

Daily News
July 29, 1952

New York Times
July 29, 1952

Evacuate 3,100 Patients in Fire

More than 3,100 mentally retarded child patients were evacuated from the 17 buildings of the Willowbrook, S. I., State Hospital yesterday afternoon when a smoky two-alarm fire broke out in an underground conduit housing steam pipes, and the fire was brought under control in less than 20 minutes. None of the buildings was damaged.

The hospital occupies the former facilities of Halloran General Hospital.

SMALL FIRE ROUTS 3,000

Inmates Evacuated at School for Mental Defectives

Three thousand inmates at the Willowbrook State School for Mental Defectives, at Willowbrook, S. I., were evacuated from Seventeen fireproof brick buildings, shortly before 2 P. M. yesterday because of a small fire started inside the steam pipes connecting building No. 7 with the power house.

No one was injured and there was no panic or excitement among the inmates. After being led out of the buildings by supervisors and attendants they were marched to the big playground of the institution where they watched the firemen fight the smoky fire and got a great kick out of it.

When the first fire companies arrived a second alarm was sounded also as a precautionary measure and brought companies from Fort Richmond, West New Brighton and Mariners Harbor.

The fire was put out within an hour. The firemen explained that the steam pipes are lined with tar paper and that it took fire from some undetermined cause. The damage was slight.

Herald Tribune
July 29, 1952

Small Fire at Mental School

Fire was discovered about 2 p.m. yesterday in a conduit at the State School for Mental Defectives at Willowbrook, S. I., formerly Halloran General Veterans' Hospital. The conduit, lined with tar paper, carries steam pipes to all the buildings. Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of the school, had the 3,000 pupils march from the various buildings to the playground, from which they watched the firemen extinguish the fire. Two alarms were sent in as a precautionary measure. Damage was trifling.