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Undercover Agent's Work at Rome School Led to Arrest of Employes

Special to The New York Times

ROME, N. Y., May 18—The state police arrested 20 employes of the Rome State School today on charges of abusing dozens of the institution's mentally retarded residents. Four other employes were still being sought.

The arrests came as the result of a four-month investigation by a state trooper who worked as an undercover agent at the school, according to Richard D. Enders, the Oneida County District Attorney. He stressed that school administrators had requested the investigation and had cooperated

Both the state police and Mr. Enders refused to specify how the victims — all male, ranging in age from 7 to 75— had been abused. The school began looking into the problem last August after a parent complained that on a visit home, a child had marks on his body,

apparently from a beating.

According to Harold Wolfe, an assistant state mental hygiene commissioner, the 22 male and two female employes charged in the sealed indictments returned Thursday by an Oneida County grand jury were

The school has about 3,000 residents and 2,200 employes, he said, characterizing the general level of care as "good."

A statement by the State De-

A statement by the State Department of Mental Hygiene said in part: "In a group of over 2,200 employes, a few may prove to be unsuitable to work with mentally retarded people. Most of the employes are qualified to provide care and treatment to the mentally retarded and perform their duties capably and humanely."

Dr. George J. Buchholtz, acting director of the Rome school, stressed that state law did not permit physical discipline of residents at the institution Noting the number of employes in the school, Dr. Buchholtz said there would be "a few who are sadistic or who have personalities unsuited to this type of work."

Mr. Wolfe said this was believed to be the first such case involving a large group of employes of a state mental institution.

Mr. Enders said all the 24 accused employes were Oneida County residents. Most of them worked as attendants at the school; some were in charge of wards. The undercover trooper observed five of the institution's 16 buildings during his stay, working as an orderly.

Mr. Enders refused to com-

Mr. Enders refused to comment on whether the arrests indicated a pattern of mistreatment at the school. However, he said it was hoped the arrests "will serve as an effective deterrent against any and all future abuse of residents in our state schools."

Mr. Wolfe said the school's residents included a smaller proportion of "severely" retarded people than did Willowbrook, on Staten Island, the state's largest school for the mentally retarded, which has been the subject of charges and countercharges involving mistreatment of children. One of the state's oldest institutions, the Rome facility was opened in 1895.

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