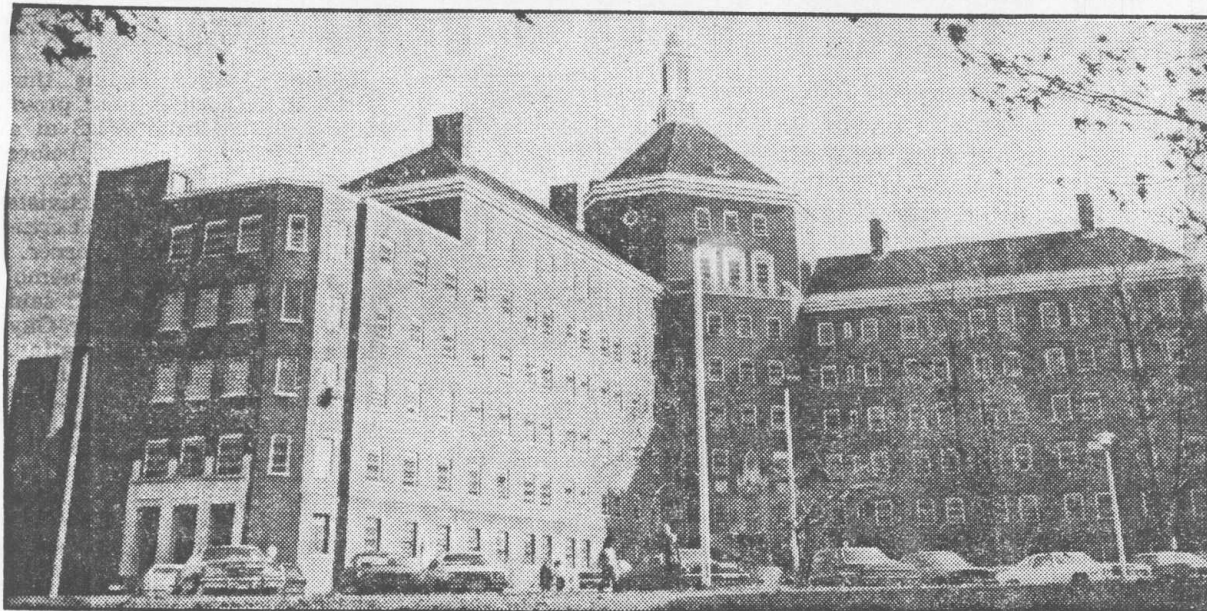


KIDS' BODY PARTS 'ALL OVER FLOOR'



ABC News

CHAMBER OF HORRORS: This is the peaceful-looking but infamous Willowbrook mental facility as it looked in 1982. It's being converted into a campus for the College of Staten Island.

By GEORGE RUSH
and MICHAEL SHAIN

A retired hero cop says he stumbled into a chamber of horrors at the Willowbrook mental facility — a room full of human body parts — that was "swept under the rug" by city officials.

"I've seen a lot of things in my time, but this was the worst," said Paul Ragonese, best known as the cop who helped rescue Brigette Gerney from beneath a toppled crane in 1985.

POST EXCLUSIVE

"I still get the shakes" thinking about that room, he said.

Ragonese tells about the Willowbrook horror in his book "Soul of a Cop" (St. Martin's Press), to be released next month.

Willowbrook, which became a national symbol of neglect and mistreatment of the mentally retarded in the mid-1970s, now houses fewer than 100 patients.

The former Emergency Service Unit cop said he was called to remove dangerous chemicals from an abandoned building at the infamous Willowbrook

Willowbrook horror bared by hero cop

school on Staten Island in December 1985.

When Ragonese and his partner entered the building, they discovered "human body parts were strewn all over the floor," he said.

"At the end of the hall, rats were eating the decayed flesh off body parts, many belonging to children," the book says.

In another room, Ragonese said, he found 50 glass specimen jars containing human organs.

The ex-cop said he considered going to the press about what he had seen, but feared he would be fired.

"I got the sense that because these were retarded kids, let's sweep them under the rug," Ragonese told The Post.

"If you found a human heart on the street, it would cause such a commotion. Here, nobody asked: 'Who are these people?'" he

said.

Ragonese said superiors at the scene told him to ignore the body parts and just remove a huge quantity of potentially explosive chemicals from the building — which was supposedly sealed and abandoned in the mid-1960s.

Two days later, when Ragonese called Willowbrook, the facility's deputy director told him the body parts had been removed, but he could not say who did it or where they had been put, according to the book.

Ragonese said he tried without success to convince higher-ups and the medical examiner's office to investigate.

Ron Byrne, a spokesman for the state Office of Mental Retardation, which operated Willowbrook, said the building once housed a pathology lab and it was likely Ragonese came upon a collection of human organs in jars.

"Walking into a pathology department can be a shock," he said. "I walked into a pathology lab once and I'm not going back."

But the spokesman said he found it "difficult to believe" body parts were found strewn on the floor of the building.

Willowbrook is being converted into a campus for the College of Staten Island.