

Remembering Robert Peckham, a leader in indigent defense



Robert Peckham (right), received a certificate of merit from the university in 1980.

In July 2006, the law school lost Col. Robert D. Peckham, former professor and director of the Legal Aid and Defender Society for more than 18 years. He was 81 years old.

A longtime supporter of indigent defense, Peckham was highly involved in shaping the Legal Aid and Defender Society (which would later become the Legal Aid and Defender Clinic) once joining the Georgia Law faculty in 1968, a year after the society was established. He also taught courses in military law and criminal trial practice.

While at the School of Law, Peckham was instrumental in the development of the

Georgia Prisoner Legal Counseling Project, the first of its kind in the nation. The project provided legal counseling services to inmates in Georgia's penal institutions from 1972 to 1996 and was emulated across the country.

For this work, Peckham received the national Charles L. Decker Award for "demonstrating outstanding achievement in service to the country's courts, corrections departments and inmates," awarded by a consortium of 20 states that provided legal counseling services to prisoners through Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grants.

In 1983, Peckham was appointed to the governor's Consumer Advisory Board by Georgia Gov. Joe Frank Harris. Reappointed by each incoming governor, Peckham sat on the board for 21 years, serving for several years as vice chair and then as chair from 2002 to 2004.

Peckham retired from the law school in 1986 but continued to teach part time. Following retirement, he also served as a judge *pro tem* for the Athens-Clarke County Magistrate Court.

Before coming to UGA, Peckham served

for more than 20 years as an army officer. He earned his bachelor's degree from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1947 and served with the armed forces in Japan and Korea. He earned his law degree from Harvard University in 1955. Among a number of his subsequent teaching and advocate positions, he served as a military lawyer in Italy and Korea and taught law at the Judge Advocate General's School in Charlottesville, Va., before retiring from the army in 1968.

His survivors include his son, Richard, and daughter, Nancy. His wife, Doris, passed away in 2002.

"As a pioneer in the field of indigent defense, [Peckham] helped fulfill the constitutional promise of justice for all Americans," J. Vincent "Jay" Cook (J.D.'64), State Bar of Georgia president, said in a published letter to the editor of the *Athens Banner-Herald*. "All of us in the legal profession, especially those who are connected with UGA and the Athens community, are grateful to have known and learned from Robert Peckham."

- Kerri Wilson