

News Chronology

... JULY 1964, Dr. Jack Hammond M.D. is appointed Director of the Willowbrook State School. The resident population, according to Dr. Hammond, is 6,247 with 2,130 staff members. Dr. Hammond promises to decrease population and increase staff.

... 1965, Senator Robert Kennedy visits Willowbrook and calls national attention to conditions at Willowbrook and accuses the State of a poor attitude towards the retarded.

... SUMMER 1968, The International Union For Advancement charges the civil service employees union at Willowbrook with not protecting the interests of black employees. An all black union is formed and Eager Smith, Recreation Department staff member, is elected president.

... OCTOBER 31, 1969, The I.U.A. takes case of employees Jacobs and Dudley, fired and charged with un-authorized absence from work, before the State Commission On Human Rights. The State Commission finds the administration acted in a discriminatory manner and ruled that the two attendants be re-instated.

... APRIL 1970, A "Place" is not a home - writer for the S.I. Register and former Willowbrook assistant teacher describes deliberate harassment techniques of the administration and its effect on the life of the institution. Willowbrook responds by calling the writer a "disgruntled" employee.

... SEPTEMBER 10, 1970, Memo from the State Department of Mental Hygiene to directors of State schools and hospitals: "WE believe that information on drugs and devices designed to regulate conception should be available to patients and that their availability should be common knowledge to patient groups."

... JUNE 1970, Institutional report-8/70 birth of child to female patient building 32; second child born... reported pregnant again 12/70: threatens to commit suicide. pregnant patient in Building 32 runs away. Three more girls found pregnant.

... SEPTEMBER 1970, Baby born to patient in Building 32, second child to mother; First child admitted to Willowbrook, identified as retarded, second child to foster care. Female patient in Building 32 leaves for mother's home to have child within month.

... OCTOBER 1970, Report of two births to female patients in Building 32. Memo to directors state schools and hospitals from the State Department of Mental Hygiene: "Therapeutic Termination of Pregnancies of Women Patients." 1. Abortions may be carried out by qualified specialists in obstetrics and gynecology; 2. The woman should understand the nature of her pregnancy and the difficulty of her situation.

... DECEMBER 1, 1970, Sharon Smalls dies in Building 14 after choking on particle of food at breakfast feeding.

... 1971, State fails 30 staff members who have taken test for the occupational therapy department. State claims that positions are not needed and will be eliminated. Workers protest ruling and State agrees to review test and make ruling.

... SEPTEMBER 1971, Memo from head of Social Service Department to director of W.S.S.: "People are working in staff homes at sub-standard wages and should be working in outside programs or vocational training." Reply from Dr. Hammond to head of Social Service Department: "We will talk with staff members who are involved and a meeting will be set up between those persons and yourself."

... NOVEMBER 13, 1971, Parents protest conditions as result of budget cuts. Dr. Hammond attributes the insufficient supervision of patients "to deteriorating services due to the loss of 500 employees, whose positions could not be filled under New York State's job freeze and to absenteeism.

... NOVEMBER 20, 1971, Staten Island Assemblyman Edward J. Amann, who claimed that he first heard of the critical condition of the institution through articles in the Daily, orders a State probe for Willowbrook.

... DECEMBER 3, 1971, Memo from Director W.S.S. to Social Service Department: "You are hereby informed that no staff is to meet with parents during working hours or after hours without the permission of the Director.

... DECEMBER 6, 1971, Memo from Social Service Department to Director W.S.S.: "We request permission as of your memo December 3, 1971 to meet with parents of children in Building 6." - No reply.

... DECEMBER 16, 1971, State may lose Federal Medicaid reimbursements due to the failure to meet Federal standards. "For the kind of health standards set by Medicaid," said Dr. Hammond, "We would have to tear the institution down and construct entirely new facilities."

... DECEMBER 16, 1971, Mark Past, writer from the S.I. Register interviews Dr. Koch, professor of pediatrics at the University of S. California School of Medicine and Director of the Regional Center for the Mentally Retarded at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles. Dr. Koch was brought to Staten Island to explore alternatives to the present New York system dealing with retarded children.

... DECEMBER 23, 1971, Register reporter John Signorile reports the Benevolent Society, whose members have child residence at the school, have been meeting with Dr. Hammond, in an attempt to have him declare the institution a medical disaster area.

... DECEMBER 28, 1971, Federation of Parents Organizations demand that county district attorneys check on neglect. Max Schneider, chairman of the Federation, referred to an admission by Dr. Hammond that three or four deaths each month are attributable to a child's choking on his food.

... DECEMBER 1971, Dr. Manny Sternlicht, Ph.D. and Dr. Milton Jacobs, M.D. question resident Bernard Carabello about his visits with Dr. Wilkins doctor of building 6. Bernard was reported to have told a social worker that the two doctors allegedly asked him if he had sexual relations with Dr. Wilkins and threatened him with being locked away if he did not answer.

Dr. Wilkins states that he had taken Bernard to the community school for cerebral palsy and did not know that he had to have official permission. Carabella has since been officially registered at UCP school.

... JANUARY 5, 1972, Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, social worker at W.S.S. receives notification from safety officer: "Your services as Psychiatric Social Worker are terminated at end of working day January 5, 1971."

... JANUARY 6, 1972, The public is officially informed that a Dr. M. Wilkins and Mrs. E. Lee, professional staff members at the school, were dismissed by the school's director.

Dr. Hammond was reported to have refused to answer any questions pertaining to the firing of the two employees, he had privately referred to as "troublemakers."

... JANUARY 6, 1972, 62 Black and Puerto Rican ward attendants are transferred from their assigned buildings. A supervising official stated at the CSEA meeting held that week that all 62 attendants were transferred in a conversation with nine of them that no further transfers would be made.

... JANUARY 11, 1972, Parents Benevolent Society demands to Dr. Hammond:

1. Reinstatement of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee.
2. Demand written charges.
3. Lee and Wilkins become permanent employees.
4. Open hearing before an independent panel if there are written charges.
5. No further firing of professionals without written charges.
6. Recognize the right of active parent participation.
7. Revocation of all directives concerning parental contacts.
8. Policy statement supporting parental contacts.
9. Declaration of Willowbrook as a disaster area.
10. Lift of budget freeze.
11. Stop all admissions to Willowbrook.

... JANUARY 11, 1972, Parents hold a rally at Willowbrook school started at Victory Blvd. with brief blocking of traffic and ended with a storming of the institution. Placards were carried demanding the reinstatement of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee.

... JANUARY 13, 1972, I.U.A. issues press release: "The first concern of the International Union For Advancement at Willowbrook is that the over 5,000 patients receive proper care. At present, due to recent budget cuts, 1,805 (approximately 451 per shift for 5,000 patients) attendants, working in four shifts are responsible for the care of these patients. On November 30, 1970 there were 3,349 employees at Willowbrook, and this was reduced to 2,844 by November 30, 1971. The ward service lost the most of these 505 employees.

... JANUARY 14, 1972, Union leader pins blame on Albany: Thomas P. Delaney, head of the school's chapter of the Civil Service Employees Assoc. criticized those who are ready to put the blame on attendants. "We would like the good work of the attendants shown as well as the bad conditions." He added, "We agree with those parents who have shown concern and are working for improvement, but unfortunately they are in the minority."

... JANUARY 14, 1972, Calling the situation at Willowbrook "impossible" Eager Smith, president of the I.U.A., charged that the CSEA did not raise much resistance about the cuts.

The IUA announces the start of a counseling program to be run with the assistance of the S.I. Urban League office. Residents from W.S.S. who have been classified as delinquents (approximately 55) will participate at the Urban League office. At present, approximately 16 are enrolled.

... JANUARY 14, 1972, Governor Rockefeller announced the appropriation of \$5 million, borrowed from next year's budget, to be used to ease the bad conditions at the state facilities. Willowbrook is to receive 300 jobs as a result of the \$5 million appropriation.

... JANUARY 15, 1972, Associated Press Article- "William Donovan, a staff official of the Office of Patient Resources at the Hudson River School Hospital, said patients are charged \$21 a day collected from relatives insurance and in some cases through Medicare.