

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1965

Obsolete Then, Obsolete Now

When Gouverneur Hospital, on the Lower East Side was shut down by the city in 1961, the action was anything but premature. And anything but casual. Files show that as long ago as 1946 the Federal Works Agency advanced funds toward three new city hospitals, one of which was to replace Gouverneur.

But nothing happened, except that Gouverneur continued its downhill slide. In 1952 Rudolph Halley, then City Council president, assailed the city's neglect of its hospitals and cited Gouverneur as a perfect example of "hospitals so outdated that they are worse than obsolete."

Three years later the Hospital Council of Greater New York recommended that the place be closed.

Considering the glacial tempo of municipal government, it's not surprising that six more years had to elapse before the hospital was finally closed in 1961 after the Hospital Council urgently restated its recommendation — and just about everybody in political and professional authority agreed that the place was indeed inadequate, obsolete and hazardous.

Even at that, the decision was vigorously resisted in the neighborhood. It is a measure of the building's sorry condition that, despite these pressures in an election year, Gouverneur was nonetheless closed. The idea of rehabilitating it for even a brief reprieve was discarded as impractical, prohibitive, a waste of money.

Yet, before the year was out, the city agreed to lease the premises to the state for housing an overflow of retarded children from the Willowbrook School on Staten Island.

The state, in turn, agreed to refurbish

the interior of the 1898 structure to make it livable.

This, mind you, was something the city had despaired of attempting. But the justification for the arrangement, as expressed by a spokesman for the Department of Hospitals, was that the state's use of the building would be for a "temporary" period—of two to five years.

Well, it's four years later. The state's improvements have been minimal, its tenancy expectations maximal.

With more than 200 retarded youngsters cooped up in this dingy, ugly relic, the director estimates that it can't be vacated for another 10 years.

That goes far beyond any conventional concept of "temporary" — and explicitly far beyond the city's original understanding of two to five years.

Clearly it was a mistake to have reopened the institution at all. It was definitely obsolete in 1961 — and much earlier. The passage of four years has made it no younger.

It may be that conditions within the building are relatively bearable today, but it's doubtful whether they were a week ago.

When the World-Telegram spotlighted the situation last Friday, a worker at the hospital told this newspaper later in the day: "They got everybody working like hell to clean it up. This place was filthy. Now they're scrubbing floors. They're afraid Kennedy might come and visit."

If we've helped get the place visitor-clean, fine. But what it really needs is final abandonment, followed by demolition. By default of his subordinates, this is now up to Gov. Rockefeller.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR Plight of the Retarded

I was horrified to see the picture of the retarded children housed in Gouverneur Hospital. Compared with these atolezal little forms, Viet Nam refugee children are abundantly healthy. Can these conditions possibly be tolerated in New York City? Is there no authority to protect helpless and sick babies from such a ghastly fate?

How providential it is that Sen. Kennedy has brought these conditions to light, and I think fervently hope that, apart from any political motives, he will pursue this dreadful state of affairs until it is rectified.

No decent human being who is in a position to do anything about rescuing these children should rest until all the wrongs have been undone.

MRS. MICHAEL J. O'LEARY
Crestwood

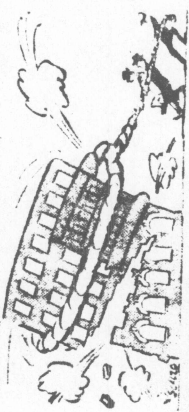
Conditions exposed this past week at state institutions for the mentally ill show a callousness to the needs of unfortunate youngsters and adults, hard to believe.

The time has come for a full and detailed investigation of the conditions which exist in our prisons and hospitals. Such an examination must be aimed at not only short-range immediate improvements in living conditions but also at arriving at detailed programs directed toward giving meaning to the lives of the people in these institutions.

In our mental hospitals genuine love and concern must be evidenced for those who may never be able to live normal lives. . . . Even if those mentally ill may have limited hopes for the future, all of us have a responsibility to keep their hopes alive and to help to see them realized. No one in our society is too unimportant to be forgotten or ill-treated.

STEVEN LELEIKO
Brooklyn

Your suggestion to raze the old Gouverneur Hospital is a good one.



Residents of New York City would welcome the demolition of the casero from without and cancer within.