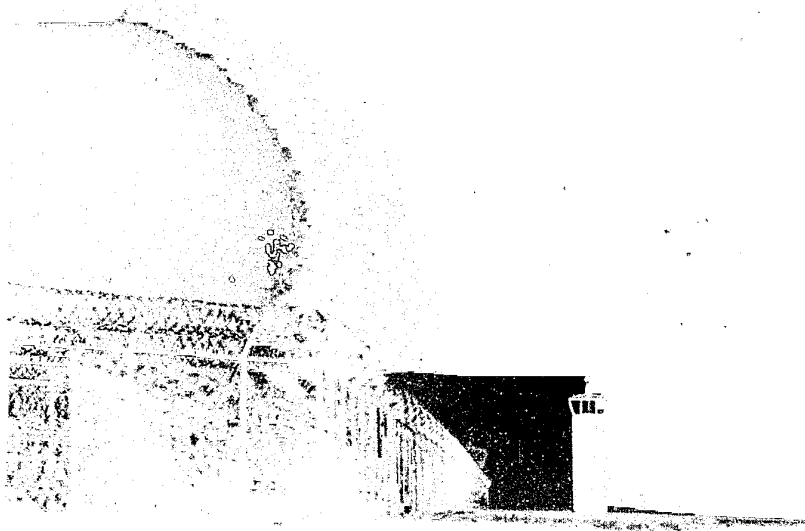


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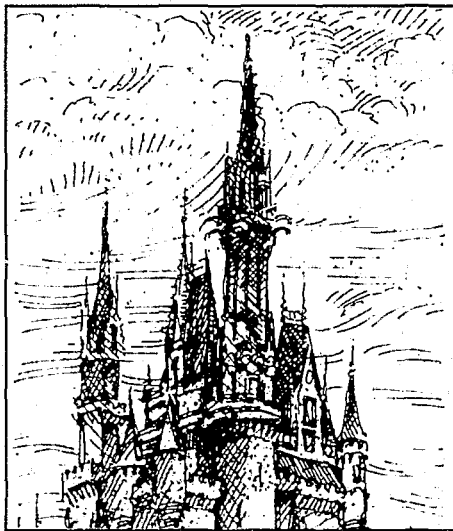
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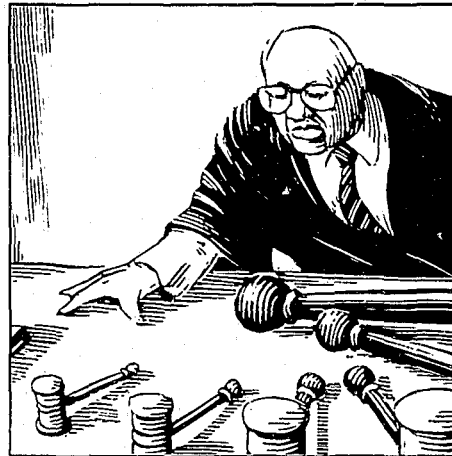
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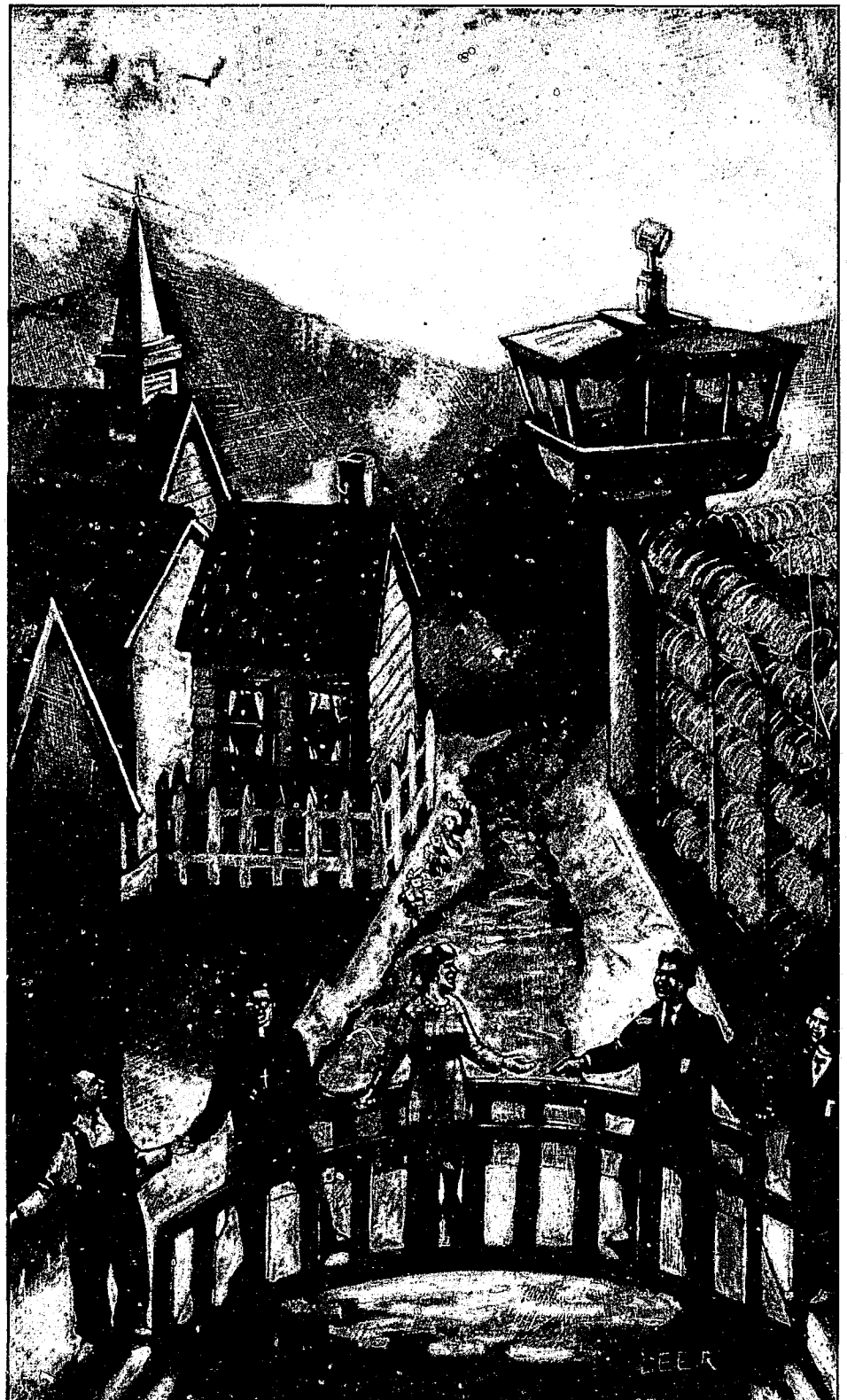
James B. Jones

In the early 1980's, the concept of formal interaction between community representatives and Federal prison officials was introduced at the newly opened Federal Correctional Institution in Otisville, New York. After discussions between the parties, it was decided to form a community advisory board composed of community leaders and citizens who were interested in the interrelationships between the facility and the town.

While the scope of the board's activities evolved over time, its original purpose was to keep the community informed on a continuing basis about the facility and its operations. Board members were routinely invited to the prison for briefings by the warden. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions and raise issues suggested by other citizens. The essence of the relationship was two-way communication: no secrets, no unanswered questions, and no hidden problems between the facility and the community.

The members of the board were to act as a conduit for a flow of information in both directions. They were to bring questions and concerns to the prison officials and, in turn, take back information to interested citizens. The theory was that open communication would result in the resolution of small issues, as well as controlling rumors and misinformation that often lead to undesirable community reactions.

The role that board members assumed over time is an interesting one. As the local experts on prisons, they became strong advocates of the prison and its positive influence on the community. They began to realize the many positive economic contributions the facility made



Rebecca Leer

in terms of local employment and purchasing, and they reached an understanding of the professional manner in which the prison operated.

When it came time for the prison to expand due to a growing inmate population, board members took the lead in explaining these actions to the community and justifying the proposed changes. In addition, the members began to act as a resource to other segments of the prison system by making themselves available to meet with officials from other communities who were considering the issue of having a prison located in their town. Prison officials quickly learned that the board members had much greater credibility with their counterparts in other communities and could be much more convincing in explaining what it was really like to have a prison as part of the community.

Expanding the concept

The reaction to this first community advisory board in other parts of the Federal prison system was not all positive. Prisons have traditionally been closed and isolated institutions; although openness to the community had long been seen as a constructive change in theory, the notion of actually involving communities in prison issues was perceived by some in the organization as going too far.

It was feared, for instance, that this regular interaction would result in local officials exerting undue influence being exerted over prison operations and that community pressures would limit the warden's administrative authority and discretion.

Over time, it became clear that the advisory board concept was indeed sound. The realization emerged that it



Steve Labier



Tracy Maher

Top: Warden Joseph P. Class (right) with members of the Community Relations Board, Federal Correctional Institution, Marianna, Florida. Bottom: Warden Margaret Hambrick (bottom row, center) and Bureau of Prisons Director J. Michael Quinlan (top row, center) with CRB members, FCI Lexington, Kentucky.

was not the interaction itself but *how the interaction was structured and managed* that was critical to the successful operation of the advisory boards and their activities. Advisory boards began to be tried in other correctional settings with different compositions and procedures. In some cases, informal advisory groups had been functioning for a considerable period without a formal identity or a specific agenda.

Interaction with community leaders began to be strengthened as a concept as more new prisons were constructed in closer proximity to established communities. This new placement of institution sites allowed for greater utilization of community resources such as education

and health care. It also resulted in more cost-effective transportation of inmates and closer coordination with other parts of the criminal justice system.

Current status

The establishment of Community Relations Boards (CRB's), as the advisory boards became known, has been strongly encouraged for the past 3 years. However, the program has not been a required activity; it is a local option for institutional CEO's.

For this reason, there are no uniform procedures for implementation, nor is there a specified structure for CRB's in terms of membership or activity. Until recently, there were no standardized reporting procedures in place for the CRB program; reporting ranged from very consistent, specific feedback from some programs to none at all from other programs.

All Bureau of Prisons CEO's were surveyed in March and April 1990. The survey sought to capture basic information about existing CRB's: the location and frequency of meetings, their membership composition, and typical agenda items. In addition, each CEO was asked to comment, in general terms, on the CRB concept and specifically about their local experience.

Of the 64 institutions surveyed, 50, or 78 percent, had a CRB and 14, or 22 percent, did not. Two institutions, a United States Penitentiary and a Federal Correctional Institution, share a CRB. Of the five geographic regions reporting, two had 100 percent participation; the others had rates of 92, 67, and 50 percent participation.*

*The survey was conducted before the Bureau reorganized its management structure into six regions.

At the maximum security level, 5 of 6 institutions participated. At the medium security level, 30 of 34 participated. At the minimum security level, 9 of 16 participated. Both administrative facilities participated, and 4 of the 6 detention facilities (*see Table 1*).

A search for common variables in the 14 facilities that were not participating in the CRB program indicates that 7 were minimum security camps, all of which were located on active military bases. Only one minimum security camp located on an active base had a CRB. (One of the detention facilities without a CRB, also located on an active base, was activated for a specific mission and has since closed.) The single U.S. Penitentiary without a CRB was the only maximum security facility located in a highly urbanized environment, but only one of the downtown high-rise detention facilities was without a CRB.

There appeared to be no difference between the program participation of facilities and the gender profile of their inmate populations. All of the facilities that had female inmates participated in the program and most institutions with male populations also participated.

The smallest number of CRB members was 4 and the largest was 43. One hundred twenty-three, or 15 percent, of the members were BOP staff; 686, or 85 percent, were from local communities (*see chart*). Service is purely voluntary; CRB members are not reimbursed in any way.

Categories that had 4 or fewer members included everything from Federal judges and elected State officials to postmasters, social workers, and farmers.

CRB membership profile

The CRB members surveyed who were not BOP staff members made up several significant groupings:

- 69 local, county, or State law enforcement officials
- 54 members of the local business community
- 53 locally elected officials (mayors or county commissioners)
- 28 hospital administrators or representatives of local medical facilities
- 24 chambers of commerce members
- 21 school administrators
- 21 city and town managers
- 19 ministers
- 19 military officials
- 18 newspaper editors or reporters
- 15 local citizens (no affiliation reported)
- 12 community college presidents or deans
- 12 non-elected city officials
- 11 university professors
- 9 superintendents of schools
- 9 Bureau of Prisons retirees
- 8 fire chiefs
- 7 city commissioners
- 6 county judges
- 6 United States Probation Officers
- 6 realtors
- 6 non-elected county officials
- 5 local attorneys
- 5 public defenders
- 5 State directors of corrections
- 5 Immigration and Naturalization Service staff

An additional survey item dealt with agenda items CRB's had discussed in the previous 6 months (late 1989-early 1990). A total of 293 items were discussed by the 49 CRB's during this period.

The vast majority of the items dealt with issues of local concern, although there was no clear trend apparent as to types of agenda items one could expect to be discussed at a given meeting. The institutions undergoing major mission changes or construction or expansion projects were very consistent in presenting this information to the CRB's. Among the many other agenda items

discussed were local child-care initiatives, drug-related offenses, emergency preparedness, recruitment, open houses, drug testing, overcrowding, medical care, strategic planning, social events, local procurement, newspaper articles, local utility problems, sites for new Federal prisons, relationships between the members of the "Federal family," hazardous waste disposal, fire protection, and escape prevention.

One issue not discussed consistently was an overview of the Bureau's expansion program and goals for the future. Instead, almost all agenda items were locally focused, with no global context provided for local overcrowding and expansion. Another issue that was not highlighted was the training and orientation of new CRB members. Although it is clear that this is being given some attention by institutional executive staff, the content of the orientation does not appear to include an introduction to system-wide issues. Thus, new CRB members may have a relatively small picture of their role and the role of their particular group.

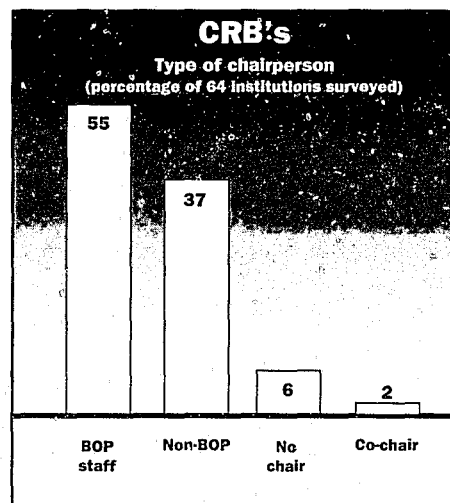
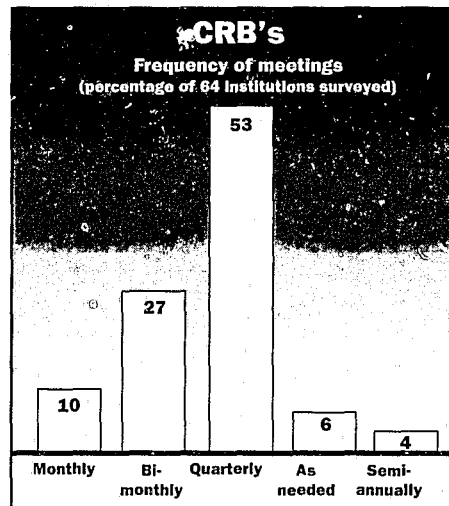
The contrast of agenda issues for Metropolitan Correctional Centers (MCC's), versus more traditionally located Federal Correctional Institutions (FCI's) is interesting. With a few exceptions, the discussions at the MCC's with other members of the Federal criminal justice family were operations-oriented, dealing with such matters as transportation schedules and processing procedures. The discussions at FCI's centered to a greater degree on the community/institution relationship; many more social and philosophical issues were a part of the agendas.

The tables at right summarize survey data on the frequency of CRB meetings and who takes the chairperson's role. Slightly more than half of CRB's met quarterly; about the same percentage had a BOP staff member (usually the warden) running meetings.

A final survey item dealt with the personal opinions of CEO's about the overall value and effectiveness of the CRB program. About one-half of the CEO's responded; most of their comments were favorable regarding current CRB activities and many were optimistic about the potential for positive CRB contributions in the future. A few CEO's indicated that the CRB program should remain very fluid, allowing maximum local flexibility.

Because this survey item was intended to elicit subjective responses from CEO's, there were no defined criteria upon which a formal evaluation could be based. After reviewing the responses, it is clear that wardens considered CRB's to be a good idea (or potentially a good idea) in terms of impact on the local environment. Obviously, this is a factor in the decision to go forward with a board. Another factor is the support that executive staff members have shown for the CRB program. In two of the five geographic regions, this support appeared to be especially strong. Added to this is the overall notion that more positive relations between a community and a BOP facility are good in themselves, whether or not tools exist for measuring this outcome.

This survey item included responses from CEO's in very different situations. Some had implemented a CRB some time ago and, at the time of the survey, were maintaining and modifying the board and its activities. This group may



be involved with a second or third generation of board members. Another group of CEO's had inherited a board and were redefining its activities to fit their view of how the process should operate. Finally, some CEO's were activating new facilities and had just formed a CRB. They were setting a tone for the board's activities and developing a structure for the interaction between the institution and the community. (Interestingly, many CEO's found the Environmental Impact Statement to be particularly useful in identifying issues of concern to the community.)

CRB's and the agency's mission

The results of the survey indicated that the concept of Community Relations Boards is alive and well in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. These boards have been implemented in most institutions; the CEO's responsible for that implementation have generally positive views as to their usefulness.

The composition of board membership was varied and appeared to reflect local needs and interests. Those CEO's who chose to implement CRB's appeared to genuinely believe the boards are useful; they were not merely paying lip service to a concept that has been encouraged at the highest levels of the organization.

The overall purpose of the CRB's as presently constituted, in terms of contributing to the mission and objectives of the agency, remains an open question. The concept of using CRB's and their memberships as an informed constituency for the advancement of public education and advocacy for issues that concern Federal prisons has yet to be realized. As the Bureau of Prisons continues to grow, it would seem even more important that local officials and citizens be called upon to present an accurate and realistic picture of prison operations and their contributions to the community.

Any such development of common goals and structure for CRB's should not be designed to undermine local discretion or flexibility, nor to make all such boards look the same, but to provide them with a set of guideposts for the future of the boards and for the agency itself. ■

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