

Missing woman found by guards

By STUART SCHUB

Security guards at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, this morning found a 29-year-old retarded woman who had been missing since Saturday.

The discovery of the woman, Helen Lever, a resident of the center for 16 years, ended a search by about 100 police officers and dozens of center officials who had been combing the grounds of the 382-acre state institution for clues to the woman's disappearance.

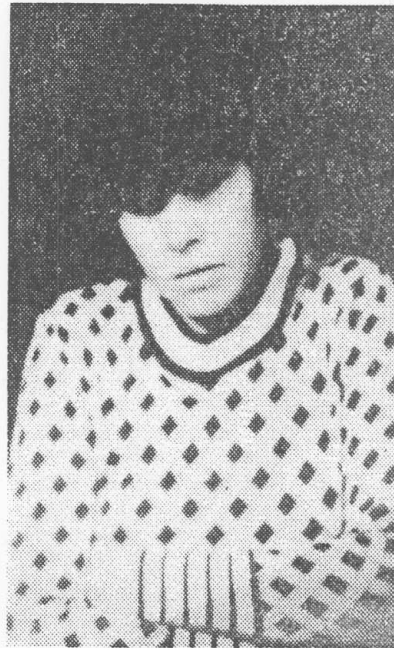
Until she was found shortly after 5 a.m. on the grounds of the center by security guards Burton Parker and Norman Donegan, police had been operating on the theory that she had been abducted.

Miss Lever, who is blind and deaf, had been reported missing from her residence, Building 23, shortly before 5 a.m. Saturday.

The abduction theory was based on a report by the supervisor of Miss Lever's ward that a man had been peering through a window of the ward about the time the woman's absence was discovered. Police said the window was open and a screen that covered it was slashed.

Miss Lever was to be taken today to the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Clifton, for a physical examination. Authorities said she appeared to be unharmed.

Asked if security, long criticized as lacking at the institution, was adequate the night of the disappearance, Fran Ryan, a deputy director, said: "Recently there were additional people hired on security. . . We don't have security for



Helen Lever

each building — we have security for the entire grounds."

She said Miss Lever's ward was staffed adequately during the shift the woman was reported missing.

But a ward supervisor, who declined to be identified, expressed dissatisfaction with security at the facility despite state efforts in recent months to increase the number of guards.

"For the dimensions of the grounds, there should be a security officer for every building — or at least every two

(Continued on Page 9)



Willowbrook Developmental Center security guards Norman L. Donegan, left, and Burton Parker search the area where they found the missing resident.

S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante

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(From Page 1)

buildings," the supervisor said. "It's not fair to the officers — they have to be responsible for the wooded area."

Ms. Ryan said Miss Lever has been visited on occasion from family in Massachusetts.

Miss Lever was not prone to wandering off by herself, Ms. Ryan said. She added that the woman was active in a daily living program and was involved in a workshop on how to socialize.

Ms. Ryan described Miss Lever as "profoundly retarded" but "function-

al." She said Miss Lever cannot speak but frequently hums, according to center officials.

The last reported case of a missing person from the center was last August when Ethel L. Atwell, 46, of Newark, disappeared from the center's parking lot as she arrived for work about 6:30 a.m. She was never found.

Another employee of the center, Shina Emma Lee, 44, of Sea View, was killed last year. Her body was found at the Institute for Basic Research, which is adjacent to the center. No arrest in that case has been made.