Guide to Willowbrook Resources

Compiled by Dr. James Kaser, Archivist, February 2004.

About the Guide

This guide is intended to help researchers locate material useful in understanding the history of the school. The main focus is on selected primary source materials, particularly archives collections and New York State publications.

Table of Contents

Introduction
Manuscript Collections
New York State Government Publications
Secondary Sources
Institutional Contact Information

Introduction

Hal Kennedy, Esq.

Willowbrook State School was built in the 1930's in Staten Island, NY to house individuals with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. It does not receive its first residents, however, until after World War II. A combination of rising placements, budget cuts, ignorance, arrogance and indifference, created notorious conditions at Willowbrook. By 1965, with over 6,000 residents in an institution planned for just 4,000, Senator Robert Kennedy calling Willowbrook a "snake pit." In November 1971, The State Island Advance published a series of articles detailing the horrible conditions at the school. Following these articles, in January 1972, Geraldo Rivera, the television reporter, began a series of programs that shook the conscience of New York State and the nation and inspired parents and others to take legislative action. The end result was the signing of a consent judgement in federal court in 1975. Willowbrook finally closed its doors in 1987.

The Consent Judgment has been called "revolutionary" because of what is accomplished and for what it inspired. The closure of Willowbrook, the placement of individuals with developmental disabilities in community

residences, the growth of voluntary agencies and the expansion of day programs and special education can all be linked to the Judgement. The Judgement finally recognized and enforced the rights of individuals with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. The Judgement is the mean used throughout the United States and in many parts of the world.

Back to Top

Manuscript Collections

Bronston, William Papers.
75 record center boxes

Dr. William Bronston, MD worked as a staff physician at Willowbrook (from 1970-1972) and was dismissed after agitating for change. Later he was a s1 witness in a legal case brought by parents to improve conditions at the School This collection includes the evidence he presented in court and other material he gathered and includes photographs, legal documents and case histories. Significant portions of the collection are slated to be digitized as part of the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement collection.

Unarranged and unavailable for use.

Bancroft Library/UC Berkeley. Call number BANC MSS 2002/227 c

16 cu. ft.

This series consists files generated by commission chairman Clarence J. Sundram dating from his service as assistant counsel in the Governor's Of The files include reports, draft memoranda, studies, correspondence, notes background materials. Subjects include the Willowbrook State Hospital investigation; Department of Mental Health reorganization.. mental hygiene and criminal justice legislation; and a state prison taskforce.

There is a finding aid for this collection. New York

State Archives. Call number: 19357

5 cu. ft.

Collection contains the outgoing correspondence of commission chairman Clarence Sundram. Sundram was the Executive Chamber's representative in the state's defense during the Willowbrook class-action suit and a member the Willowbrook Review Committee established to oversee compliance with court orders related to that case.

Files are arranged chronologically and a subject index is available. New

York State Archives. Call number: 19355

36 boxes, 41 cu. ft.

David J. and Sheila M. Rothman wrote *The Willowbrook Wars*; these records are the Rothmans' research files on the Willowbrook case. Included are publications relating to mental health care and photocopies of reports, memoranda, legal briefs, correspondence, and other records from official sources (such as: the State Office of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Willowbrook Review Panel, and New York City mental health agencies). Available are an extensive number of community placement files that include information on individual cases, reports on other community placement programs, reports on the Willowbrook community placement program, leg papers on community placement, and duplicate copies of professional literacy on community placement.

This collection is unprocessed and no finding aid is available, however a partial index is available within the collections. Access to the collection is restricted.

New York State Library. Manuscripts and Special Collections. Call number SC18831

246 cu. ft.

This series consists mostly of case files of patients who died while residing Willowbrook. The case files document patients' admission, treatment, there and education. Case files typically contain: admission phase sheets, record visitors and correspondents, ward admission records, legal admission record psychiatrists' psychological reports, Willowbrook school reports, physical examination information, progress notes by doctor, social service notes by social worker, laboratory notes, consultation requests (for x-rays, etc.) signed by doctor, prescription records, nurses' notes, dental and weight charts, clothing lists, and correspondence from other institutions.

Access permanently restricted in accordance with Mental Hygiene Law relating to confidentiality of clinical records.

New York State Archives. Call number: 19452.

Willowbrook Collection.
6 linear feet

Primarily documents the activities of the One-to-One Foundation, an organization concerned with de-institutionalization and group homes. Record types includes correspondence news clippings, books and videos.
Unprocessed, but open to researchers with a preliminary inventory.

Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University.


*117 cubic feet*

In 1975, newly elected Governor Hugh L. Carey signed the Willowbrook Consent Decree, a civil rights law that obligated New York State to provide appropriate housing and programs for more than 6,000 individuals at Willowbrook State School. The law established the Willowbrook Review Panel, a temporary federal authority to oversee the transfer of residents from the Willowbrook Center to group homes. These records document the work of the review panel over a twelve year period and capture a significant aspect of the history of New York state mental health policy and include reports from monitoring agencies, complaints, correspondence, meeting minutes, and research materials. The collection is currently unprocessed and closed. A good is underway to process and create a finding aid for the collection. The collection will be available for access in January 2005. Some materials may be restricted due to privacy. Questions should be forwarded to the Head of the M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives.

Collection Number: APAP-0127
M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University at Albany, SUNY

**Wolf, Benjamin H. (1909-) Arbitration Papers, 1972-1982.**

*45 linear feet*

Wolf was an arbitrator, labor mediator and attorney. He represented the City Service Employees Association in *State of New York Departments of Mental Hygiene, Agriculture and Markets, Health, and Transportation and New York State hospitals at Rockland and Willowbrook vs. Civil Service Employees Association.* (1972-1975) on issues of improper personal conduct, discipline negligence, dismissal, fringe benefits, and insubordination.

Open to researchers in keeping with repository rules
Finding aid available in repository or through interlibrary loan, folder level control.

Kheel Center, Cornell University. Call number: 5539

*Back to Top*

**New York State Government Publications**

N.B. All of these materials are housed at the New York State Library. Some items, as no are also held by the New York Public Library Research Library. The New York State Library call number is given.

*Compliance Audit Willowbrook Developmental Center, May 6, 1976*

http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/archives/WillowbrookRG.htm
WIL 600-4 COMAW, UNCAT


Also at NYPL


New York (State). State Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled. *Quality of Care: A Newsletter Published by the NYS Commission for Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled.* Albany: The Commission, 1980. MEN 960-3 QUACN 84-56650


Also at CSI, see Archives and Special Collections.


MEN 455-4 PROCP 79-70818


Secondary Sources


Institutional Contact Information

**The Bancroft Library**  
University of California, Berkeley  
Berkeley California 94720-6000 (510) 642-6481; fax (510) 642-7589 e-mail: bancref@library.berkeley.edu  
http://bancroft.berkeley.edu

**College of Staten Island**  
Archives & Special Collections  
Library, 1L-216  
2800 Victory Boulevard  
Staten Island, New York 10301  
(718) 982-4128; fax: (718) 982-4127  
e-mail: archives@mail.csi.cuny.edu  
http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/archives

**New York State Archives**  
Cultural Education Center 3043

http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/archives/WillowbrookRG.htm  
7/27/2004
Albany, NY 12230  
(518)474-8955  
e-mail: archrefi@inail.nysed.gov  
http://www.archives.nysed.gov

M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives  
State University of New York, Albany  
New Library Building, Room 352  
1400 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12222  
(518) 437-3931; fax (518) 437-3930  
http://library.albany.edu/speccoll/

Kheel Center  
Martin P. Catherwood Library  
School of Industrial and Labor Relations  
Cornell University  
227 Ives Hall  
Ithaca, New York 14853-3901  
607-255-3183; fax 607-255-9641  
e-mail: kheelcenter@eoniell.edti  
http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/library/kheel

New York State Library  
Manuscripts and Special Collections  
Cultural Education Center  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, New York 12230  
(518) 474-6282; fax (518) 474-5786  
e-mail: mscolls@mail.nysed.gov  
http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/mssdesc.htm

Special Collections Research Center  
Syracuse University Library  
E.S. Bird Library, Room 600  
Syracuse University  
Syracuse, NY 13244-2010  
(315) 443-2697; fax (315) 443-2671  
e-mail: arentsl@library.syr.edu  
http://libwww.syr.edu/information/spcollections/index.html

Back to Top