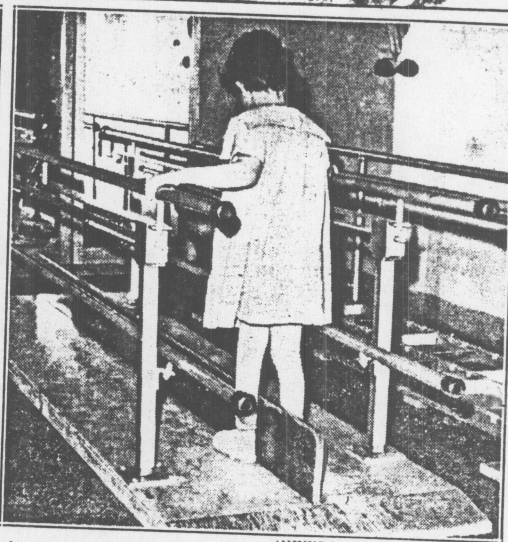




Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the overcrowded Willowbrook School for Retarded Children, Staten Island (foto left), stands among 89 beds jammed into one ward. A mentally and physically retarded five-year-old (right) learns to walk with aid of parallel bars.



(NEWS photos by George Mattison)

'SECRET CHILDREN'

The Retarded in Overcrowded Institutions

By JACK MALLON
(First of two articles)

THE attendant placed the boy with his arms outstretched and his palms pressed against the wall and then beat him on the back with a shoe . . .

"I saw these seven kids, none older than 10, their little bodies compressed in strait jackets as they rocked back and forth on plain wooden benches . . ."

"Soon after the attendants left, this delinquent, who was put into the overcrowded ward as punishment, grabbed the retarded boy by the throat and squeezed and squeezed—until he was dead."

Familiar echoes from the snakepit institutions of long ago?

Not at all. These cries concern present-day institutions for re-



One of the fallen, broken basketball backboards noted by News reporter Jack Mallon when he visited Willowbrook.

State Association for Retarded Children.

"There isn't one inch between these beds. The youngsters sleep in a ward where 50 to 100 beds are lined up one next to another. This entire ward may be supervised by one attendant."

Letchworth Village, situated on a 2,316-acre plot in the rolling countryside of Theills, N.Y., has 1,265 children more than its certified capacity of 3,049.

As many as 96 children are crammed into some of its picturesque cottages, which were constructed for 56 patients.

More than 600 extra children are squeezed into Wassaic State School in Wassaic, N.Y., the so-called Community of the Abandoned. Most of the children there are those who have little or no visitors.

State Sen. William T. Conklin (R-Brooklyn), chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Mental Retardation and Physical Handicap and father of a retarded child, admits that the main problem is overcrowding.

"We have more people making applications for these institutions than ever before," he said. "We hope that there will be some relief this year with the new school opening in Suffolk County."

AN EXPLOSIVE REPORT, BUT ONE KEPT QUIET

A special visitation committee was formed last year by Senator Conklin to investigate conditions in these institutions.

"The committee went all over the state without hatchet or halo to find the truth," Sen. Conklin said.

The explosive report, describing the problems of overcrowding, insufficient funds and inferior personnel, was turned over to Gov. Rockefeller last November. It has never been made public.

"I would like to see something done about the brutality," Dr. William Fraenkel, executive director of the Association for the Help of Retarded Children, said. "I saw this brutality myself. I

saw children with noses smashed and eyes blackened. Many of the children had fear etched on their faces—fear of the attendants," he said.

Fraenkel, who was a member of President Kennedy's advisory panel on retardation, has traveled almost a quarter million miles and visited 30 to 40 institutions for the retarded throughout the country.

"The conditions in some New York schools are far inferior to those in similar institutions throughout the United States," he said.

THREE MEALS A DAY AND NOT MUCH ELSE

So upset was Fraenkel by the over-all abuses in these state-run schools, that he was moved to say: "I think we should blow them (the schools) all up and start all over again."

"The children aren't getting much more than three meals a day. If 50 children or so are gathered together there should be something planned for them to do, with the necessary staff, equipment and program. At least, weather permitting, patients should be taken for walks about the grounds regularly."

When The News visited Willowbrook recently, the institution resembled a college campus during summer recess. Occasionally, on the grounds two or three children smiled and waved.

But behind the locked wards, in the 24 patient buildings spread over 382 acres, almost 6,000

tween 1,000 and 1,500 babies and not one resident pediatrician. Only seven recreational directors are on the staff to supervise the physical activities of 6,000 youngsters. The children are limited to about one hour a week of occupational therapy.

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the school, called conditions at the institution "deplorable" when he took over last summer.

In an address to his staff he said that he wants to work with them "on something that resembles more a hospital than a snake-pit."

CROWDING MONSTROUS, THE NEW CHIEF FOUND

"We are trying to do something about this overcrowding," Dr. Hammond told THE NEWS.

"When I arrived here last year we were admitting 80 to 100 children per month. The problem got monstrous.

"We closed admissions and I am now taking children in on a one-for-one basis."

With 500 to 600 new retardates seeking admission to the state-run schools annually, the Department of Mental Hygiene is trying to contain overcrowding with a five-year, \$134 million construction plan.

The program, announced by Governor Rockefeller in January, calls for the building of seven 1,000-bed schools to be located in Albany, the Syracuse and Saratoga areas, and in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens.

According to the Governor's plan, additional jobs will be created and compensation increased to attract more professional and higher caliber personnel.

WHAT CRITICS WANT: IMMEDIATE ACTION

"In the future, we will institutionalize those who can't profit by community services," said Dr. George L. Wadsworth, associate commissioner in charge of the Department's Division of Mental Retardation.

"We're not proud of the fact we have 6,000 at Willowbrook. We want to reduce it. But we want to diminish it sensibly over a period of time. We are gradually working toward the 1,000-bed institutions," he said.

Critics point out, however, that the construction program will just keep the state abreast of the expanding problem of the retarded.

They want action now.

Tomorrow's Death visits a Willowbrook shower room.

DAILY NEWS
SPECIAL FEATURE

retarded children throughout New York State.

Seven such institutions, operated by the State Department of Mental Hygiene, house more than 26,000 of the state's estimated 500,000 retarded children and adults.

RETARDED CHILD BORN EVERY 5 MINUTES

Every five minutes a retarded child is born in the United States. The affliction can strike any family. It recognizes no race, social or economic status.

The vast majority of these "secret children" are cared for in the community. The severely retarded, whose families can no longer provide for their needs, and the retardates who have been abandoned because of the death or the indifference of their parents, are placed into the state institutions.

The number of resident patients has been increasing at the rate of 500 to 600 annually. The life span of the severely retarded has also been increasing, with some living to 80 or 90. This has created the critical problem—overcrowding.

BEDS SIDE BY SIDE, ONLY ONE ATTENDANT

Willowbrook School for Retarded Children on Staten Island has a certified capacity of 4,273. Admissions had to be stopped for three months last year when the patient population rose to 6,300.

"The overcrowding is so serious that they have wall-to-wall beds," said Joseph T. Weingold, executive director of the New York

Some low-functioning children grow old in cribs. They are placed into them when first institutionalized and never get out. In Willowbrook there are be-