

DEADWOOD WALL OF FAME 2005

Richard McGrath

Born: May 14, 1915

Died: February 12, 1977

Dick McGrath was elected sheriff of a small county in an obscure Western state. In this quiet environment, few people could have predicted that Dick would eventually find himself nose-to-nose with troublemaking motorcycle gang-members – and come out on top.

Dick was born in the spring of 1915 to Irish immigrants living in Lead. He attended Lead Catholic School and graduated from Lead High School before entering a career of public service. He started out working for the City of Lead as a laborer and tractor operator, but found his true calling in 1937 when he became an officer of the city's police department. He served in this capacity for more than a decade.

In 1948 Dick was elected sheriff of Lawrence County, an office he held for the legal limit of two terms. When he was forced to step down in 1952, Dick continued on as Lawrence County's deputy sheriff. Later that year he was accepted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation National Academy, from which he graduated in 1956.

A career in federal service, however, would never materialize for Dick. A change to state law in 1955 permitted Dick to run for the office of sheriff once more, and by 1956 he was again leading the county's law enforcement. During this second stint as sheriff, Dick found himself on the front lines of several major disasters. In 1959 he became instrumental in evacuating residents from Deadwood during a massive forest fire, and later volunteered his office as the firefighting headquarters. Dick also played a role in the 1972 flood, becoming one of the first to warn Rapid City officials of the torrential rains heading toward the community.

One of Dick's more famous experiences involved a confrontation with a motorcycle gang bent on wreaking havoc in Deadwood. According to his sons, Dick ended up face-to-face with a large man named "Tiny," the leader of the offending gang, in the middle of Deadwood's Main Street. In a scene reminiscent of a shootout from a classic Western, the two men met, exchanged several quiet, as-yet-unknown words, and parted ways. Shortly thereafter, the bikers left town without incident.

In 1960, Dick established the Lawrence County Civil Defense Office and served as its first director. He remained in this post until 1974, when he also retired as county sheriff. Dick spent the last two years of his life as chief of security for the growing Homestake Mining Company. He passed away in early 1977, and was laid to rest in Oakridge Cemetery just outside Deadwood.

Dick was honored numerous times during his life. The Jaycees, Kiwanis International, the National Sheriff's Association and the South Dakota Governor's Office were among the groups that presented Dick with awards for his years of public service. Dick was even recognized by the national periodical Detective Magazine in its January 1969 issue as its National Police Officer of the Month.



DEADWOOD
SOUTH
DAKOTA

A National Historic
Landmark