the same for New York.

The Willowbrook lawsuit was filed in March 1972 by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) and the Legal Aid Society at a time when the institution's deplorable conditions were making headlines across the state and parents of patients were demanding action.

The formal complaint put before Judge Orrin Judd in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn, which was filed on behalf of the 5,343 residents at Willowbrook, challenged "the adequacy and constitutionality of conditions" at the institution.

Bruce Ennis, who headed the legal team for the plaintiffs, hoped the suit would upgrade client care at Willowbrook; the ultimate goal was to force the state to close Willowbrook and its other institutions and resettle the mentally retarded into the community.

By the time Goldmark became involved, the lawsuit had bounced around in the federal court for three years without a satisfactory resolution. While the NYCLU obtained timetables on such items as increasing the Willowbrook staff and putting a freeze on admissions, the lawyers doubted conditions at Willowbrook had actually improved.

In addition, the NYCLU was alarmed by the way the state was relieving the overcrowding at Willowbrook. Between 1972 and 1975, the institution's population had dropped from 5,300 to 2,900. But only eight residents were placed in group homes; most were transferred to other institutional settings. Some were placed in vacant wards at state mental hospitals, and others went to boarding or nursing homes. More than half were simply transferred to other state institutions for the retarded. It wasn't what the NYCLU had in mind at all.

Moreover, the very manner in which residents left the institution was disturbing — even to the Willowbrook staff. Genevieve Benoit, a supervisor at the center during the 1970s, remembers people walking into a ward and arbitrarily pointing out residents, "I'll take you and you and you." People were taken away in such haphazard fashion that staff were sometimes unsure of who had left or where they had gone.

"You would go into a ward and say, 'Where's Jane? She was here yesterday.' And people would sort of shrug their shoulders and say, 'I don't know. Where *did* Jane go?'" Ms. Benoit recalled.

(The patient exodus later provided Ms. Benoit with the name of the non-profit agency she formed with colleague Diane Bugioli after they left Willowbrook.

(As Ms. Buglioli explains it: "We were working in a ward with kids, and when everything started happening, we decided that we had to prepare these kids for leaving Willowbrook. So we told the kids how wonderful their new home was going to be. I would tell them that they were going to a very special place. And when we formed the agency, that's what we called — A Very Special Place." The agency, headquartered in Dongan Hills, provides training and recreational programs for the mentally retarded.)

The NYCLU lawsuit went to trial in the fall of 1974. While the state argued that the squalor had been eliminated, their arguments were undermined by a host of witnesses for the plaintiffs who told horror story after horror story.

One particularly gruesome piece of testimony came from a nurse who helped remove the cast from the leg of a Willowbrook resident; when the cast was removed, maggots were found festering underneath.

As the trial began, the state and the NYCLU were attempting to negotiate a settlement, but that was complicated by the 1974 elections and resulting change in governor.

Actually, the change seemed to benefit the plaintiffs, according to Chris Hansen of the NYCLU. Carey was more willing than his predecessors to resolve Willowbrook's problems, Hansen said.

Carey called in Goldmark, and in 1975 the negotiations began in earnest. Goldmark says that from the start his goals matched those of Ennis, who led the NYCLU team — both wanted the consent judgment to ultimately empty Willowbrook and build a new system of community residences.