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The Sun

Local Forecast: Cloudy and cooler today and tonight with scattered showers. Details on Page 2.
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Gouverneur Chief Admits Error

By FELIX KESSLER
Of the World-Telegram Staff

The director of Willowbrook State School has admitted he was mistaken when he said a major renovation program had been undertaken at Gouverneur before mentally retarded children were moved there.

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the Staten Island institution and its Gouverneur Hospital branch, declared yesterday that the state had spent "hundreds of thousands of dollars" to rehabilitate the hospital building after it was abandoned by the city in 1961 as hopelessly inadequate.

But Hammond conceded later that the State Mental Hygiene Department had spent about \$100,000 to refurbish the ancient Lower East Side building — not hundreds of thousands.

"I made a mistake before," he said. "I was confused about the number of zeroes."

'Enormous Expense'

Hammond was obviously stung by the World-Telegram's disclosure that the building which the city gave up as "an enormous expense" to rehabilitate was being used to house 208 mentally retarded children and young people.

He said that the money spent on rehabilitating the 77-year-old hospital building, a turn-of-the-century police station, went for repainting, modernizing, plumbing, installing of fluorescent lights and repairing floors.

"Although it is old," Hammond insisted, Gouverneur "has been restored to a very satisfactory condition."

New Hospital

At first, Hammond described the building as "fire resistant" and said that several parts of the building had been equipped with a sprinkler system.

Later, he said that only one part of the five-story structure — the basement and dumbwaiter shaft — had the sprinkler system.

Hammond did not make clear how the state had completely renovated the building for only \$100,000 after the city's Hospital Department decided it was prohibitively expensive to modernize it adequately — and instead decided to build a new \$3 million Gouverneur Hospital.

He asserted that it was now hoped to transfer children at Gouverneur to other institutions in "5 to 10 years."

'Terrific Expense'

Originally, when the building was leased in August, 1961, the state said it would be used on a temporary basis only for 2 to 5 years.

If the building were not safe, he said, it would have been shut down by the Fire and Buildings Departments. He said that the building's two elevators were modernized "at a terrific expense," but could not give the exact cost.

He added that the elevators would not have received insurance coverage, as they have, if they were not safe.

"If a child of mine were retarded," he said, "I would prefer to have him here rather than Willowbrook (on Staten Island) because it is less crowded and there is more personal care."

Newsmen Barred

Neither Hammond nor anyone else connected with the state explained why they did not immediately bring up

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