

March 17, 1950

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State Studies Expansion Of Willowbrook School

3,100 Patients To Be Treated At Institution

By ERWIN ENDRESS

Having won its long fight for the full return of the Halloran VA Hospital site to its jurisdiction, the state Department of Mental Hygiene today sees a bright future for Willowbrook State School, a facility for the mentally retarded.

Return of the Halloran tract on June 30 will set into motion plans to expand the facility to its intended 3,100-patient load. These plans, gathering dust in Albany files since the Army took over the property at the start of World War II, will help end what state officials have called a "pressing need" for space.

Acquisition of the 60 per cent of the tract still used by the Veterans Administration as a veterans' hospital will put scores of buildings to the use they were originally intended.

More than 1,000 persons, state officials believe, will eventually be employed in medical and non-medical capacities at the school. This is more than triple the number presently working there.

Expected to be treated at the school are patients ranging from babies in cribs to adult patients who will do various "chores," as part of the state agency's therapy program.

Full expansion of Willowbrook will be speeded by the fact that 40 per cent of the facility is already in operation, with a trained resident staff to build upon.

According to Dr. Harold Berman, director of the institution, there are 325 persons now employed at Willowbrook, and there are 970 patients being treated there. These include

360 babies in cribs; 327 "toddlers," and 283 adults.

The payroll at Willowbrook from April 1, 1949 to March 31 this year will amount to \$592,600, he said, and the payroll for the next year was to be in the neighborhood of \$735,000.

While state officials are not yet ready to say what the payroll will be once the school is in full operation, observers speculate it will be in the neighborhood of \$2,000,000 a year.

Dr. Frederick MacCurdy, commissioner of Mental Hygiene, has pointed out that the question of how long it will take for Willowbrook to expand fully will depend largely on how long it takes to reconvert the Halloran buildings, redesigned and reequipped for federal use.

Willowbrook, constructed in the early 1940's and completed just prior to the United States' entry into World War II, had been part of an overall plan to ease the growing need for expanded facilities in the face of a growing patient load.

When it became apparent that Willowbrook would not be available for state use for years to come, the state agency was forced to crowd patients into other institutions.

Officials have long emphasized that Willowbrook will be exclusively for the treatment and education of mentally retarded persons. The school is not designed for insane persons, it is said.

So pressing did the need become after World War II ended that the agency carried on long and forced negotiations with federal officials to gain the return of the Halloran tract.

A compromise agreement, in 1947, made it possible for the Department of Mental Hygiene to open the school, on a limited scale, in the late summer of 1947. The school, starting with a patient load of less than 100, has expanded steadily since.

State School Chief to Be VNA Guest

Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of the Willowbrook State School, will be the guest speaker at an open meeting of the Visiting Nurse Association of Staten Island April 21.

The meeting will be held in the auditorium of the Richmond Health Center, St. George, it was announced yesterday following a meeting of the board of directors in the VNA Activities Center, Stapleton. Mrs. William Y. Daly, president, presided.

Reports were presented by Miss Dorothy V. Smith, vice-chairman of the publicity committee; Mrs. Malcolm B. Carroll, vice-president; and Mrs. A. Benbow Elliman, vice-chairman of the nursing committee.

Mrs. Marian B. Nelson was elected supervisor of the education and maternity division. Miss Neela Cawley will serve as part time instructor in public health for nursing students, it was reported.

Mrs. Daly announced that Samuel A. Turvey will serve as chairman of the finance committee for 1950. He will be assisted by Walter L. Allum, Clare Brown, Mrs. Carroll, Mrs. Elliman, Winthrop E. Mange, and Mrs. Hans H. Hinrichs.

Serving on the publicity committee will be Mrs. John Gans Jr., chairman, Miss Smith, Mrs. Bertram J. Garbe, Mrs. Christopher DiCrocco, Mrs. Daly, Miss Mary A. Coleman, and Mrs. Nelson.

Mrs. Jacob Stein, chairman of the nursing committee, will be assisted by Mrs. Elliman, Mrs. Carroll, Mrs. Hinrichs, Mrs. Eduard C. Meurer, Mrs. William A. Scheuch and Mrs. Daly.

The next meeting will be held April 21 prior to the open meeting.

The Staten Island Transcript March 21, 1950

What are all the grumblings about at the Willowbrook State Hospital for defective mental children??? Will the Comm. of Mental Hygiene make a personal visit there next week or not?? Likewise there is a supervisor of physical training but I wonder if he knows WILLOWBROOK exists.

ENDING
CENT