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Richard P. McCormick made his mark as an innovative student of American party politics, as well as the most influential interpreter of New Jersey history. A distinguished teacher, scholar, and public historian, McCormick revitalized a venerable but dormant state historical society. Later, he used notable anniversaries, such as the Bicentennial of the American Revolution and the Tercentenary of New Jersey's founding, as vehicles to bring history to schools and the general public. He also helped create a state historical agency, the New Jersey Historical Commission, to promote New Jersey's past and preserve its historic treasures. Birkner describes McCormick's life and times. He looks at McCormick's scholarly apprenticeship, the origins of his interest in a new political history, and his contributions to the study of American politics before the Civil War. McCormick's concern for elucidating political machinery was fused with a fundamental skepticism about American democracy as run by and for the people. Through use of oral history, McCormick tells his own story. Then, through their exchanges, Birkner challenges some of McCormick's scholarly arguments and elicits responses that help to shed light on his subject's theory of politics.
