

# Retarded center torched after opening announced

By ROBERT A. WILLIAMS

Fire and police investigators combed Dongar Hills this morning for clues to the identity of arsonists who last night set fire to a neighborhood building — plagued with suspicious fires — that was to serve as a day center for retarded persons.

The structure, a two-story brick building at 26 Ducent Ave., near Hylan Blvd., was to have been used as a satellite facility of the Staten Island Developmental Center to provide counseling, therapy and recreation programs for 200 retarded persons. A blaze May 1 caused no-demon damage and the facility was scheduled to open in a few weeks.

Fire marshals said this morning that a liquid was used to set several separate and distinct fires in the newly renovated building.

Two firefighters were injured, not seriously, while fighting the blaze.

Last night's fire was reportedly the fourth in less than six months. Two fires were out or not caused little damage.

No arrests have been made in any of the blazes.

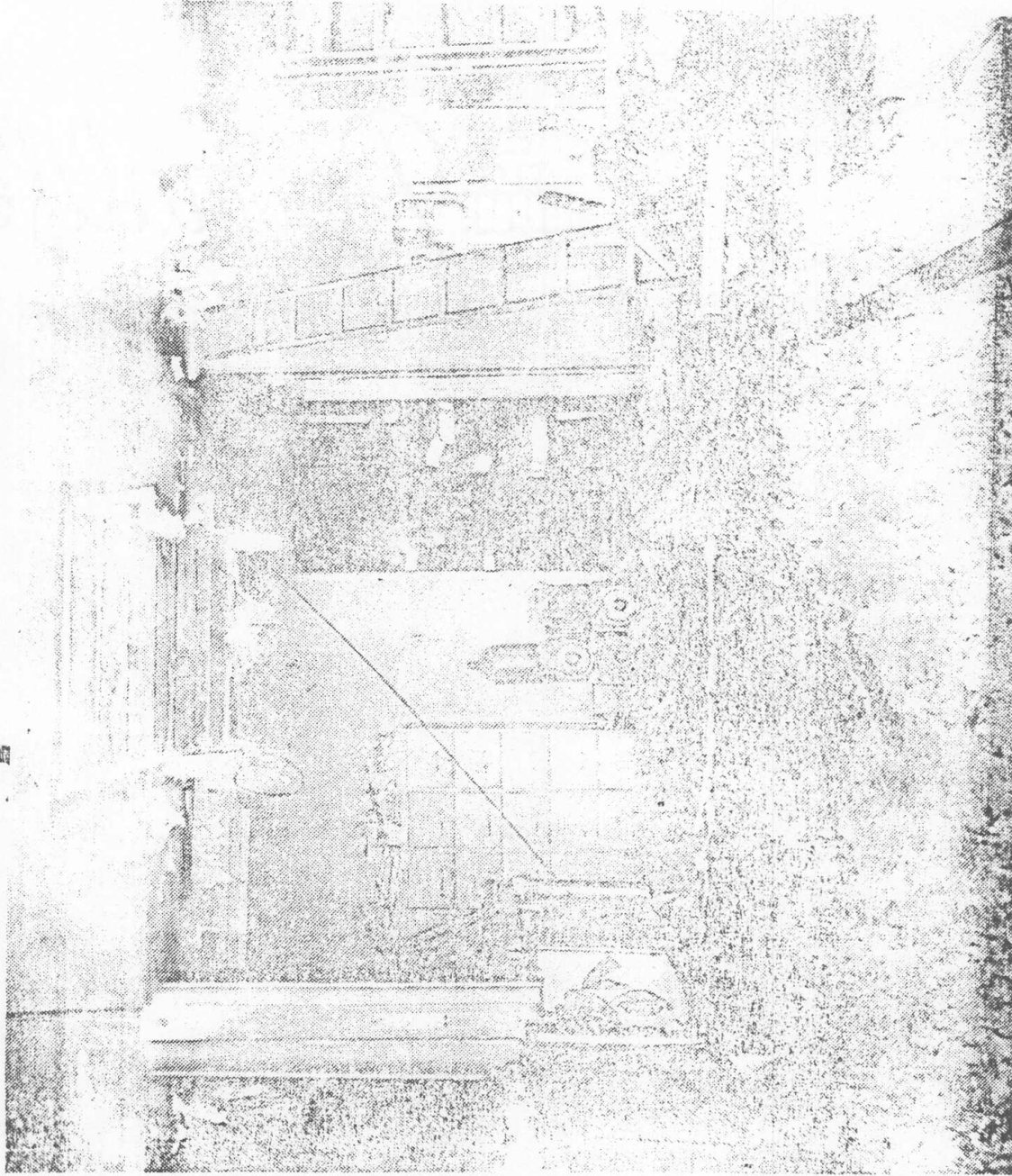
"I ordered marshals to begin their investigation immediately because of the nature of past fires in that building," said Deputy Chief Warren Haring, second in command of Island firefighters.

Chief Haring, off duty at the time in his Grant City home, was listening to a fire radio when he heard the address of the fire.

"I didn't know anything about the blaze, except the address, and, based on that, I felt an investigation should begin at once," he said.

Deputy Chief Fire Marshal John Baracato was alerted in minutes at his

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The interior of the Dumont Ave. building, which was to be a day center for the retarded, is wrecked after a blaze last night. It had been renovated after another fire May 1.

By Photo by Tony Caromonte