

marry for a "green card," the ticket to legal employment and opportunity on American shores.

Authorities at the Brooklyn Developmental Center were immediately suspicious. That had become Miss Winter's backup institution in 1978, when she was transferred from Willowbrook to a small community-based facility in Brooklyn. Perhaps ironically, the transfer was part of a federal court-ordered program to normalize the lives of retarded persons confined in overcrowded and wretched state institutions.

"We felt so uneasy about the whole thing," Thomas J. Schurtz, director of the Brooklyn Developmental Center, said.

The fact that Ahmed is an alien threw a shadow over his motivation. But that wasn't all. State authorities' fear of a scam was fueled by their assessment of Miss Winter's personality.

She wasn't considered a natural candidate for marriage, and her supervisors had trouble imagining why any man would sincerely want to take the plunge.

The record shows Miss Winter was not well-adjusted at Willowbrook or, subsequently, at two consecutive Brooklyn community facilities. Consulting her file, officials described her behavior as late as October 1979 as "continually anti-social and inappropriate . . . verbally abusive . . . temper tantrums." In the 1950s, clinicians treated Miss Winter with Thorazine, among other powerful anti-psychotic agents, and in the presumably more enlightened past decade they prescribed the tranquilizer Valium, as well as suspension from a work program in Manhattan for unruly behavior.

Weighing against marriage was "a feeling she wouldn't be able to sustain that much organization in life," Jean Cincotta, Miss Winter's case manager for the last six months, related.

Curiously, a visitor to the house where Miss Winter lives with her husband found a completely unanticipated personality. Wearing nylon pajamas, the woman who answered the door was calm and polite. Alone in the house, she was washing a sink full of dishes and proceeded to make two double beds. She displayed the clothes she had laundered and the food she had cooked. In short, Miss Winter appeared transformed into a model housewife.

Apprised of Miss Winter's new skills, Ms. Cincotta observed, "Maybe the last laugh is on all of us who were trying to bring her along in this way for so long."

The couple is staying in the Stapleton home of Tina Rigas, an Egyptian immigrant and a low-level employee for nearly 11 years at Willowbrook, where she apparently took Miss Winter under her wing. Mrs. Rigas was instrumental in the meeting of the retarded woman and Ahmed shortly after his arrival in the United States July 5.

Mrs. Rigas' role in the marriage has increased state officials' anxiety. "What may be starting," Schurtz fretted, "is a citizenship mill using our residents."

Mental retardation officials, however, have turned up no evidence of marriage-brokering. Miss Winter's wedding to a foreigner appears to be an isolated occurrence.

A second visit found all protagonists in the marriage at home. One arm circling Miss Winter's waist, Ahmed offered his version of events. His English was rudimentary, and Mrs. Rigas sometimes functioned as an interpreter.

Tall and slender, Ahmed has curly black hair and a mustache. He described himself as a devout Moslem, the son of a wealthy Cairo banker.

The ideal wife, in his opinion, would be loyal and obedient, satisfied with keeping house. He said Miss Winter, retarded and with no cause for vanity, struck him as fitting. An American's difficulty in understanding his love, he added, might stem from a cultural gap.

Both he and Mrs. Rigas voiced indignation at the suggestion of Miss Winter's lack of domestic, basic writing and counting skills.

Miss Winter joined in, complaining repeatedly, "Why did they say I have a low IQ?"

In her institutional file, a caseworker noted that Miss Winter had a "superiority complex in relation to other residents." Whether such a complex might be justified was not broached. One official compared her intellect to that of a child "five years and two months old."

She was, however, fairly articulate. Her husband, she observed, "speaks my language."

A short, sallow-complexioned woman, Miss Winter offered glimmers of a forceful and stubborn personality. "This wedding," one state official who knew her well suggested, "might be a way for her to find a family and a way of getting the state out of her hair."

The scene at the kitchen table brought to mind Ms. Cincotta's account of an interview with Ahmed and Mrs. Rigas conducted by a team of Brooklyn Developmental Center clinicians: "They presented themselves well. It was maybe even a little disconcerting to all of us."