

Parents Call Gouverneur Depressing

By FELIX KESSLER

Of the World-Telegram Staff

Although they praise the medical care, relatives of retarded children at Gouverneur Hospital describe the turn-of-the-century institution as a "depressing place" for its 208 pitifully handicapped patients.

"It's an old building—what else can you say?" said one grandmother. "If anything can be done about it, then they should do it."

It was visitor's day at the Lower East Side hospital yesterday, an occasion for parents to "show love and understanding to children who will probably spend the rest of their lives in an institution.

Demolition Urged

One expert intimately familiar with Gouverneur has described it as "an old, rotten building (which) should be torn down." Gouverneur is used by the state to house the overflow from almost 7000 patients at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island.

This expert has charged that the rusty balconies ringing the five-story building are "unsafe" and cannot be used to provide the children with badly needed fresh air.

One young couple took their daughter in a wheelchair to a nearby park bench. Obviously happy at being allowed out, the child rocked on her father's lap and played with her brother yesterday.

Of her 13-year-old granddaughter, Mrs. Sarah Silverstein said that the child

receives "much better care and looks better than she did at Willowbrook."

"The building has improved since the newspaper stories began," Mrs. Silverstein said.

Called Depressing

Another grandmother, Mrs. Jane Girardi, said the staff was considerate and her grandchild looked "wonderful" because of the medical care.

"But the building is depressing," she said.

In the wake of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's charges of "snake-pit" conditions at Willowbrook, the World-Telegram disclosed last month that the 67-year-old Gouverneur was being utilized to house the most severely handicapped.

Parents whose children have been fed, clothed and cared for at Gouverneur were obviously reluctant to criticize conditions there. And it was clear that the youngsters were receiving better attention than at Willowbrook.

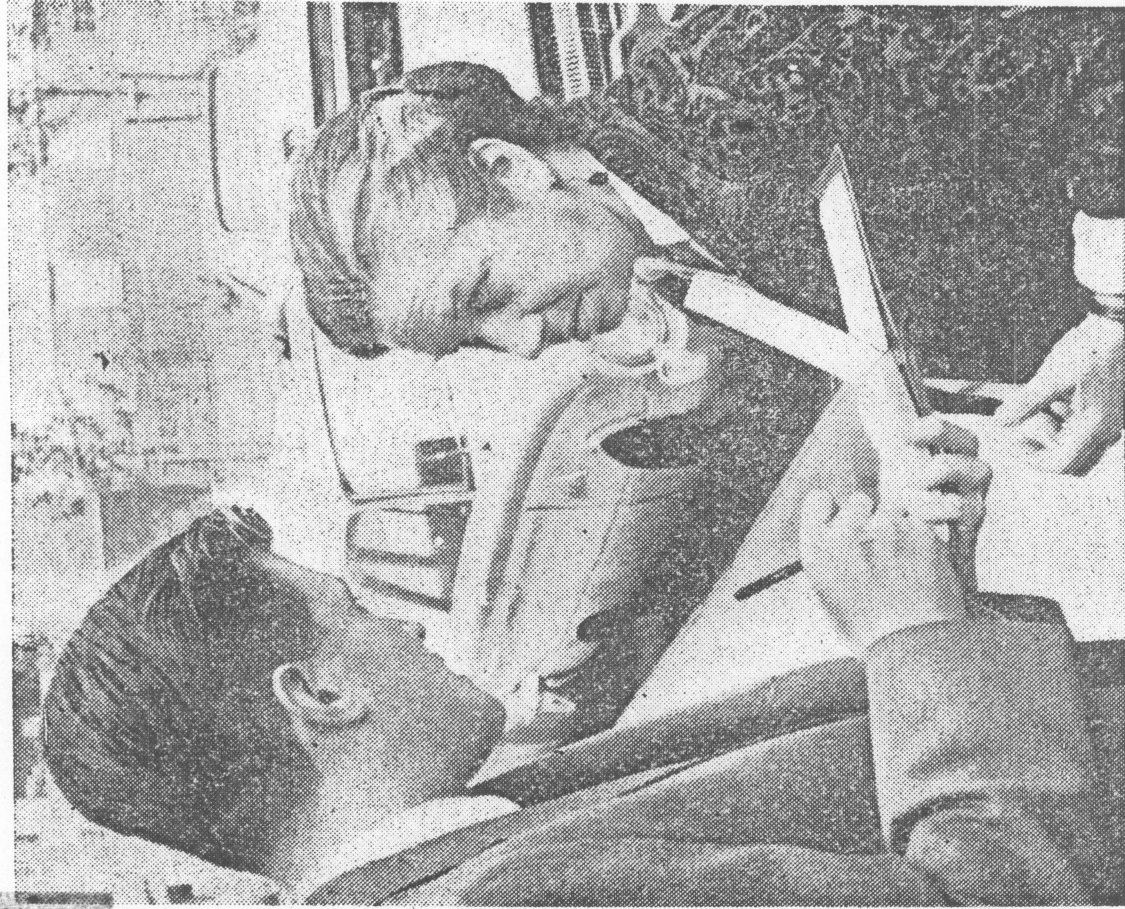
"My child has been here two years and her appearance is very good," said Mrs. Eneida Gonzalez. "She looks healthy."

She said her seven-year-old daughter was receiving better medical attention at Gouverneur than at Willowbrook, from which she had transferred.

Favors New Building

But Mrs. Gonzalez agreed that the building should be replaced. "I think it's better to have a new one," she said.

The State Department of Mental Hygiene has leased Gouverneur from the city since



World-Telegram Photo

Mrs. Jane Girardi, on her way to visit grandchild at Gouverneur Hospital, talks to World-Telegram reporter Felix Kessler.

1961 for \$13,000 a year as a temporary measure to relieve overcrowding at Willowbrook.

But state officials have conceded that Gouverneur might be in use for another 5 to 10 years because of a lack of adequate new facilities.