

Willowbrook resident missing in Pennsylvania

By ROBERT MIRALDI

A 43-year-old woman resident of Willowbrook Developmental Center strolled out of a camp for the retarded in a thickly wooded area of northern Pennsylvania 17 days ago and has not been seen or heard from since that sunny morning.

Despite a massive air, land and water search that has involved more than 200 persons, Louisa Burdi, a mildly retarded, high functioning center resident, has not been found.

"It's very likely that she got picked up by a passing car," said Cpl. Joseph Moraz of the Pennsylvania state police, which has coordinated the 12-state alert-search. "At least, that's what we're hoping.

"We would have been able to spot her if she was in the woods," Moraz added, referring to the intensive four-day search which had Pennsylvania's lone bloodhound sniffing through the woods and a helicopter scouring the rocky, hilly terrain.

Perhaps hardest hit by the disappearance of Miss Burdi from Camp Rosemont in Honesdale, Pa. (near Scranton), has been her 86-year-old father, who lives in Brooklyn.

Burdi would come to visit his daughter, a Willowbrook resident for 19 years, every other week, according to

James Stanley, the director of the building where she had lived before departing for a week's stay at the Pennsylvania camp.

"He's pretty despondent," Stanley said yesterday. "We're very much aware of what she means to him. I'm not giving up hope."

Stanley pointed with hope to the case of Marguerite Sass, a 28-year-old resident who was lost for six days on a trip to Manhattan, but was found by police in Penn Station after, apparently, being cared for by someone.

Miss Sass was also a resident of Building 23, Miss

Burdi's residence. "I just hope," Stanley said, "there will be a positive ending to this. You just couldn't ask for a sweeter person.

"Everyone is hoping that she was picked up by a car. But anything is possible," Stanley remarked about the plight of Miss Burdi, who he described as well-liked, friendly, helpful and able to tell her name. "She probably would say she lives at Willowbrook."

As far as police have been able to determine, no one has seen her; there have been no positive identifications and only one lead has turned up in the 17 days since she walked out of the camp.

Police reconstruct the walk-out and subsequent search this way:

Miss Burdi and a group of residents were walking to the camp laundry at 11:30 a.m. Aug. 20. A counselor was with the group, but Miss Burdi apparently meandered away from the laundry site and into the woods.

Police say that within 10 to 15 minutes after her disappearance, officials reported to authorities who immediately came to the Wayne County campgrounds and began interviewing persons to find out

what had happened.

The search began the next day. A state police bloodhound, Clancy, was brought in and given a sniff of Miss Burdi's clothes. Off he went into the trails, but the much used trails apparently had many scents. Clancy got tired, police said, and the canine search team went home when darkness fell.

That same day, however, a 30-member team of volunteers from the Civilian Air Patrol took to the woods, but to no avail.

As the search continued, groups included the state police, camp counselors, the C.A.P., the National Guard, state helicopters and four horsemen. An adjacent pond was

eventually dredged and radio and television stations and newspapers joined the effort with accounts of her disappearance and showing her photograph.

By the weekend, according to police, the search units, mostly volunteers, were in full force — upwards of 200 — but still no sign of Miss Burdi.

Aug. 25, the only lead was turned up when a neighboring resident reported hearing and seeing someone outside his home. Clancy was brought back by helicopter the next

day and spent the day sniffing without any luck.

After that lead did not pan out, Cpl. Moraz said, the search became a "disheartening thing," and many of the volunteers had to return to work.

Miss Burdi was wearing a tan trenchcoat and a red dress with blue paisley markings. She has short brown hair and is 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighs 135 pounds. "She could be anywhere," Stanley said. "We're just hoping."