

March 6, 1952

# 6 New Buildings Sought by State For Willowbrook

## Cost Is Set At \$5,000,000

### 'Have to Do Something, Are Getting Filled Up,' Says Head of Institution

An appropriation of \$5,000,000 for construction of six additional buildings for patients, at Willowbrook State School is in the state budget now being considered by the Legislature, Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of the school, said yesterday.

"We have got to do something," he added. "We are getting filled up rapidly. Every mail brings applications for admission. We only can take those with the greater hardship."

Willowbrook, which cares for mental defectives and severely handicapped children from babyhood, is a brand new idea, and the only institution of its kind in the world, he said. He pointed out that in New York City two in every 1,000 children born are potential patients at the institution.

#### 3,000 Patients

Willowbrook today has about 3,000 patients, he declared, and the need for more room is acute. Of these, he pointed out, 600 are babies in cribs.

The idea of institutional care by the state for the very young mental defective is comparatively new, he said, and the plans for Willowbrook only got under way in 1936. However, the state did not get the buildings back from the federal government until 1946.

Before, he said, defective children under 5 had to be cared for by their families, most likely at home. Having such a child at home, particularly in urban areas, created real problems, economic, social and medical, Dr. Berman added.

...regardless of race, creed, economic status or education.

Today, with proper medical care such as is given at Willowbrook, the defective grows up, and therefore must be trained for a place in life, he stated.

"The mongol and the spastic are entitled to life just as much as anyone else," he said. "Some serious-minded people believe in euthanasia, but that is not my belief nor the belief of the government of the State of New York.

"It is a social and community problem, affecting the basis of the American way of life—the family."

#### Lauds Islanders

Dr. Berman, speaking at a meeting of the Lions Club in the Meurot Club, lauded Islanders who have become employes at Willowbrook, as well as the considerate cooperative attitude of the public at large.

"One has to marvel at the care these Staten Island people give our children, he added.

"Deformities or paralysis make no difference. They give each the same care."

The mental defective who grows up on the "outside" becomes the

(Turn to page 2)

...working on it. Everytime a straw blows we chase it down."

Describing how the training of the patients is accomplished, he pointed out that some even have to be taught to chew and to swallow. More than 300 of the children attend school, he said, and many of them reach the equivalent of a fourth-grade education.

Therapy has rehabilitated many paralytics at the school, he said, as well as developing the ability of the patients to get along. He pointed out that in some cases, children have to be shown such taken-for-granted things as use of their thumbs.

#### Trained to Work

The children are trained to become domestics, kitchen and storehouse workers and helpers for various crafts, so that they will be able to get a job if the time ever comes when they can leave.

The school's budget, he said, is \$3,500,000 a year for operation and maintenance.

"There's nothing more lovable, more congenial, more friendly than a little mongol," he stated.

"A visit can tell you more in ten minutes than I can tell you in hours."