

Men in 70s, 80s Still Help Run U.S.

By Jack Anderson

As the nation today steps into the 1970s, it is still guided, in part, by men with one foot in the 1800s. They are the septuagenarians, who cling tenaciously to their towers of power long after retirement age.

They are found in Congress, the courts and, more rarely, the federal agencies, helping to shape the future through a rear-view mirror. They are occupied more with dreams of the past than visions of the future.

The septuagenarians who remain in power, in most cases, stepped in when the country needed them. The question is whether they will step out now that they have petered out. As another decade recedes into history, these men of a bygone era should hand over the leadership to men of lesser years but keener minds.

Nowhere is the tired-blood gap more visible than in the council of elders who run Congress. On Capitol Hill, senility is respected and infirmity revered. No less than 15 Senate and House committee chairmen were born before the turn of the century. Six are over 75; two have passed the 80-year mark.

The most powerful septuagenarian is Speaker John McCormack, 78, a New Deal Democrat who should have departed at least with the Fair Deal. Once one of the scrappi-

est infighters in Congress, he now runs the House with all the dynamism of an Asian mystic contemplating his navel.

'President' McCormack

The venerable McCormack usually has been found battling for the public interest. But now he is a pallid shell of his earlier self—a frail, gaunt beanpole of a man whose colleagues worry that he may not survive the next blast of hot air they send his way.

On Nov. 22, 1963, McCormack was dining with his cronies in the House restaurant. An aide rushed in with the news of John F. Kennedy's assassination and with an Associated Press report that Lyndon Johnson was wounded.

For a few breathless, heart-stopping moments, John McCormack thought he was President of the United States. The immensity of it overcame him, and he went into momentary shock. He tried to stand but became dizzy, reeled, then fell back and sat trembling.

But if the false AP report jolted the old man, it caused sheer panic for a few high officials who, for an anguished moment, thought President McCormack was in charge of the government. Today, he is six years older and still third in the line of presidential succession.

"Old Jawn," as his colleagues fondly call him, is losing his grasp of the issues of the 1970s. In the cloakrooms,

they whisper of his "lack of awareness" and "seeming indifference." Front-row representatives sometimes hear him muttering prayers to the Virgin Mary during House proceedings.

And his greatest concern in this age of Vietnam and pollution and moonwalks is over the remodeling of the west front of the Capitol building.

When Congress reconvenes, John McCormack can be found shuffling through the corridors of Congress, brushing back his yellowing white hair, cigar stuck in his cheek, wrinkled notes poking from every pocket in his depression-style, pin-stripe suit—an 1891 Capricorn making decisions for the Age of Aquarius.

Mr. FBI

Today is the birthday of another powerful septuagenarian. J. Edgar Hoover, whose bulldog demeanor has made him the personification of law and order, is a rugged 75. For almost 46 years, since he took command of the Federal Bureau of Investigation at age 29, he has ruled autocratically as the nation's top cop.

In 1924, the Bureau was loaded with drunks, hacks, misfits and courthouse hangers-on. Almost overnight, he transformed it into the most respected and effective crime-fighting outfit in the world—a close-knit, scandal-free organization with a high esprit de corps.

But in 1970, Hoover is also an anachronism. The world has changed since his gang-busting days of the 1930s, when his men shot it out with the likes of John Dillinger and Baby Face Nelson. J. Edgar, however, has not changed. He is still a law-and-order fundamentalist. He lives in a black-and-white past while the world around him thinks increasingly in grays.

Through the years, Hoover has carefully created the image of a tough lawman until he has become an inviolable institution. To most Americans, he is a man of bedrock integrity and constant action, eternally prepared to battle criminals and communists.

He has little disposition to give up the post he has occupied for nearly half a century. He has expressed concern that he might be succeeded by someone who couldn't be trusted to protect the confidentiality of the FBI's voluminous files of raw data.

Insiders say he is more worried that his own intemperate comments on the high and mighty, scribbled in the margins of FBI reports, might be exposed to daylight. Former Attorney General Francis Biddle, in his memoirs, told how the FBI director used to entertain him with stories "of the intimate details of what my associates in the cabinet did and said, or their likes and dislikes, their weaknesses and their associations."

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