

D. A. REPORT IN INQUIRY GIVES STATE SCHOOL OK

Willowbrook Patients Get 'Best Possible Care,' Says Simonson, Lauding Work

District Attorney Sidney O. Simonson completed yesterday his investigation, under way since last summer, into personnel conditions at Willowbrook State School and drew up a formal report giving the present situation at the institution a clean bill of health.

Over a period since last August, Simonson had interviewed many witnesses, among them the school director, Dr. Harold H. Berman. The district attorney also examined and checked hundreds of records and completed his investigation yesterday with a personal, unannounced visit to the school.

On the basis of the facts he had learned, District Attorney Simonson said in his report, "I am personally convinced that the patients at Willowbrook State School are receiving the best care possible and I think the administration is in fact setting a record for a program of rehabilitation of its patients that is heartening and deserving of credit."

Simonson's investigation, directed chiefly into methods used in hiring help at the school, was brought about when Ralph Tuccillo, 48, of Tompkinsville, employed at Willowbrook, was arrested Aug. 20, 1952, charged with striking one of the inmates. This revealed that Tuccillo had been employed in spite of the fact that he had been an inmate of a mental institution and a state

... suspended sentence for assault charge was not substantiated. Tuccillo, however, was indicted on a perjury charge because of false statements he had made in his application, but pleaded guilty of a State Civil Service Law violation. He was given a suspended sentence and was placed on probation.

Simonson felt that a checkup of Tuccillo's application for employment had been inadequate. He then ordered the investigation into the methods used in checking and selecting employees.

"On request," yesterday's report states, "Dr. Berman supplied me with a complete roster of all the present employees. This list was checked for criminal records with the State Civil Service and the New York Police Department."

The checkup involved a large volume of work, most of it conducted by detectives of the district attorney's squad.

D. A. Makes Inspection

Simonson also had received Dr. Berman's permission to inspect the institution at any time, without advance warning. He made the inspection yesterday, accompanied by Acting Lt. John F. Bracken, commanding officer of his detective squad.

The prosecutor's report shows that the personnel checkup revealed that less than 15 out of a total of 900 employees had some record of law violations.

"However," Simonson states, "in none of these cases was the conviction for a violation of a vicious nature, which would disqualify the person from the position he held. Furthermore, in each case the employment record showed that each of the aforementioned employees had noted the fact of the prior conviction on his application and in all the cases the conviction occurred many years ago."

As to Tuccillo's employment at Willowbrook State School, Simonson reports that this "was not the result of negligence or omission, but rather a combination of coincidental factors outside the control of the hospital."

The report continued: "There were some weaknesses in the system of classification and process of employment that became evident and these were immediately corrected by the hospital administration."

Final Approval

After a lengthy investigation, the district attorney has reported that Willowbrook State School is making a fine record in the care and rehabilitation of patients . . . a report fully anticipated by the observant public.

The probe started last summer when an employe was accused of hitting an inmate . . . and it was later discovered that the employe, an ex-convict, had spent time in a mental institution.

This was the result of a flay in procedure and should not have reflected on the policies and program of the Willowbrook institution.

That unfortunate situation is now in the past, and corrective administrative measures have been applied. It's good to have this final report of approval.