



# **Jackson: The Rise and Fall of The World's Largest Walled Prison: A history and a memoir**

*Mr. Perry M. Johnson*

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OVER THE YEARS, THERE HAS BEEN MUCH SPECULATION about how Jackson prison came to be so immense and why it perpetually cycled between disrepute and disorder on one hand and hopeful programs and productive industry on the other. Once built, the question as to whether it might just be too massive ever to be properly managed was raised repeatedly over its existence. Were its problems a curse of design or just a developing legacy? Who conceived it, planned it and brought it into being? What problems already present in the old prison had survived transplant to the new? Answers to these questions require the following of an often obscure and erratic paper trail. This book is subtitled “A History and a Memoir.” An even more accurate description might have been “A History Illuminated by a Memoir.” For almost three decades (nearly half of its existence), Perry Johnson was intimately involved in the operation of the State Prison of Southern Michigan at Jackson. Starting there as a lowly counselor in 1955, he would, before his career was over, serve the prison as the Deputy Warden, Administrative Assistant to the Warden and Warden – before moving on to oversee all of Michigan's prisons and eventually becoming Director of the entire Department of Corrections. It would be no exaggeration to say that he knew Jackson Prison inside and out. To the reader's benefit, the recounting of this career is not merely a recitation of events, but also an evaluation of their meaning and context. It is a tale told with humor and compassion. As is inevitable in any history of an old-line prison there are stories involving extreme violence and cruelty – but these are leavened with others that are genuinely funny.

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