

Beating Reveals Flaw in Hiring At Willowbrook

By ROBERT J. POPP

How an ex-convict, once confined to a hospital for the criminal insane, could be hired under an alias to care for mentally defective children in the Willowbrook State School is a question police and state authorities are trying to answer today.

So far as the hospital authorities are concerned, the former criminal, now accused of beating two of his charges with a broom handle, was John J. Martini, a man with no police record. In line with established procedures, he had been fingerprinted. Why his true identity was not discovered is one phase of the problem police are investigating.

Actually the man, who is facing a felonious assault charge, is Ralph J. Tuccillo, 47, of 298 Bay street, Tompkinsville. He was arrested Wednesday night

in the hospital and arraigned yesterday in Magistrate's Court. There he asked for time to get a lawyer and, because of his previous record, was held without bail for a hearing Monday.

Welts Discovered

The case came to the attention of hospital authorities Wednesday morning when a doctor noticed a 14-year-old Jamaica, L.I., boy limping. When the youngster was examined, four welts were discovered on the lower part of his body.

Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of the school, was notified, and an immediate investigation was ordered.

All 182 boys in Building 7, where the injured boy lived, were examined and questioned. Bruises were discovered on a 15-year-old Roosevelt, L. I., boy.

The boy bearing the welts was (Turn to page 2)

Unknown Record

There's more than a court case in the reported beating of two teen-age boys at Willowbrook State School.

The courts will decide the guilt or innocence of the accused man fairly on the basis of evidence.

But the court proceedings won't answer this question:

How could an ex-convict, who had spent time in a hospital for the criminally insane, be hired to care for mentally defective children in a state institution and not have his record known to the officials of the institution?

Even though he was hired under an alias, he was fingerprinted. Theoretically, those fingerprints are routinely checked.

Apparently someone, or the system, fell down.

Why?

The defendant in the beating of these two youngsters has a long criminal record . . . dating all the way back to 1923.

Once he was given an indeterminate sentence in the Elmira Reformatory for burglary. On another occasion he was sentenced to 15 years in Sing Sing Prison, for robbery.

On two occasions he was sent to Kings County Hospital for mental observation. In the spring of last year, he was sent to the Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane and, after six months, was declared sane and discharged.

Why was it that not until another serious charge was made against this individual did his past history become known to the institution's officials . . . seven months after he was first hired?

unable to tell how he had been injured. However, according to authorities, three older boys, patients assigned to help care for the younger children, said that Tuccillo had beaten the 14-year-old youngster while he was bathing Tuesday night.

Former Boxer

Tuccillo, a former boxer, has a criminal record going back to 1923. In that year he was sentenced to Elmira Reformatory for an indeterminate sentence as the result of a burglary conviction in Manhattan.

In 1929, he received a 15-year Sing Sing sentence for robbing a man of \$7 in Tompkinsville.

Seventeen years later, Tuccillo was trapped on a sleeping porch of a Stapleton home and accused of burglary. This arrest was made six years prior — to the day — of his arrest Wednesday. However, Tuccillo was sent to Kings County Hospital before trial then for mental examination.

He escaped from the institution and in May, 1950, was picked up in Tampa, Fla., for being drunk. Sentence in this case was deferred.

Arrested in 1950

In November, 1950, Tuccillo again was on the island and once again ran afoul of the law. At that time, he was recognized by Patrolman Gerald Lino, who had arrested him four years earlier.

When first picked up, Tuccillo maintained he was Ralph Martino and produced a driver's license and registration, bearing a Tampa address, to prove his contention.

Again he was sent to Kings County Hospital. What happened then is not known. Apparently Tuccillo was released from the hospital because in April, 1951, authorities in City Prison, Richmond, complained that he had attacked other inmates. This time Tuccillo was sent to Bellevue Hospital for observation. Doctors there adjudged him insane.

In May, 1951, he was committed to Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. After six months treatment, he was declared sane and discharged.

Once again he was arraigned on the 1946 burglary charge, but by this time the complainant was in England with the Coast Guard and the charge was dropped.

Tuccillo, whose name also has been carried on court records as Tuscillo, is being held on a statement by Detective Charles Casazza.