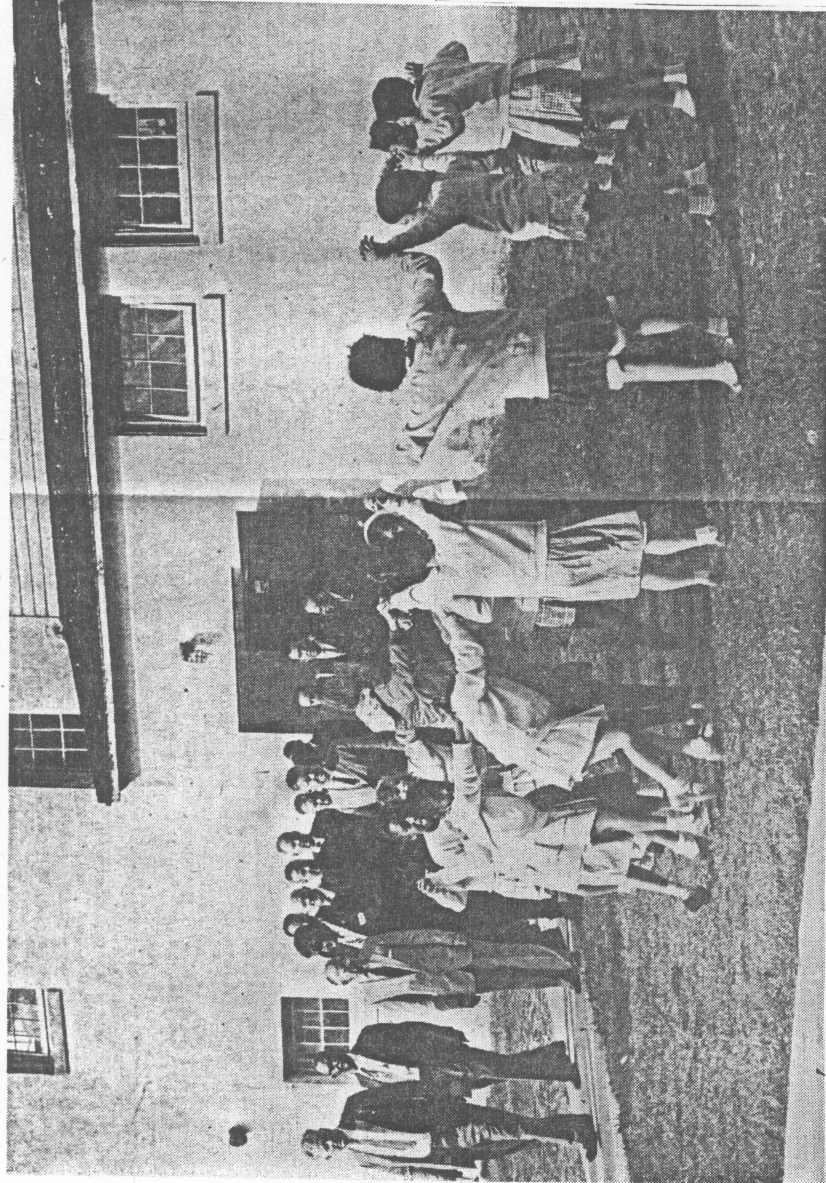


*Staten Island Review*

# Willowbrook Relief Year Away



Grand jurors filing out of the gym at Willowbrook pause to watch a group of girls at their games. The panel probing conditions at the state school visited wards and classrooms in their visit. S.I. Advance Photo by Berry G. Schwartz

By MARK WIESNER

The opening of a new state institution for the retarded in Suffolk County tomorrow will not ease overcrowding at Willowbrook for at least six months, it was learned yesterday.

Gov. Rockefeller said Suffolk State School's opening would relieve conditions at Willowbrook, but it was learned that transfer of patients from Willowbrook to Suffolk is some time off.

"I expect it will be six to 12 months before Suffolk will be able to take patients from here," Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook's director said.

A Richmond County grand jury had a first-hand look at conditions at the overcrowded

and understaffed Staten Island institution yesterday.

**THE SURPRISE** visit of the jury came coincidentally on the heels of the governor's announcements of measures to reduce overcrowding and improve patient care.

Rockefeller approved additional jobs for teachers and therapists and gave the State Department of Mental Hygiene a Dec. 1 deadline to submit to him a list of facilities in the New York City area, which could be rehabilitated for use in housing Willowbrook's overflow.

Facilities to house 500 to 1,000 patients are being sought, Hammond said. Patients who were formerly at Willowbrook have been sent to Bronx State

Hospital to await Suffolk's opening, but it will be at least 6 months before any of Willowbrook's current population of 5,900 can be transferred there.

Willowbrook has a certified capacity of 4,500.

The grand jury investigation was prompted by accidental deaths at the school, and the jurors toured the building where two deaths occurred and saw conditions representative of those attacked by U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy last month.

But the panel stayed long enough—in the words of Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook's director—to "see what the senator didn't say long enough."

That officials at the institution are doing all they can do with the manpower and equipment available. But there's no question they need more financial assistance from the state."

**BRAISTED** went on to say that he saw evidence of dedicated and conscientious work of employees.

In addition to trying to help prevent such accidents as those that prompted the inquiry, its aim is to acquaint the public with what goes on at the institution and to "help Dr. Hammond improve conditions," Braisted stated.

He paid tribute to Hammond for "cooperating fully and holding back nothing."

Hammond, who led the grand jurors, members of the D.A.'s staff and reporters on the tour of the wards and buildings, said the job positions approved by the governor represent only "a beginning."

The department has already been looking at a number of facilities in the city which can be rehabilitated for use," Hammond said.

"One of the things being considered is the possibility of leasing or purchasing stainless steel, pre-fabricated buildings, similar to portable classrooms."

Hammond said it would be better if additional facilities were erected on the state school grounds where there have been

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**District Attorney John M. Braisted Jr.** at the close of the  
visit, said he was "convinced  
that officials at the "institution  
are doing all they can do with  
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grounds, where "we have focus  
for care of the children, rather  
than an old building in Brook-  
lyn."

**THE DIRECTOR** said he  
was particularly heartened by ap-  
proval of the new positions,  
which will make it possible for  
more youngsters to engage in  
activities.

"Without activities, without  
stimulation, Willowbrook be-  
comes a warehouse for humans,  
rather than a school," Ham-  
mond declared.

He said he hoped to be able  
to fill more than half the posi-  
tions within a year. He noted  
that reductions of overcrowding  
and improved conditions might  
make it easier to find at-  
tendants for jobs now vacant.

The grand jurors—who ar-  
rived by chartered bus in the  
morning—first went the build-  
ing 27, where 10-year-old John  
K. Taylor was fatally burned  
last Ma.

They examined the shower  
stall where he was scalded and  
the underground piping of the  
water supply system. They also  
saw Building 2, where 42-year-  
old Frank Harber died last  
February when another patient  
pushed his wheelchair into a  
scalding bath.

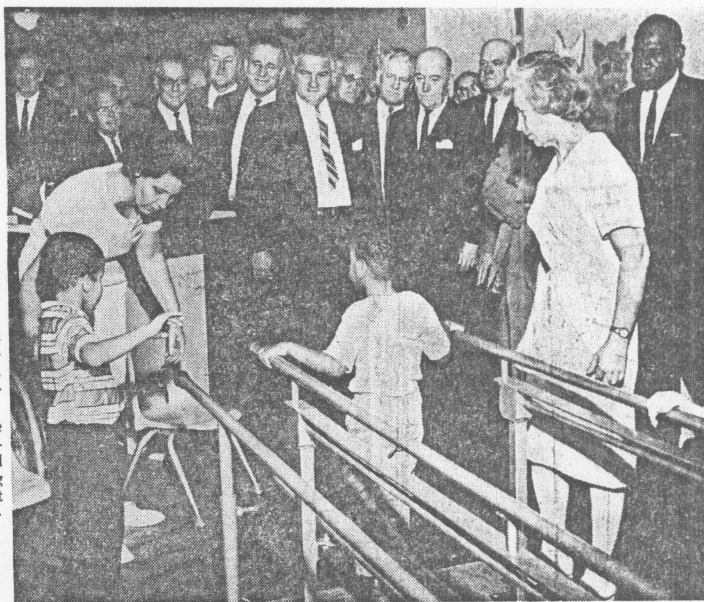
**THE OTHER SIDE** of Wil-  
lowbrook emerged in visits to  
the school facility and occupa-

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District Attorney John M. Braisted Jr., left, and Detective Vincent O'Grady inspect the shower where 10-year-old John K. Taylor was scalded to death last May in Willowbrook State School. The water cannot be turned on without the use of a key.

S.I. Advance Photos by Barry G. Schwartz



The panel watches physical therapists teaching retarded youngsters, who are also physically handicapped, how to walk.

tional therapy and physical  
therapy rooms.

In the school room, jurors ap-  
plauded a class of blind chil-  
dren who sang "Allegheny  
Moon." They also saw young-  
sters reading schoolbooks and a  
class of children with defective  
hearing learning how to speak  
and read.

"It would be quite a thing,"

Hammond said, "if we had  
enough help to have them all  
in activities, rather than in  
wards of 150 to 200 like you  
saw this morning."

Many of the patients get little  
or no activity, Hammond said,  
"all could benefit from it."  
IT was 3:30 p.m. before the 21-  
man and one-woman jury board-  
ed a bus to leave the institution.

It was evident that they had  
gained a new perspective and  
broader appreciation of the  
complexities of the school's  
operation.

The grand jury will resume  
next Tuesday when Dr. Ham-  
mond will be called to testify.  
Its investigation will go on at  
least "to the end of the year,"  
the district attorney said.