

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.

"But," he said, "the money does not go directly for patient care. The funds, which total more than \$124 million, not counting state money, are used to pay off bonds floated for the construction of mental health facilities" and, in some cases, highway construction.

... JANUARY 16, 1972, Parents get show cause order to rescind director's memo of December 3, 1971.

... Willowbrook given top priority by state, an additional 300 persons will be hired.

... JANUARY 17, 1972, Dr. Hammond reports that the dollar situation at Willowbrook looks "gloomy." \$300,000 worth of bills outstanding. "The writing is on the wall. Willowbrook will have to resort to cutting back on personal care for patients to scrape up the \$300,000."

... JANUARY 17, 1972, Dr. Hammond was reported to have rescinded the memo of December 3, 1971. Judge Garbarino grants the state attorney general a week's extension to draw up new guidelines for staff meeting with parents.

... JANUARY 27, 1972, Benevolent Society passes a resolution calling for the dismissal of Dr.'s Hammond, Sternlicht and Jacobs. It is reported that Lee and Wilkins are reinstated and that Dr. Hammond has been fired. A group of employees stages a walk-out and holds a rally to show their support for Dr. Hammond.

... Judge Garbarino grants state a second extension to finish new guidelines. Legal aid attorney Robert Feldt states that Dr. Hammond's desire to approve meetings held by staff and parents is unacceptable.

... JANUARY 29, 1972, Unsigned pamphlet alluding to political ties and personalities of Dr.'s Wilkins and Bronston distributed to all patient buildings. "All Parents Unite! Don't let Dr. Hammond be forced out. Who Will Be Next?"

... SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 1972. Employees are posted to explain and distribute unsigned pamphlet to visiting parents in building lobbies.

... JANUARY 31, 1972, first day of hearings held by the S.I. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Roro Hall.

Presiding over the hearings are Councilman Biondillo, Councilman Poste, Anthony Gaeta, and Father John Serviddio.

Dr. Hammond was the only person testifying and he explained the difficulties in communicating with the State Department of Mental Hygiene. He read several letters and memos sent from his office to show his many attempts to appraise Albany of the conditions at Willowbrook.

Councilman Postel asked Dr. Hammond about pregnancies and abortions. Dr. Hammond said that there is an average of three a year and no abortions.

... FEBRUARY 1, 1972, Memo from director Hammond: To all employees: "First let me assure you that I am still Director of Willowbrook. Be especially wary of unsigned, scurrilous printed materials. They do us no good; in fact, they do us great harm."

... Rally of employees during day shift and evening shift. Employee rally during day showed feelings against reinstatement of two fired employees. A standing ovation was given at the night rally when the names of the two employees were mentioned.

... Attendant Barbara Wright testified at the S.P.C.C. hearings concerning the death of Sharon Smalls. Miss Wright explained how the child began to choke while being fed. "We wheeled Sharon in her crib to the treatment room and told the nurse that she was choking and should be suctioned."

"The nurse, Miss Barton, gave Sharon an injection and told us to administer oxygen. The phone rang and the nurse went to answer it. She was gone for ten minutes and in that time it appeared that Sharon was dead."

Miss Wright could not say officially that Sharon Smalls was dead because the doctor must give the official word. Miss Wright finished her testimony by saying that when she went to Dr. Jacobs concerning the child's death he threw up his hands and said, "It is not my problem."

... FEBRUARY 4, 1972, "After six days of intensive discussion," Dr. Miller, Commissioner of State Dept. of Mental Hygiene announced that, "In the best interest of maintaining patient care and employee morale, the two dismissed provisional employees would not be re-employed at Willowbrook State School."

... FEBRUARY 4, 1972, Wilkins and Lee will not testify. Ira Raab, attorney for the SPCC panel said: "The panel is considering bringing appropriate legal action in the state courts to compel these uncooperative witnesses to appear and give sworn testimony to support their public accusations."

... FEBRUARY 4, 1972, Dr. Jack Hammond shows the medical record of Sharon Smalls. He indicates that the data for the three days prior to her death was not entered in her record. "This is the responsibility of the same people who are making the complaint."

Dr. Jacobs testified that her cause of death was Bronchial Pneumonia.

... FEBRUARY 5, 1972, The Willowbrook Rally Committee holds rally in Willowbrook Park. A crowd of 250-300 people heard the speeches of Congressman Murphy, S.I.; Congresswoman Bella Abzug; Assemblyman Koch.

... FEBRUARY 6, 1972, Councilman Frank Biondillo charged that "a deal" had been made by the state with two dismissed employees to reinstate them and oust the school's director, Dr. J. Hammond, "within six weeks."

... FEBRUARY 7, 1972, Assemblyman Andrew Stein (D-Man.) introduced a bill in Albany to upgrade and revamp the care of the mentally retarded and to give authority voice to the patients in setting policy for local programs.

... FEBRUARY 8, 1972, Gene Eisner, lawyer for Wilkins and Lee, told of a conversation he had with Dr. Miller, Mental Hygiene Commissioner, on January 29th. "Dr. Miller told me that Dr. Hammond had given a lifetime of devoted service and that he would like to be able to allow him to leave with dignity."

... FEBRUARY 10, 1972, Rep. Edward I. Koch (D-Man.) has suggested that state institutions such as Willowbrook State School to institute a program of their patients' actual in-depth appraisal.

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