

Look back at DOC History through WWI Armistice Centennial Lens

Because Veterans Day 2018 also marks the centennial of the armistice that ended WWI's actual military hostilities, the holiday time period serves as an appropriate opportunity for this website to review how that first global conflict intersected NYC Correction history.



James A. Hamilton
DOC Commissioner
1/1/18 to
12/31/22

One of the WWI-related activities in which DOC engaged was hosting river excursions aboard one of its steamers: the *Correction*. DOC's 1922 annual report included a review by James A. Hamilton of his four years as Correction Commissioner.

Among the items prominently mentioned were boat trips conducted for soldiers' families and recuperating wounded servicemen.

Back then, DOC's "fleet" consisted of four steamers (*Correction*, *Hart's Island*, *Rikers Island*, and *James A. Hamilton*) and two launches (*Patrick A. Whitney* and *Burdette G. Lewis*).

The latter three were named for two former Commissioners and the then current one. The annual report declared:



Children dance, a band plays, flags flap in the breeze, as the steamer Correction plows New York waters on a WWI era excursion.

"The Welcome Home Trips, 1918 and 1919.

"Requisition was made of the *Correction* to carry City officials, honored guests and relatives and friends of soldiers expected on incoming ships down to Quarantine, or thereabouts. The



Officials wait on wounded soldiers on board Correction.

Correction served in this capacity from December, 1918, through all of 1919, making four or five trips a day to the ships, and employed thereat from 7 A. M. to 7 or 8 P. M.

"The *Correction* carried 4,500 passengers a day for 336 days, or, 1,512,000 persons in all, with perfect order and passenger safety.

"Excursions for Wounded Officers and Soldiers of Fox Hills, Staten Island.

"One summer day the *Correction* had 300 wounded officers and soldiers of the Fox Hills Hospital as passengers on an all-day trip, under the auspices of the

Mayor's Committee of Women. Mayor Hylan, Miss Emma Frohman of Fox Hills Hospital, Commissioner Whalen of the Department of Plant and Structures, and the Commissioner of Correction

received the soldier guests. The "boys" were out from eleven until seven and sailed to West Point. Luncheon was served when the guests arrived on board and the evening meal at half-past four.

"Outings for Mothers and Children.

"Between June and September the Steamboat *Correction* carried 20,607 women and children on forty excursion trips, sponsored by the Mayor's Committee of Women (Mrs. William Randolph Hearst, Chairman, and Mrs. Nelson Herrick Henry, Secretary).

"The all-day water trips were planned to give a happy day to mothers and children from the congested districts of the City. On these excursions were tired and anemic mothers, cardiac, crippled, and kindergarten children.

"Doctor Hitchcock and six nurses of the Bureau of Hygiene of the Health Department accompanied each excursion and examined each mother and child. Anemic children and mothers and convalescent mothers were given successive trips.

"The boat carried its full quota only, 800 persons. There was no overloading, and wire netting was placed outside the rails of the steamer as an effective safeguard for the children. Strict discipline prevailed and fire and boat drills were in order. Usually two firemen and two policemen were on board and, as a result of fine management and efficient care, no one was hurt.



"All day water trip for mothers and children" reads the banner of the "Mayor's Committee of Women" displayed



Children are assisted off a bus for escort to their excursion aboard the steamer Correction

"The Parks and Playgrounds Association supplied play leaders to interest the children and relieve the mothers of as much care as possible. The Street Cleaning Department provided music, sending on each trip a band of not less than twelve, and often sixty pieces. Volunteer workers acted as hostesses, and served milk and ice cream. The Milk Committee, made up of five members of the Mayor's Committee of Women, supplied plenty of milk, and generous subscribers furnished plenty of ice cream cones.

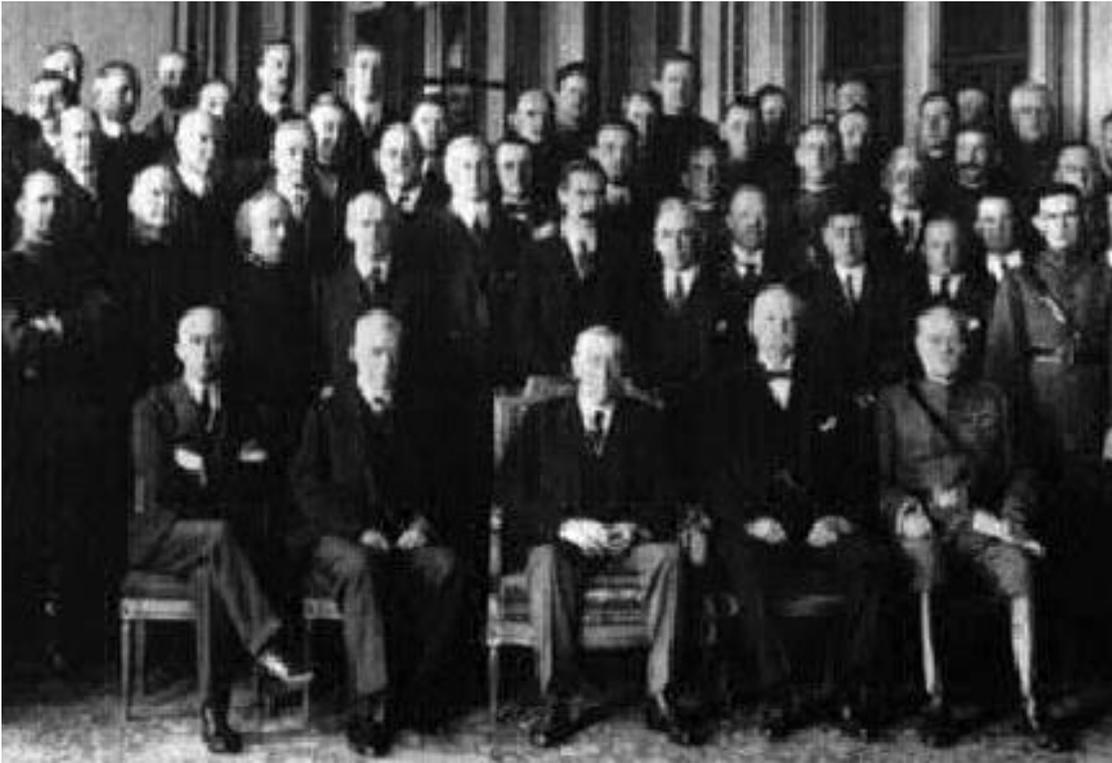
"The ordinary routine of the Department was affected by withdrawal of *Correction* from its daily routine of service, and this in turn, brought about greater work throughout the entire Department. Six days' work was done in three. Freight had to be handled and delivered, storekeepers had to adjust themselves to the temporary change and keep their institutions supplied, and prisoners had to be transferred just the same. Wardens had to manage, too, to swing their work to three days.

"However, all employees affected by the changes mentioned and the consequent demands for efficient and willing adjustment stood well in the emergency to do their part to make these trips a success."

Before becoming DOC Commissioner (one of its most transformative),

Richard C. Patterson served in the Great War and at its Paris Peace Talks

A Columbia University mine engineering graduate, Omaha-native Richard J. Patterson worked a while as a gold mine day laborer and later joined the Army as a cavalry private on General John J. “Black-jack” Pershing’s punitive expedition into Mexico.



“Black-jack” Pershing’s punitive expedition into Mexico.

Prior to American entry into WWI, he was a high ranking administrator at FDNY. He saw action with the Army Corps of Engineers during the Great War, first as captain and later as major.

A 1993 Corps report on its WWI role said, “The Corps formed large 1,660-man regiments of American combat divisions. Army engineers built port facilities, roads, and railroads essential to moving war materiel to the battlefield. They also harvested timber for military construction and operated search-lights in anti-aircraft defense.”

ABOVE: President Woodrow Wilson is seated center in this cropped group photo of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace in Paris. In the front standing row at the far right is Major Richard C. Patterson, near the shoulder of seated U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Tasker Bliss, who like Patterson is in uniform.

BELOW: Uncropped photo of the peace treaty conference’s administrative staff which Major Patterson, seated fourth from left, headed as executive officer.



In the post-Armistice era, Patterson was assigned to Army Intelligence and from December 1918 through July

1919 headed as executive officer a 26-member staff providing administrative services for the American Commission to Negotiate Peace at the treaty conference in Paris. While in France, he helped organize the American Legion and later served on its national board. Patterson emerged from WWI as a Lieut. Colonel.



Major R. C. Patterson Jr.

Major Richard C. Patterson sits at his desk as executive officer of the administrative staff assisting the American delegation to the 1919 WWI Paris peace talks.

retrieving correspondence, etc. Rather it was title of a high ranking administrator of the agency. Still today most Presidential Cabinet federal agencies are headed by administrators with the title “Secretary.”

At the time of Patterson’s 1927 appointment as DOC Commissioner, Tammany Haller Robert L. Tudor was Secretary of the Department. Later he became 1st Deputy Commissioner (FDC) and then Acting Commissioner in 1932 when Patterson left to head the National Broadcasting Company (NBC).

Patterson’s more than five years leading DOC provided him opportunity to employ his administrative, organizing and engineering skills which had been honed in the WWI conflict and its peace treaty talks.

Patterson oversaw construction of the Rikers Island Penitentiary and Hospital complex and the Women’s House of Detention in Greenwich Village. He initiated and followed through on establishing the nation’s first Prison Keepers Training School, now known as the Correction Academy. He directed that custodial facilities have on-premises pistol ranges, that all keepers receive pistol training and periodically qualify for weapon use, and that marksmanship competitions be held annually. He introduced rules, regulations and staff reviews to raise the level of professionalism within DOC. His Commissionership was transformative for DOC.

In its August 11, 1927 reporting of Mayor “Jimmy” Walker’s appointment of Patterson as Correction Commissioner, effective August 15th, the *New York Times* noted:

“In 1913, he [Patterson] organized the Young Democratic Club and was the first President of that organization. He entered the employ of the city as an Inspector in the Department of Public Works and was an engineer-inspector on the Catskills Aqueduct. During part of the years 1916-1917 he was Secretary of the Fire Department.”

Being the “Secretary” (capital “S”) of a municipal agency in that era did not involve the office holder personally taking and typing dictation, filing and



This circa 1917 snapshot of Capt. Richard C. Patterson in a motorcycle sidecar is from his papers in held in the Truman Presidential Library.

1933 – the year NYC had 3 different Correction Commissioners & 1 invoked his status as WWI vet.



1st Deputy Commissioner Robert L. Tudor, seated second from left, and Commissioner Richard A. Patterson, seated fourth from left, with 1930 Prison Keepers Training School graduates.

As noted on the preceding page, FDC Tudor became Acting Correction Commissioner in 1932. His tenure in that capacity lasted eight months -- the longest in DOC history – extended well into 1933. Tudor, who had served in high DOC posts since February 1919, reverted to FDC after Mayor John O’Brien named William J. Cahill as Commissioner effective May 26, 1933. But Cahill’s tenure lasted only a matter of months. Even shorter was Wilbur T. Wright’s term. He was appointed on Nov. 28, 1933, by O’Brien after Cahill had fallen out of political favor with the lame-duck Democrat mayor.



Congressman Fiorello LaGuardia took unpaid leave to serve as a WWI pilot and U.S. military aviation chief in allied Italy.

Fusion/Republican reform Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, a bomber pilot and U.S. military aviation leader in allied Italy during WWI, named prison education reformer and former federal prison official Austin MacCormick as Correction Commissioner and former “gang-buster” prosecutor David “Mickey” Marcus as the latter’s First Deputy, both appointments to take effective Jan. 1, 1934.

Long-time Tammany Haller Tudor accepted his FDC dismissal as part of the vagaries of political life. But former WWI Army Major Wright tried to invoke a 1909 NYC law barring dismissal of a war veteran without a hearing and a finding of misconduct or incompetency. Nevertheless, MacCormick took over his appointed post Jan. 10, 1934.

In late April 1935, MacCormick's selected WWI Marine veteran Richard A. McGee to serve as the first warden of Rikers Island Penitentiary. The latter had headed inmate education at federal penitentiaries in Lewisburg, Pa., and Leavenworth, Kan.

When Deputy Commissioner Marcus succeeded MacCormick as DOC Commissioner in April 1940, Rikers Warden McGee became Deputy Commissioner. In December 1941, McGee left DOC to accept a position as Washington State Supervisor of Public Institutions, including four correctional facilities. He later headed California's prison system. The state's correctional training center is named for him.

Whatever else, war tests people. Sometimes those whose skills rise to the encounter get opportunities for peacetime governance. So it was with DOC’s Richard C. Patterson and Richard A. McGee.

[Return to CorrectionHistory.Org home page](http://ReturntoCorrectionHistory.Org)