

# Staten Island

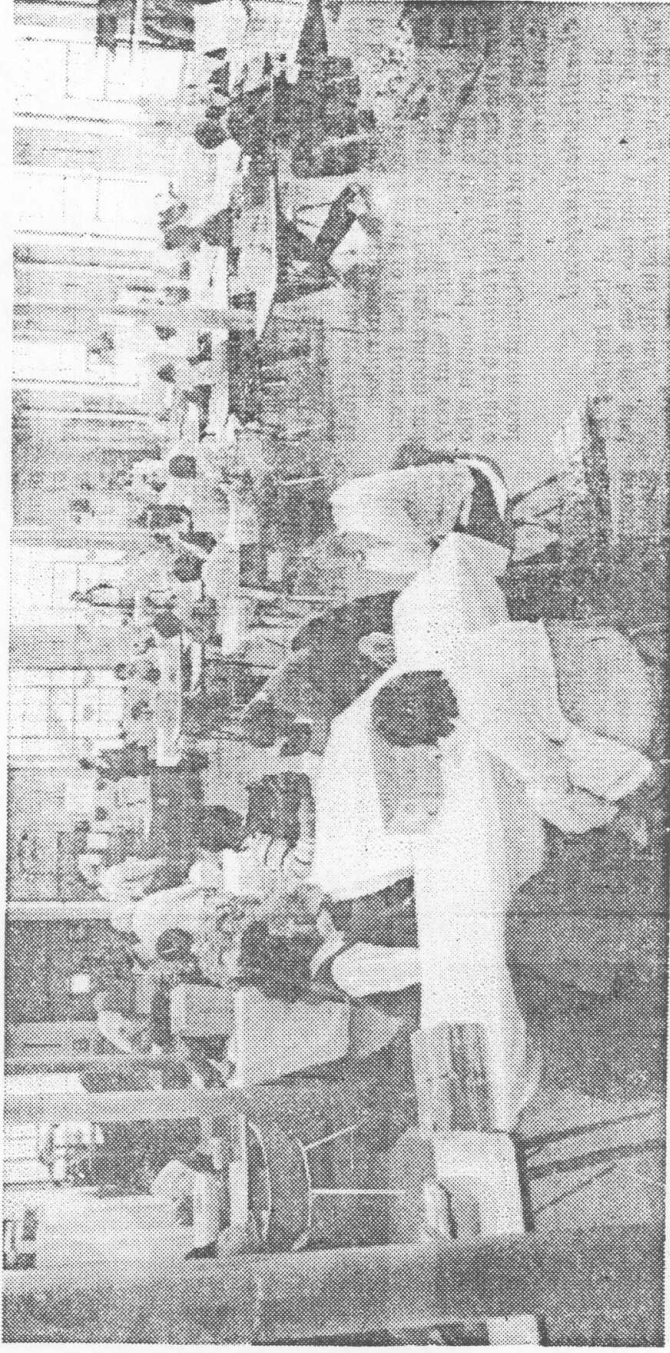
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State Controller Edward V. Regan



Deputy Director James Shea at work



Patients at the Staten Island Development Center (Willowbrook) engage in work activity. Facility is decreasing population.

# A director of Willowbrook answers a report by state

By GUS DALLAS

**A** STATE AUDIT charging the Staten Island Developmental Center, formerly Willowbrook, with poor financial management, was answered by the institution's deputy director, who said that all of the faults cited have been or are being corrected.

The audit, made public Wednesday by State Controller Edward Regan, accused the Staten Island facility of "a gross lack of controls" and "noncompliance" with state procedures for keeping track of funds.

The report said the center "has virtually disregarded accountability for patients' cash, state funds, materials, supplies, food, clothing and equipment."

The auditors said they found no evidence that money was misappropriated, but they cautioned that "the conditions existing are an open invitation to such acts and would be almost impossible to detect." Their report strongly urged "immediate corrective action and continuing departmental supervision."

## Describes action

James Shea, the center's deputy director and administrator, said, "We have been receiving interim reports of the audit and have been implementing their recommendations all along."

The audit was commenced in the fall of 1976 and concluded in March 1979. Willowbrook, a state home for the severely retarded, was in the spotlight in the early 1970s because of inadequate patient care. Relatives of patients brought suits in court and in 1975 the state entered into a consent agreement to decrease the number of patients to 250 by 1981.

The center's patient population was decreased after the consent agreement from almost 6,000 to 1,480 and the staff has grown from 3,100 to 3,600. The agreement stipulates that the staff would number 1,200 when the patient population is reduced to 250, Shea said.

The report charged that the center has inadequate internal controls on cash ex-



Security guards check visitor to the facility. Auditors report had criticized guards for not stopping cars without sticker identification.

inventory of cash receipt books. The auditors said they found 96 outstanding checks going back more than five months, as far back as 1971 and totaling \$3,932. Financial guidelines require "stop payment" orders on all checks outstanding more than three months.

Shea said the report "somewhat exaggerated" the situation, "since we have been correcting the errors right along as we received interim reports." The auditors cited the outstanding checks in September 1978 and payment was stopped on them, and the center began stamping checks "not valid after 90 days."

The administrator conceded that the bookkeeping had been less than efficient up to that point. "There were errors in recording, and the record-keeping was antiquated," he said.

The auditors criticized the center for not balancing its cash ledgers every month and cited the presence of \$8,100 belonging to deceased or discharged patients that should have been relayed to the controller's office at least six months

controls at the center, and failure to keep accurate inventory records. The auditors said they found discrepancies between physical counts of certain stored items and the count entered in the center's inventory records.

They cited oversupplies in certain food, clothing and equipment items, noting such things as a 7½-month supply of pork jowls and a 6½-month supply of gefilte fish, a 15-month supply of paper hats, a 22-month inventory of mothballs, and eight washing machines and 19 dryers still stored in their original crates since 1974 and 1976.

## Blames higher authorities

"Some of the inventory has been on hand for many years, possibly even from 1950, when Willowbrook opened," Shea said. "The fault lies with the higher agencies. Someone should have taken action long ago to declare some items surplus and put them up for sale. That's what is happening now."

"The washers and dryers were purchased because higher authority gave Willowbrook a design for laundromats in individual buildings. After installation began, it was found that some buildings were not adequately wired. The project evaporated and the rest of the machines stayed in the warehouse."

He could not explain the oversupply of hog jowls. "We've redrawn our menus to use up the food oversupply as quickly as possible," he added.

The auditors also strongly recommended tighter security controls at the center. They reported that assault, vandalism and theft had increased from 369 reported incidents in 1971 to 522 in the first nine months of 1978. They said the payroll office had no safe and checks were kept in a filing cabinet. They noted that a safe was installed after they called it to the center's attention. The auditors sharply criticized guards at the gate for not stopping and checking cars that entered the grounds without sticker identification. It said that stiffer security had been urged in a 1973 audit of Willowbrook, but the auditors "acknowledged that the facility did not receive approval to hire 24 additional security officers."

sion was created over the past three years or so because of constant staff turnover. He came to the center two years ago, he said. The director, Elin Howe, was appointed deputy director in 1977.

## Considered inherited

He implied that inadequate bookkeeping practices were inherited from previous staff and conceded that some new staff members accepted the practices "as the way things should be done." Unbalanced books were inherited, he said. The staff tried to balance them, he said, and when they couldn't, simply carried over the unverified total. This led to another practice that the auditors criticized: inserting loose sheets of paper with cash information into the ledgers instead of entering such items as cash receipts and disbursements.

Shea said this was the result of inadequate priorities set by personnel over the years. "The center was going through dramatic changes after the consent agreement, upgrading services, quickly discharging thousands of patients," and the staff couldn't keep up, he said.