



200 Retarded Tots Housed In Hospital Closed by City



Although photographers were not allowed in the hospital, the World-Telegram's Stanley Wolfson got this picture through a window of a locked door. Children are lying on the floor of the dilapidated building.

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More than 200 mentally retarded children are being housed in dilapidated and obsolete Gouverneur Hospital.

The youngsters—including many infants—have quietly been assigned to Gouverneur since 1962—a year after the city abandoned the grim, fortress-like pile as hopelessly inadequate for use as a hospital.

The boys and girls are part of the youngest age group of patients at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island, which

Sen. Robert F. Kennedy yesterday described as intolerably overcrowded, understaffed and depressingly filthy.

The State Department of Mental Hygiene said that the 67-year-old Gouverneur building on the Lower East Side was leased as a branch of Willowbrook because "the facility lent itself to this age group." Gouverneur was obtained by the state to handle overflow patients from the Staten Island institution.

"We had to have a certain area for these children," a

spokesman said. "It's better to keep them all together."

The spokesman said that young children require special care and must be segregated from older mental retardates. She insisted, however, that the children were provided with ample recreation and other facilities within the ancient former hospital.

"They have all types of activities for the children," the spokesman said. "Toys, games, that sort of thing."

A reporter and photographer were denied permission to tour

the wards. But, stealing a glance into one of the wards from the rear window, the newsmen found a dismal scene.

A half-dozen youngsters were sprawled, semi-clothed, on several mattresses placed on the floor in a virtual throw-back to the snake-pit.

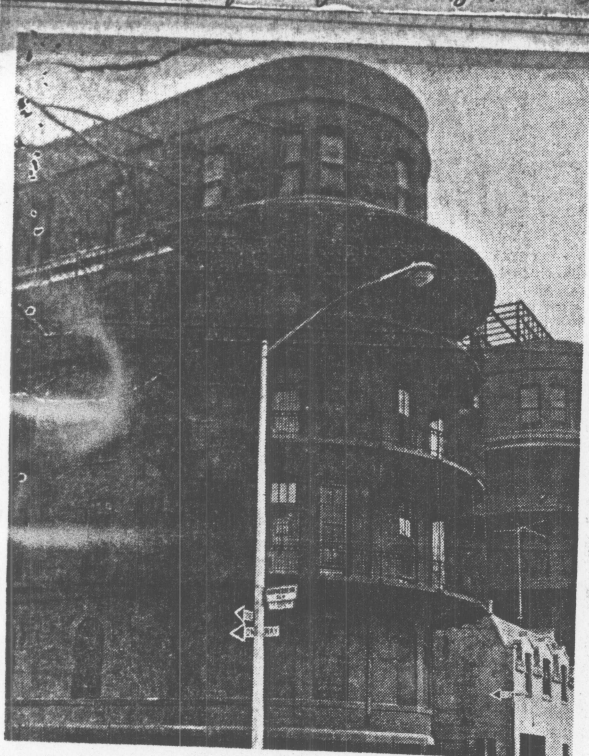
There was no sign of any toys, "recreational activities" or anything cheerful.

The general atmosphere is dreary and depressing.

It would be hard for motor-

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U-shaped rear wards of the turn-of-the-century Gouverneur Hospital house mentally retarded infants. World-Telegram Photos

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ists riding along the East River Drive to believe that the building is occupied. Its sooty screens and incredibly dirty windows block all view of life inside—and shut out daylight.

Before the red-brick, five-story building was closed down by the city, it contained facilities for 100 patients. It now quarters 208 children, the state spokesman said. She said most of the children are less than 5 years old.

The staff is composed of five psychiatrists, one nurse, 113 ward attendants and 62 clerks, maintenance men and guards, the spokesman said.

There are no physicians in residence at the institution.

"Any physical problems are immediately taken care of," the spokesman said, "but no physicians as such are on the roster. Whenever there is any problem because someone is ill, doctors are available from the main school on Staten Island."

At the time the building was closed, it was described as "non-fire-resistant" and its two elevators were termed inadequate under normal use and possibly dangerous in a crisis.

Its U-shaped wards and general construction presented immensely difficult problems in guarding against hospital contagion. Paint was peeling off the walls.

From the time the building, located at 621 Water St., was leased from the city in August, 1961, until the first children were moved in six months later, a general "refurbishing and repainting" was undertaken by the state, the spokesman said. She could not say whether any major renovation was undertaken.

Although she said the children at Gouverneur comprised the total under-five age category at Willowbrook, at least another 1000 infants are also housed in Staten Island buildings.

One of these "baby build-

ings" was toured by reporters yesterday in the wake of the Kennedy disclosures. The building was clean, almost cheerful, but the row-on-row of little white beds and the youngsters who occupied them made a pitiful sight.

Dr. Jack Hammond, Willow-

brook's director, said the children faced a bleak future but termed Kennedy's charges of filth and neglect as "sensational and exaggerated."

He said that the institution needed more money and more personnel to improve conditions and provide better supervision for his 7000 charges.