

# Gouverneur Care Defended By Willowbrook's Director

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook State School on Staten Island, today defended conditions in Gouverneur Hospital.

He said mattresses placed on floors are "therapeutic exercise mats" for children unable to walk. He said such mats are a "very much approved adjunct to treatment."

Declaring that the once-abandoned hospital is "fire resistant," he said the state spent "hundreds of thousands of dollars" renovating the building.

## Sprinklers Installed

Parts of the building have been furnished with a sprinkler system, he said.

In Albany, however, a spokesman for the State Department of Mental Hygiene had been unable to describe what major renovation, if any, had been undertaken at Gouverneur or what it cost.

Hammond admitted that no physician lives there, but said five are assigned to the building, with one always in attendance.

The state spokesman had said that physicians assigned to Gouverneur came from Willowbrook in case of emergency and said none was on the hospital's roster.

Hammond insisted the hospital was not overcrowded, pointing out that cribs take less space than full-sized beds.

"When the city had it," he

said, "the hospital had 350 patients with beds in the hall."

## Below Capacity

A Hospital Department spokesman said that in recent years there was no evidence that it was occupied by anywhere near 350 patients.

In the immediate years before the hospital was closed,

the Hospital Department spokesman said, Governor's average number of daily patients was around 125—which she noted was well below the capacity then of 155 beds.

Even during the admittedly overcrowded post-World War II years, when the hospital's capacity was 172 beds, it aver-

aged 194 patients, she said.

Hammond admitted that the building's exterior was dirty but said this was because it was located "in a heavy industrial area. Two or three days after the windows have been washed," he said, "it looks like they were never washed."

## Retarded Children Housed In Condemned Hospital

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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 was dreary and depressing.

It would be hard for motorists 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 almost all daylight.

Before the red-brick five-story building was closed down by the city, it contained facilities for 155 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 in March 1961, 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.

When the city abandoned the hospital, it was considered beyond hope of being rehabilitated.

Although the state spokesman said the children at Gouverneur represent all of Willowbrook's patients under 5, at least another 1000 infants are also housed in the institution's Staten Island buildings.

One of these "baby buildings" 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, Willowbrook'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 5900 charges.