

Antiquated Plumbing Spotlighted In Shower Death at Willowbrook

By **RAYMOND A. WITTEK**

An investigation into the death of a 10-year-old mentally retarded boy at Willowbrook State School is virtually certain to turn to what one source described as the school's "antiquated plumbing system," it was learned yesterday.

That the school's plumbing system will come under a searching look by investigators became apparent with the disclosure of extensive corrosion in cold water pipes that caused decreases in pressure and sudden changes in water temperature.

The boy, John K. Taylor, one of five children of a Nyack, N. Y., minister, died Friday with 80 per cent of his body covered with burns. He was scalded while being given a shower.

The Taylor boy was the second patient to be fatally burned at the institution under similar circumstances in the past three months.

DR. JACK HAMMOND, school director, was one of several sources that commented on the school's plumbing system.

Dr. Hammond said that replacing the cold water pipes at the institution had been given consideration before his arrival last July.

Dr. Hammond also revealed that the building in which the boy was scalded is near where work was being performed last week and in which the water supply was turned on and off at intermittent periods.

He said his investigation disclosed that this may have loosened material in water pipes which caused clogging of toilet bowls. Several bowls in the building in which the child was scalded were found running and this could have contributed to the water pressure and temperature problem, he said.

Dr. Hammond ruled out the possibility that the water mixing valve of the shower was defective. He said the valve was removed and inspected and found to be in proper working order.

ACCORDING to Dr. Hammond about 4 p.m. Thursday Miss Dorothy Bryson, 18, of 89

Tompkins St., Stapleton, gave the Taylor boy a shower. The boy who weighed only 40 pounds, could not talk or feed himself.

Miss Bryson has been suspended without pay. Formal charges are due to be brought

against her under civil service procedures.

The attendant noticed blisters start to form but did not report it and instead, she dressed the boy.

About 90 minutes later, the attendant observed a cut on the boy's scalp. She reported it to

a supervisor, and the boy was sent to a doctor for treatment, at which time the burns were discovered.

The boy died at 4 a.m. Friday. Police were not notified until after 1 p.m.

Dr. Hammond said that in both the death of the Taylor boy and the earlier death the medical examiner's office was notified and that it was "incumbent on the judgment of the medical examiner," to decide whether to report the case to the police. He said it is a matter of policy that either the medical examiner or the Health Department be notified, depending on the circumstances.

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DISTRICT ATTORNEY John M. Braisted Jr. today began a "protracted investigation" into the death of the Taylor child. The investigation will center on the circumstances surrounding the child's death and into the death last February of the other patient, Frank Harber, 42, who died of burns after being scalded while showering. Braisted said he will question Harber's mother, Mrs. Mary Harber of Brooklyn.

Before questioning Mrs. Harber, Braisted said he will confer with Police Inspector Walter Bracken, in charge of Staten Island detectives, and Dr. Gertrude Wilber, assistant medical examiner who performed an autopsy on the Taylor child.

The state Mental Hygiene Department in Albany said an investigator will be sent to Staten Island shortly to make an official report.