

State Stamps Top Secret On Willowbrook Work

Mental Hygiene are apparently taking no chances on stirring up opposition to the plans for the Willowbrook State School.

Considerable work has been carried on at the institution but virtually no information has been released to the public.

The probable reason for all the secrecy can be traced to the furor of ten years ago when Staten Islanders went up in arms at the prospect of having mentally ill adults as patients here. After a long fight, it was agreed that only mentally deficient children would be assigned to the school.

That "pact" is now apparently being ignored by the state. Whether state officials are justified in side-stepping that old agreement is easy to judge. A conference should have been called between state and local officials to ascertain present sentiment.

State officials now are out to outmaneuver any possible opposition—through secrecy. The idea seems to be that once the institution is in operation no one will object.

In a progress report published in the "Mental Hygiene News" and "addressed to the people of New York State," Commissioner Frederick MacCurdy gives bare mention to the Willowbrook school. He observes that "it is planned that by March, 1949, 1,400 mental defectives will be under care at Willowbrook."

The Willowbrook school is clearly not to be a small project. It will have facilities to handle more patients by far than the three voluntary hospitals put together, and may be slightly larger than adjacent Halloran VA Hospital.

Staten Island will be vitally interested in this latest addition to the community picture.

Staten Islanders should know what goes on there. Commissioner MacCurdy should remove the Willowbrook school from the category, "Places of Mystery."

Officials Decline To Comment on School's Opening

Officials at the Willowbrook State School for the Mentally Deficient on the grounds of Halloran VA Hospital know what's doing there. But they're not saying.

Neither is Commissioner Frederick MacCurdy of the state Department of Mental Hygiene, which is assigned the Halloran tract.

Plans and progress made toward official opening of the school have been carried on behind closed doors in back of 5,700 feet of eight-foot high wire fence since last October.

Some information has leaked out. But Willowbrook officials refuse to confirm or deny it.

While Albany refuses to say little more than that "progress is being made," it is generally known that this progress has moved forward to the extent that a chapter of the State Civil Employees Association has been founded behind the eight-foot fence that takes in 40 per cent of the Halloran tract.

It is known that up to 100 em-

ployes are already at work at the Willowbrook school.

And it is estimated that up to 100 mentally deficient adult patients are already being housed at Willowbrook.

These adult patients are there contrary to an agreement with ex-Borough President Joseph A. Palma ten years ago that only mentally deficient children would be housed at the school.

The commissioner has issued no information as to whether present plans call for the eventual treatment of children at Willowbrook, or whether it will go ahead housing adults.

As officially silent as the commissioner is Dr. Frank B. Glasser, state physician in charge of the Willowbrook program. His stock reply to questions is "that he cannot say anything."

Some minor facts are beyond the control of the state mental hygiene commissioner. For example, in the regular releases of the state Department of Public Works is often found references to bids being made for construction and installation work at Willowbrook.

In a recent release by this department it was disclosed that a low bid of \$5,843 for installation of laundry equipment in Building 61 at Willowbrook has been placed by the Gottlieb Iron Works, Brooklyn.

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June 5, 1948

Nurses Lack Seen Delaying Willowbrook

Early opening of the Willowbrook State School for Mentally Deficient Children on the Halloran VA Hospital tract was foreseen to day as officials indicated they were in the final stages of staff recruitment.

While officials of the Department of Mental Hygiene, which will operate the school, admitted there was still an insufficient number of nurses available to put the school into operation at once, they said the opening will come "very soon."

According to information made public today by Dr. Frederick MacCurdy, commissioner of the department, it is anticipated that, by March, next year, a total of 1,400 mental defectives will be under care at Willowbrook.

Opening of the school has been pending since October, 1947, when preparation work began for the first utilization of the facility erected for the purpose six years ago.

The Department of Mental Hygiene, which owns the hospital, will use 40 per cent of the tract while it leases the remainder to the Veterans Administration for use as a temporary veterans' hospital.

The civil service employes group has elected Mrs. Kathleen L. Hennessy president. Other officers in the group are Nicholas Bellezza, vice-president; Miss Janet Yuill, R.N., secretary, and Mrs. Vivian Koop, secretary.

Recent visitors to the Willowbrook tract were high officials of the employes organization from throughout the state.

In a recent statement regarding his public relations policy at Willowbrook, Commissioner MacCurdy declared:

"Apparently, the Staten Islanders have heard in sufficient numbers of the potential opening of the school as we have had a very satisfactory number of applicants for work from those interested, and we appreciate all this cooperation."