
The Career of Richard A. McGee: An Overview

Richard McGee was born September 11, 1897 on a farm in the rural community of Wyoming, Minnesota, in Chisago County. Although one of nine children, and working first on the family farm and then as a carpenter in the construction business that his father started, he graduated high school at age sixteen. For about the next fifteen years, even when a college teacher, he worked most summers as a carpenter, and the rest of the year taught school, often while also taking college courses. Usually the carpentry work was on remote farms in Minnesota, South Dakota, or Manitoba, where construction crews received room, board, and wages.

Ten-or twelve-hour working days, 5 1/2 or 6 days per week, were then customary in rural America, but from his boyhood days of helping his father, McGee was accustomed to long hours, and greatly valued diligence. He was completely self-supporting after high school, and saved his summer earnings for his expenses in other seasons, when he was often a student.

Following high school, McGee completed a two-year program in education in five quarters at a state "normal school" in St. Cloud. At age nineteen he became an elementary school teacher in Sauk Center, Minnesota. A year later he was principal of an elementary school in South Dakota, and later of a high school. In 1918, during World War I, he enlisted in the University of Minnesota's Student Army Training Corps, electing to be in the Marine Corps unit. Following the Armistice later that year, the Corps was disbanded, but he continued at the university as a student.

In 1919, McGee left the university to attend Stout Institute at Menominee, Wisconsin, then a private institution, but now part of the state college system. Its mission was to train vocational education and

home economics teachers. Approximately six months later, he became an elementary school principal in the iron mining region of northern Minnesota. He supplemented his income by also conducting evening classes in Americanization for European immigrant miners and their spouses.

In 1920, McGee returned to the University of Minnesota to study architecture, and also taught woodshop in the university's high school. A year later, he switched to the College of Education, completing a Bachelor of Science degree in education in 1923. He then taught at Stout Institute, left for a year to head the Department of Industrial Education at State Teacher's College at Minot, North Dakota, but went back to Stout for two more years.

McGee then returned to the University of Minnesota as an Instructor in the Department of Industrial Education. He also continued graduate study there. In 1926, he published *Instructional Units in Wood Finishing*, which subsequently had nine printings, the last in the 1950s.

This preparation of a manual, regularly updated, foreshadows his later custom of advocating and preparing manuals throughout his correctional career. These manuals helped to standardize performance expectations in the many types of jobs under his supervision. Some of these manuals are described in the next two chapters. His habitual initiative in task analysis is somewhat comparable to the persistence of the industrial engineers, Frank B. Gilbreth and his wife Lillian M. Gilbreth, who pioneered time-and-motion studies to get all jobs done more efficiently. This trait is described in the humorous biography about the Gilbreth's, *Cheaper by the Dozen* (Gilbreth and Carey, 1948), and in the movie from it, with Clifton Webb and Myrna Loy.

Indeed, woodworking was always McGee's hobby during his subsequent career as a government official. His son, Richard McGee, Jr. writes:¹

In the early 1950s, Dad drew plans for a separate shop building behind his residence on Tamarack Way. A permit was acquired and we formed, poured, and framed it. He truly enjoyed working with his tools. He once said it gave him a better perspective on all things.

He was a fine craftsman. Hardwoods were collected in his travels and many relaxing hours were spent turning small and large trays, candlestick holders, etc. Staining and finishing these items was his specialty. On one occasion he produced a beautiful Hi-Fi cabinet with arched doors, lifting top, album storage, and curved inlay on door surfaces.

My eight year-old son, Richard, enjoyed visiting his grandfather. These visits developed into learning and competing in chess. One Christmas, Rich received a beautiful inlaid chess board produced by his grandfather. On the back of the board was scrolled by router, to Rich from Grandfather McGee.

McGee received a Master of Arts in Education at the University of Minnesota in 1928. While an instructor at the university, he enrolled in a doctoral program. In 1931, by competing in a national civil service examination, he became the first Supervisor of Education at the Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas. His main assignment was in the "Leavenworth Annex" (later the Army Disciplinary Barracks), which at the time held 1,800 inmates, 85 percent charged with narcotics offenses. Many were illiterate, and a large percentage Latinos. He had to rely on inmate teachers, but could pick from thirty-five physicians also serving sentences there. He soon learned the highly variable conduct potential of prisoners, and that many are conscientious and capable.

As Table 2.1 shows, from 1931 until his death in 1983 at age eighty-six, McGee was a leader in corrections, and in much more than education. His perspective as a teacher oriented him from the start to try to help convicts learn how to succeed in a law-abiding life. He was fond of pointing out that less than 2 percent of those entering prisons will die there. More than most others in corrections, his focus was on reducing the prospect that prison releasees would commit further crimes.

In 1932, McGee moved from Leavenworth to become Supervisor of Education at the then new Federal Penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. In 1935, he made a major role change when he won a national competition to become the first superintendent of the New York City Penitentiary on Rikers Island, which operated under the city's reform Director of Corrections, Austin MacCormick, a former assistant Director of Federal Prisons. The Rikers Island institution was still unfinished when it opened, and housed 145 inmates. It was so unfinished that the kitchen floor was only a dirt floor covered with ashes. It took two more years to complete, a period in which "batches" of inmates—sometimes hundreds at a time—were transferred to Rikers before facilities were ready for them.

Holding convicts with terms ranging from ten days to thirty-six months, Rikers was the main confinement place for persons sentenced for misdemeanors and lesser felonies. Rikers could be reached only by ferryboats. The boats were operated expensively by another branch of city government, and they often stalled overnight or longer due to fog,

TABLE 2.1

A Chronology of Turning Points in
the Career of Richard A. McGee

1897	Born, September 11th, in Chisago County, Minnesota.
1913-23	At various times, he was a(n) woodworker, elementary or high school teacher, in U.S. Marine Corps, elementary school principal, and university student.
1923	Bachelor of Science, University of Minnesota.
1923-26	Instructor in woodfinishing, Stout Institute, Menominee, Wisconsin; briefly Head of Dept. of Industrial Education, Teacher's College, Minot, North Dakota.
1926-31	Instructor in Vocational Education, and Ph.D. candidate, University of Minnesota.
1928	Master of Arts, University of Minnesota.
1931-32	<i>First</i> Director of Education, U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas.
1932-35	<i>First</i> Director of Education, U.S. Penitentiary, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.
1935-39	<i>First</i> Warden, New York City Penitentiary, Rikers Island.
1938-41	<i>First</i> President, National Jail Association.
1939-41	Deputy Commissioner, briefly Acting Commissioner, New York City Department of Correction.
1941-44	Director, Division of Public Institutions, State of Washington.
1943	President, American Prisons Association.
1944-61	<i>First</i> Director, California Department of Corrections.
1961-67	<i>First</i> Administrator, California Youth and Adult Correctional Agency.
1967	Retirement from State of California employment.
1959-80	<i>First</i> , Chairman, American Justice Institute,
1983	Died October 29th, in his sleep at home in Sacramento, of a heart ailment.

so that employees remained at work on overtime pay, deliveries could not be made, and visitors could not leave. (More recently, a bridge has been built to the island.) It was designed for 2,200 inmates, but was soon overcrowded. McGee quickly had to administer a much larger organization than he had ever before headed, and in a setting watched closely by the newspapers.

Rikers Penitentiary was opened under reform Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to replace the notorious institution on Welfare Island. Under

the previous mayor, the colorful Jimmy Walker, there had been repeated scandals in the city's penal operations. McGee's distinctive approach to penology, the problems he encountered, and his resourcefulness in achieving rapid change, are evident in his (1937) report on conditions at Rikers, less than two years after it was opened:

The malcontents whom we received from Welfare Island in the summer of 1935 did not know the meaning of either orderly discipline or fair treatment without special privilege; neither were they accustomed to the hard work they were required to do on Rikers Island. The prisoners...from the Welfare Island institution have for years assumed that those with money or influence would receive desirable work assignments and that those in these assignments would eat officer's food rather than that of inmates; that they would be allowed out of their cells until late hours; that they could

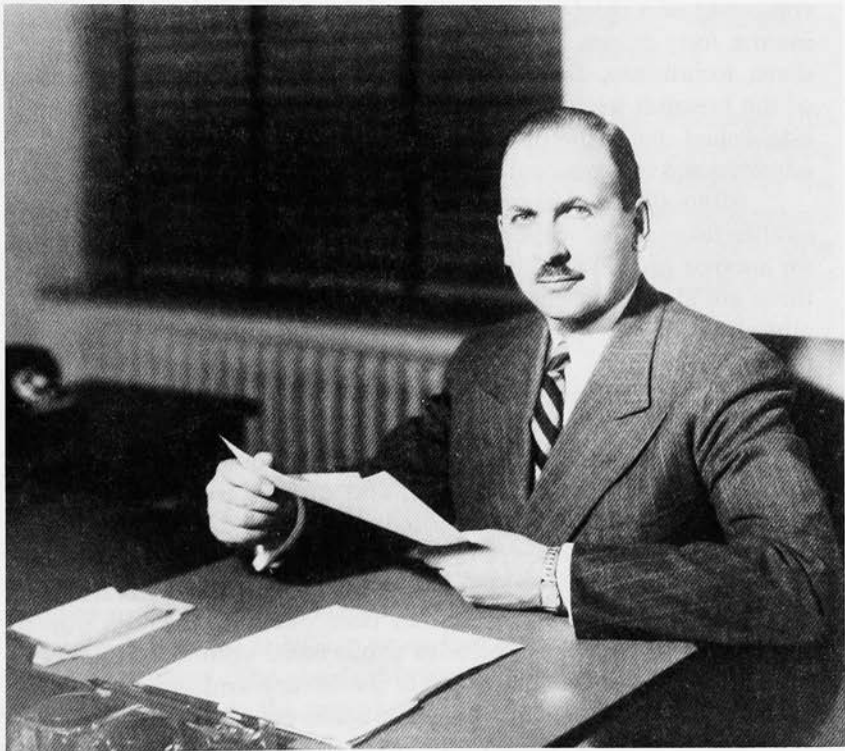


Figure 2.1. Portrait of R. A. McGee, 1939, at Rikers Island

have special articles of clothing brought in from the outside; that they could cook food in their own cells; that an ordinary keeper interested in doing his duty would not be privileged to give orders to this self-appointed aristocracy of the jail. All of these abuses have been thoroughly eliminated. All inmates at Rikers Island eat on the "main line"; they all receive the same privileges as to clothing, commissary, recreation, and cell equipment. All patients in the hospital wards are there because they are sick and not because they are prison "big shots."

...the medical service...occupies a modern and completely equipped seven story hospital in addition to which are the out-patient clinics occupying the second floor of the receiving building. The outstanding clinic is that for venereal diseases in which some 600 men are under treatment continually for syphilis and gonorrhea. The dental, the eye-ear-nose and throat, and general medical clinics treat about 750 cases per week. The medical service has a visiting staff consisting of fifty-two specialists. The resident staff is composed of a chief medical officer, four resident physicians, ten interns, forty nurses, and in addition, the necessary hospital attendants, technicians, dietitians, and cooks. The daily average census of the hospital itself is 180. A neuro-psychiatric clinic has been established under the direction of three visiting psychiatrists and administered by a resident psychologist....

Although the designers of the institution provided no physical facilities for educational work, a building originally designed for another purpose has been converted into classroom space and there are at the present time about ninety under-educated men attending all-day classes, and 200 more are enrolled in correspondence courses. The vocational education program is...in abeyance pending the equipping of our shops.... There is also a very active department of recreation headed by a licensed teacher of physical education. This program includes quiet games in the cell blocks, corrective exercising, and during good weather a program of outside recreation carried out on a ten-acre recreational field. A band and orchestra of thirty pieces is also making good progress under the direction of WPA instructors. A very satisfactory collection of library books has been obtained through purchases and gifts. It now includes about 6,000 volumes. Seventy percent of the inmates make use of the library, and on a basis of those who use it, the circulation is five books per month....

With the cooperation of the WPA, a very useful and active social service unit has been established. This group is divided into

two sections, an institutional unit, and a field unit. All men having indefinite penitentiary sentences, of which we receive about 225 per month, are interviewed by social workers in the institution, the family situations are investigated by the field workers, and each case is cleared through the social service exchange.

On January 1, 1936, a classification director was appointed. This employee, who has psychological training and prison experience, with the assistance of his staff develops a short case history, known as an admission summary, of each man having an indefinite sentence. This summary is used as the basis for assigning each man to work and outlining his program in the institution. Those who present unusual problems are selected out and brought before the classification board which meets every Saturday morning. Our short experience with this board has demonstrated...the desirability of bringing before it the problem cases only, rather than to attempt to make this a routine procedure for all admissions. It has further demonstrated its value in developing the morale of the institution by bringing the various specialized departments into closer contact and a better understanding of each other.

Staff was low-paid. Many from Welfare Island had welcomed gifts from the friends and family of affluent criminals, in exchange for favors, as well as money from reporters for stories about the inmates or the institution (McGee, 1981:42-45). LaGuardia gave little time to the prison. McGee had to learn quickly not only how to control it, but how to gain support from the press, and how to be a non-partisan politician, a friend of many influential persons, but obligated to none.

In 1938, McGee and others formed the National Jail Association (today the American Jail Association), to raise standards in short-term confinement. He was the president for its first three years. In 1939, he was promoted to be one of two Deputy Commissioners of the city's Department of Corrections, and briefly its Acting Commissioner; this Department ran all the city's jails and community supervision programs for pretrial and sentenced offenders. In New York, he recognized the importance of communicating to the public, and from then on, gave speeches and published extensively.

McGee married in 1931, a union that produced three children, then ended in divorce. The children usually lived with their mother in Minnesota, attending the same high school from which he had graduated, but often came to stay with him. His older daughter shared the new warden's house on Rikers Island and went by ferry to college in

New York City. Later McGee remarried.² His son, Richard A. McGee, Jr., wrote in an August 1993 letter to me: "Even though divorced, Dad never faltered in duty to family and love for his children." He added this recollection:

During the summer of 1939, as a 15-year old youth, I visited my father on Rikers Island. At that time he related an incident that occurred in the Rikers Island Hospital.

One day, as warden, he was called in to observe a prisoner who was hospitalized with a broken leg. The prisoner managed to rebreak his leg, after initial healing, to remain confined in the hospital.

My father and the prison doctor leaned over the prisoner's leg to assess the damage. Suddenly the prisoner, with closed fist, hit my father across the jaw and sent him dazed, to the floor. The inspection continued after Warden McGee regained his composure.³

On December 1, 1941, McGee moved to the State of Washington to become Director of the Division of Public Institutions. This placed him over fourteen quite contrasting facilities, including not only prisons, but also mental hospitals and state schools for the blind, deaf, and retarded. Within a week, the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, and the U.S. entered World War II. Institution populations diminished, many of their staff left for military service, and much inmate labor was directed into the war effort.

McGee's leadership qualities were manifested early. In 1943, at age forty-six, he became president of the American Prison Association (now the American Correctional Association), the leading organization of American prison personnel, and also of academics, and others interested in penology. (This was only twelve years after his first job in prisons.) In 1946 he also founded and edited its journal, *Prison World*, now *Corrections Today*. He was a leader in this organization for the rest of his life, and participated in its formulation of standards for correctional institutions and agencies. From this evolved the national program of accreditation for correctional operations (Halley, 1992; McGee, 1976).

As indicated at the close of the preceding chapter, when Earl Warren became California's governor in 1944, he soon achieved a reorganization of California's prison management, creating a Department of Corrections, and of its parole system, creating the Adult Authority as a new parole board. He appointed a three-man committee—James Bennett (then head of the Federal Bureau of Prisons), Sanford Bates (then head of

New Jersey prisons, and prior head of federal prisons), and an Associate Justice of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C.—to help find “the best man available” to head the new department.

The committee gave written and oral examinations to many candidates, and McGee was its first choice. According to one of Warren’s aides: “The Governor had to negotiate with Governor Langlie, of Washington, to get McGee’s release. It took a long time, but the Governor was willing to wait to get the best man, and finally he did get him” (Katcher, 1967:169). McGee became the first head of the Department of Corrections on July 1, 1944, and resided in Sacramento for the rest of his life.

Warren also placed a high priority to appointing a head for the state’s Youth Authority. The Authority was created in 1942 by his predecessor, Governor Olson, based on an American Law Institute proposal, but it was still largely a paper organization in 1944. Warren pointed out that over 40 percent of California’s serious crimes were charged against persons eighteen to twenty-one years old, and most were to be dealt with by the Youth Authority’s correctional institutions, parole board, and parole supervision agents. To direct this organization, he quickly brought on Karl Holton, then head of the Los Angeles County Department of Probation.

Holton had achieved some prominence for creating forestry camps for young offenders as alternatives to jail or traditional juvenile detention centers. He brought with him his long-term deputy in Los Angeles, Heman G. Stark. When Holton returned to Los Angeles in 1952 to head its probation department for another twelve years, Stark succeeded him at the Youth Authority (Weaver, 1967:128–29). He was a close collaborator with McGee in numerous projects, not only when both held state office, but also after their retirements.

For the first seventy-seven years of the twentieth century, almost all California adult prisoners had highly indeterminate sentences, such as one-to-ten years, one-to-twenty years, or one to life (discussed further in chapter 6). The first releases under such sentences, and often some subsequent ones, were usually by parole. The dates for paroles, and decisions on penalties for reported parole violations, were made by a politically appointed board, reorganized in 1944 as the Adult Authority. There was much controversy over alleged political bias, racial bigotry, and inconsistency in the decisions of prior parole boards.

As his first Adult Authority appointee, Governor Warren picked Walter A. Gordon, who had regularly been his sparring partner in boxing when both were students at the University of California at Berkeley. Gordon, who had been an All-American football star at

Berkeley and later a part-time football coach while also practicing law, was the first African-American to hold such a high state office. Two years later, the board elected him to be its chairman. Gordon and McGee were good friends and mutually supportive. By appointment of President Eisenhower in 1955, however, Gordon became Governor of the Virgin Islands, and in 1958, a judge in Federal District Court (Warren, 1977:195; Pollack, 1979:29).

Don Gottfredson, who worked as a group counselor in the prison at Chino during 1953–55 while pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology (and later was prominent in the Department of Corrections research staff, and then as a Rutgers professor), recalls that in one of his counseling groups an “old-timer” among the inmates recalled how much worse the institutions were before McGee. This inmate drew Figure 2.2 to show his recognition of the difficulties McGee had faced in 1945.

By 1961, when the Department of Corrections had become perhaps the most advanced state organization of its type in the nation, Governor Edmund G. (“Pat”) Brown, Sr. appointed McGee to a new cabinet position in the state government, Administrator of the Youth and Adult Corrections Agency. This placed him over 24,000 adult prisoners, 4,000 Youth Authority wards in custody, 10,000 adult parolees, and 10,000 Youth Authority parolees. This total of 48,000 lawbreakers under state control had increased by 11,000 in just three years (Halley, 1992:57).

During 1961–67, McGee’s last years of state service, his post as Administrator of the Youth and Adult Corrections Agency decreased his direct involvement with offenders and those who interacted with them. He was now a member of the Governor’s cabinet, and a participant in its discussions on many issues. Even on correctional matters, more of his time had to be devoted to courting legislators for support of policy and budget proposals. Halley (1992:57–60, 74) says, citing from McGee’s writings, these years were less happy for him than his earlier ones because he became “the supporter of programs more than the instigator of them.”

Kim Nelson, who took a leave from the School of Public Administration faculty at the University of Southern California during 1964–65 to be Deputy Administrator under McGee in this cabinet post, provides a similar report on McGee’s frustrations in that period. He now did not have very immediate control of either the Department of Correction or the Youth Authority, as their heads had personal responsibility and autonomy in most of their decisions on their agencies, including those on budgeting and disbursement of funds. McGee’s discussions with them were mainly on their long-term strategies, and on their relation-

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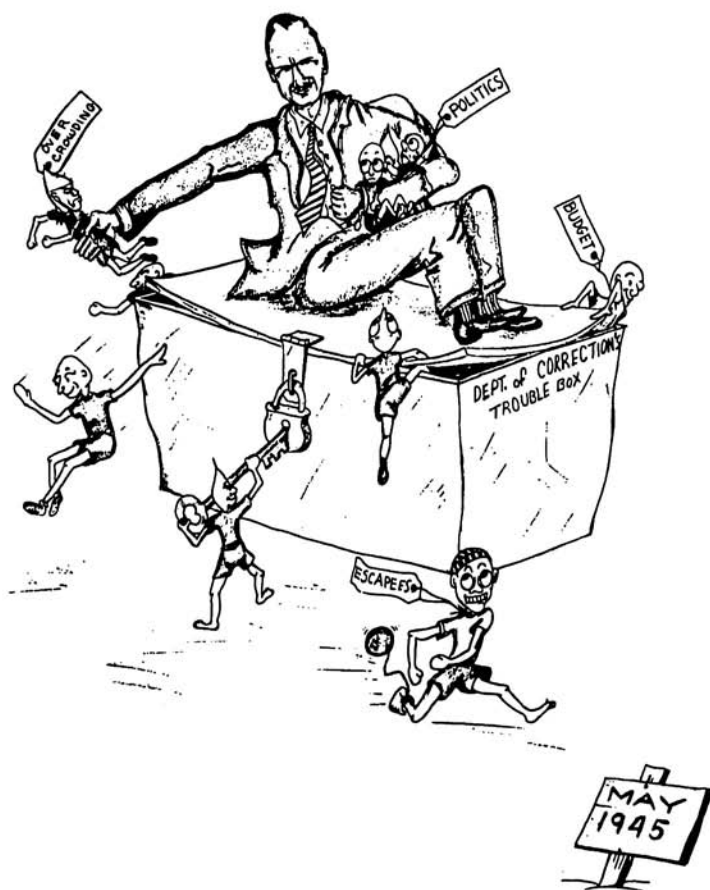


Figure 2.2. Inmate's cartoon on McGee's early problems

ships with the legislature in seeking appropriations or specific laws or authorizations. Governor Pat Brown was on good terms with McGee, but often inaccessible due to his other concerns. Also, Nelson recalls, on several occasions the governor's Legal Affairs Secretary took the initiative of giving the press statements on correctional issues, but in ways not to McGee's liking.

Observing McGee over a thirty-five-year period of either working with him for the State of California, or as a close friend when employed

elsewhere, Nelson describes him as a genius in seeing long before others the theoretical, moral, and practical implications of issues and proposals being discussed. Interested in all types of new ideas, McGee invited, and sometimes hired, advocates of promising, but atypical policies. The new ideas were discussed at department or agency meetings.

Nelson concluded from their association in the cabinet post, and afterwards on the Board of Directors of the American Justice Institute, that McGee was a political genius. In promoting a proposal to legislators or funding agency officials, McGee could sense opposition at its earliest stage, and move with great charm and astuteness to gain their support. Throughout his California employment, McGee tried to know many legislators personally, and often took groups of them on trips to visit prisons. He participated regularly in the large Rotary Club in Sacramento, valuing the government and business contacts he met there. He was most active in political concerns when in his cabinet role, that ended with his retirement in 1967, at age seventy.⁴

Allen Moore, a retired parole agent who worked full time on the staff of various politicians in Sacramento in the 1950s, recalls that no one thought of McGee as a politician in this period, as he seemed too quiet and scholarly. Yet he sold legislators on the need for change in corrections so well, that he always got more money than they had expected to appropriate for him—they would say “we’ll give it to you now but cut back on new money next year.” When the next year came, however, McGee had planned his campaign so well, and gotten solid support successively from Republican Governors Warren and Knight and Democrat Brown, as well as from key legislators, that the process was repeated.⁵

Adding to McGee’s unhappiness during his last years of state employment, however, although not impairing his talents, was his immense distress from the death of one of his daughters in an auto accident in late 1963.

At McGee’s retirement dinner in 1967, U.S. Chief Justice Earl Warren, who as governor had brought McGee to California in 1944, was quoted as saying:

In all my experience, I have never found a better administrator or one more devoted to duty and more successful in what he tried to do than Dick McGee. I didn’t know him from Adam. I took him on faith and he accepted me on faith. We had an understanding. I was not to interfere and he was not to permit politics to interfere with his prison reform work (Abramson, 1983).

When Ronald Reagan won the November 1966 gubernatorial election with campaign rhetoric advocating harsh penalties, and implying that his political opponents “mollycoddled” criminals, McGee announced that he would retire June 30, 1967. Reagan, who had in his campaign asserted he would cut his cabinet from eight members to four, reappointed McGee, but said that the post of Administrator of Youth and Adult Corrections would be abolished on McGee’s retirement date. Corrections, thereafter, became a responsibility of the head of the state’s Health and Welfare Agency, a cabinet post to which Reagan appointed his party’s unsuccessful candidate for Attorney General, who had been vehement in denouncing the state’s “leniency” toward lawbreakers. In 1980, under Governor “Jerry” Brown, the son of Governor “Pat” Brown, who had established it previously, the Youth and Adult Corrections Agency was restored (but called “Correctional Agency”). It has continued to survive even under Republican governors.

Twenty-three years after he began employment in California and less than two months before his own retirement, McGee sent Reagan a 232-page monograph (co-authored with M. R. Montilla, 1967) entitled *Organization of State Correctional Services in the Control and Treatment of*



Figure 2.3. From left to right: Governor Goodwin Knight; DeWitt (Swede) Nelson, Director of Department of Conservation; Richard A. McGee; Chief Justice Earl Warren; Governor Edmund G. (“Pat”) Brown; Ernest Webb, Director of Industrial Relations; September 1966

Crime and Delinquency. It began with a fifteen-page single-spaced letter of transmission from McGee to "Dear Governor Reagan." The letter predicted a large rise in the crime-prone youth population of the state. Traditionally, this rise would call for construction of more prison capacity, but McGee claimed that improvements in community corrections and social services could eliminate the need for new prisons. It shall be referred to in this book as McGee's "Farewell Address" to Reagan. There is no evidence that Reagan was influenced by it, or even read it. Halley (1992:74-77) asserts that McGee never met Reagan.

McGee did not plan a traditional retirement. As chapters 6 and 7 will indicate, he continued developing a body of profound and insightful ideas on the needs and possibilities for improvement of the criminal justice system that he set forth in important writings, before and after his retirement. He also maintained a strong interest in correctional and other criminological research, as well as in crime-preventive education.

In retirement, McGee had more time for a non-profit organization he had established in 1959 in Sacramento, the Institute for the Study of Crime and Delinquency. He chaired its Board of Directors, which included the Youth Authority's Heman Stark and a number of other California correctional leaders, plus a lawyer, John Lemmon. The institute was launched by receipt of a \$105,000 "start-up" grant from the Ford Foundation, was certified in 1960 as tax-exempt, and expanded its board to include some distinguished researchers. The institute received several subsequent research, training, and education grants. To administer some of the grants, the institute established a separate but temporary non-profit organization headed by the same board of directors, but named "Center for Training in Differential Treatment."

Calling itself "a new force in the war on crime," the institute sought to accumulate an endowment of a million dollars, and gave as its purposes:

1. Expanding knowledge through research;
2. Demonstrating new programs and applications of new technology;
3. Training personnel in new methods;
4. Publishing and disseminating new knowledge to both practitioners and the general public; and
5. Providing consultation services to public and private crime control agencies.⁶

In 1971 it was renamed the American Justice Institute (McGee, 1981:144-45).

McGee was a tall and husky individual, with a ready smile and a strong, pleasant voice. Quick-witted, fond of exchanging anecdotes, a good listener as well as a good speaker, he welcomed serious discussion on any interesting topic. I first met him in 1953 at a session of the American Prisons Association, while presenting a report on my pending Ph.D. dissertation on predicting parole outcomes, prepared while I was employed in Illinois prisons for the Illinois Parole and Pardon Board. In subsequent years, when I attended Prison Association meetings, he was one of the few prison administrators interested in the small sessions of the research section. During 1958–62, when I taught at the University of Illinois and directed a large evaluation of the federal prison and parole system, funded by the Ford Foundation, McGee was a member of the project's Advisory Board.

As Table 2.1 chronology indicates, McGee was the first holder of most of his major occupational positions. He was the first Supervisor of Education in a federal penitentiary, the first head of a new New York City penitentiary, the first head of California's newly created Department of Corrections, and the first in its then new cabinet post of Administrator of Youth and Adult Correctional Agencies. He also pioneered in many of the correctional programs and policies that he introduced in California, which are described in detail in the next three chapters. In addition, as chapter 6 details, his innovative thinking extended to the entire criminal justice system.

McGee was also a founder and leader in professional organizations, and an influential speaker and writer. Throughout his career, and during his retirement, he remained inquisitive, educationally oriented, and an encourager of research. He was morally upstanding, and inspired many loyal and dedicated followers.

Governor Pat Brown, the third of four governors, from both parties, under whom McGee served in California, told a *Sacramento Bee* reporter writing an obituary for McGee:

He was a soft-spoken individual. Cool, calm, collected. I knew him well and although he had served under my predecessor, I kept him because I admired him. I took his advice for eight years and never regretted it.

A collection of eleven short tributes were published as eulogies in *Corrections Today*, written by some of the most prominent persons in its field. John Conrad, who worked for and with McGee during most of their careers in California, wrote:

Because he lived for most of his adult life as a chief executive officer, Dick McGee was exempt from the competitive struggles that shape the outlook of civil servants. Unlike most of us, he had no need to maneuver for advancement. He devoted his entire attention to the craft of administration. There was never a question of using his power to demonstrate his superiority to those around him....Better than most of his contemporaries, he knew how far penology had to go to arrive at a state of relative decency and integrity. His long career was dedicated to making possible what was necessary (1984:81).



Figure 2.4. R. A. McGee in 1983, the year of his death (Photo by Owen Brewer, *The Sacramento Bee*)

McGee's Initiatives in California Prisons

Arriving in California as the first head of its Department of Corrections, McGee had to centralize control of scattered prisons, each with a warden who had always been highly autonomous. These quasi-feudal heads of institutions, especially at the old and large San Quentin and Folsom penitentiaries, lobbied individually with politicians for their separate budget appropriations. The politicians often expected reciprocity, for example, that their political supporters be favored when the wardens hired people or made institution purchases. Of course, each warden also wanted to prevent scandals resulting from escapes or riots that would prompt demands for new institution leadership, and each maintained press relations independently of the others.

This situation could not be changed instantly, since prisons are entrenched establishments. However, McGee's New York City and State of Washington experiences had given him the vision, tactics, and strategies to change such traditional arrangements more rapidly and securely than others in power had deemed feasible. One of his first priorities was to improve the selection and training of California's correctional employees.

Staffing Prisons

"Prisons are run by people," McGee asserted, adding:

The kind of people, the number of people, and the morale of the people are the most important considerations in determining the quality of the program. The major part of the budget of an institution is spent on salaries and wages. Unwise budgetary restrictions will be felt first and most disastrously in the personnel. However, ...security of tenure, and the elimination of improper political influences in the management of personnel, are just as

important as salaries. It should be accepted without argument that all...employees should be a part of a sound merit system wherein they are appointed on a basis of competitive examinations and realistic standards of qualification. Promotion through the ranks should be orderly, fair, and competitive; and personnel should be eligible for membership in a sound retirement system. Conversely, such a merit system must also make provision for the separation from service as promptly as possible of those persons found to be temperamentally or morally unfit for the work (1953a).

He deplored the lack of preparation for staffing prisons:

Since prison employees are almost never trained for their work before entering the service, it is obvious that they must learn their duties and skills while on the job. There is no field of public service in which there is more desperate need for a well-organized, well-developed program of in-service training. Such programs cost money because they take time and intelligence. On the other hand, for the amount of money spent, no other phase of prison administration pays such handsome dividends. The training and development of personnel is as important and urgent a responsibility of a prison warden as it is of a military commander or a football coach (1953a).

He stressed:

I am everlastingly amazed by the notion...in some quarters that these positions can be held by almost anyone if he is a strong personality and has the right political affiliations. The lack of administrative ability and capacity for organization in many of our institutions is appalling. I can tell you of one major institution, with several hundred employees, in which, a number of years ago, there was such complete lack of organization that 42 employees stated that they reported directly to the warden. This meant that, for all practical purposes, at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of them reported to nobody. It is possible to point out dozens of institutions in which there are no rules and regulations in written form constituting a body of administrative law governing both employees and inmates....

Ours is a field desperately in need of aggressive, able, experienced leadership. The only way that a service can obtain such leadership is to develop it from within. We must train young and

able personalities who will advance through the service, with the best of them rising to the top as the years go by. It takes funds and long-term planning to provide the positions and the salary levels to implement a program of personnel development. But, conversely, able personnel will develop a program which will justify support (1953a).¹

The fiefdoms of the long-term wardens at San Quentin, Folsom and the women's prison at Tehachapi resisted change. Duffy had been made warden of San Quentin two years earlier by Governor Olson who, in reaction to scandals and low morale in the institutions, also replaced everyone on the Board of Prison Directors. Duffy had been reared around San Quentin, where he had held several administrative posts, and his father was a guard. Reacting to rumors that McGee's reforms would include centralized control over prisons, Duffy promptly sought to maintain autonomy and raise morale by hiring a new head cook to improve the food, reducing the harshness of the notorious punishment unit, and by public relations efforts (Bookspan, 1987:240-41).

Duffy developed good relationships with the San Francisco press by allowing it ready access to interesting prisoners. Helped by a ghostwriter, he also published stories about the prison, and he started an inmate music and comedy show, "San Quentin on the Air," regularly broadcasting on a San Francisco radio station (McGee, 1976:110; 1981:9). He lobbied to preserve San Quentin's autonomy, including its separate budget.

San Quentin, especially, used inmates in key clerical jobs, a widespread custom that I saw still being done in Illinois prisons in the early 1950s. McGee relates:

There were, if I remember right, some sixty prisoners who worked in the administration building. They were working on the records of prisoners, in the accounting office, the trust funds, in everything. They were all under the supervision of a paid employee, but it made it possible, first of all, for them to get a lot of information that ought to be regarded as confidential inside of an institution, and also to manipulate the records. I don't think I ever really convinced the legislative analyst and some of the other people that are monitoring what the state agencies do until we had an experience with a fellow at Folsom. He'd been working in the record office and was transferred to San Quentin in a routine transfer. He was at San Quentin for a few months and was released. But by that time we had set up a central record office over in the capitol.

When this list came through, and here this fellow had been discharged, somebody looked at the record and saw that he had another twenty years to do. When he was transferred from Folsom to San Quentin, he had just torn off a lot of his previous criminal record. You have these so-called rap sheets and some of these fellows have five or six sheets; he had been out on parole apparently and came back with another offense. He just destroyed that and altered the other one. San Quentin didn't know anything about all this, so when his term expired they turned him out.

When I got this information, I said this man is an escapee. We put out a warrant for his arrest, brought him back, and charged him with escape.

I went to the legislative analyst's office and said I've been telling you this for years and now here's some evidence. They assigned a young fellow to go down to San Quentin and study every position, and we finally got personnel to replace the prisoners (1976a:116).

Supported by his staff and local leaders, Warden Duffy often stalled when McGee asked him to use new procedures, but changes gradually occurred, including non-renewal of the radio show contract. McGee reports that he finally removed Duffy in 1949 by urging his appointment to the Adult Authority, then the state parole board for adult males, where "he was more comfortable...and was an excellent addition to that group" (1981:9).

McGee did not replace the heads at Folsom and Tehachapi until their retirement. Alma Holzschue had been Superintendent at Tehachapi since 1942. A former social worker and head of a girl's school, she had also worked at the famous Massachusetts Women's Reformatory at Framingham that was directed by Miriam van Waters, author of widely read books on women offenders. On her own initiative, Holzschue developed academic and vocational education at Tehachapi, established reception programs in which selected inmates helped orient newcomers, invited parolees to speak to women awaiting release, and even started work furloughs. She showed much warmth to inmates and staff, called them all "my family," and corresponded with some parolees. McGee at first overlooked her maintaining her autonomy, as he was preoccupied with the more problem-ridden men's prisons (Morales, 1980; McGee, 1976a:105-27).

In 1954, an earthquake at Tehachapi forced the temporary housing of its inmates in tents and then the hasty move to a still unfinished new