

The constitution of 1776 provided for a strong legislature and a weak governor. Elected annually by a vote of the legislature, the governor lacked the power of veto, and Williamson did little to strengthen the feeble powers the constitution accorded him. He dropped the traditional practice of giving an annual message to the legislature and thereby inadvertently weakened his influence.

As governor, Williamson actively supported the construction of canals in the