

Mount Airy Families Proud of Homes

By Jeanette Reid

Staff Reporter

MOUNT AIRY — "I enjoy keeping the house clean now," said Mrs. Rossie Wade.

"My curtains don't stand straight out from the windows now when the wind blows," said Mrs. Nora Glover. "I love everything about my new house."

"I still can't believe it," said Mrs. Novelia Wiggins. "Sometimes wonder if I'm really here."

These are typical comments from people forced out of their old homes by Mount Airy's new public housing who are now living in the housing project.

Nine of the twelve families in the project lived in the Virginia Street area that was cleared to make way for the government-financed housing.

A close look at two families gives insight into the problems they encountered and how they feel about the change.

Four in Home

Mrs. Wade is a 59-year-old widow who doesn't work because she has to care for Richard Jr., her 24-year-old epileptic son. A grandson, Jack Snow, 18, a student at J. J. Jones High School, and granddaughter, Wanda, 12, also live with her.

Mrs. Wade's annual income is about \$1,300 from Social Security.

Mrs. Wade pays \$33 a month for a three-bedroom unit with utilities furnished. Refrigerator and stove are provided for each unit, but the occupants provide furniture and curtains.

The new units with clean walls, tile floors and electric heat are modern and well arranged. Each has a brick exterior, small front porch, paved walks and landscaped grounds.

Old House

In contrast, Mrs. Wade used to live in one of the many little houses standing neck to neck along Johnson's Alley. It was so dirty and run-down that Mrs. Wade had little hope of improving it.

A sewer line had burst, said one official, leaving an open sewer. Water pipes frozen during the previous winter had not been fixed. Where walls had crumbled inside, newspapers were pasted up. The house had no bathroom.

Her new house is clean and colorfully furnished. It is less than half a block from where her former house stood.

Asked what she likes best about the new house, Mrs. Wade said:

"Lord, everything is so much nicer. I can't express myself about how much more decent everything is. I wish this had happened long years ago."

Husband Disabled

Mrs. Glover, who lives with her disabled husband and four grandchildren whose father died, said the housing project is "one of the best things that ever happened to the Negroes in Mount Airy."

The family's income is about \$2,850 per year.

The Glovers could have an income up to \$4,200 per year and still be eligible to live in the public units. They were paying on a small frame house when the government took over the area for public housing, but they had little equity in it.

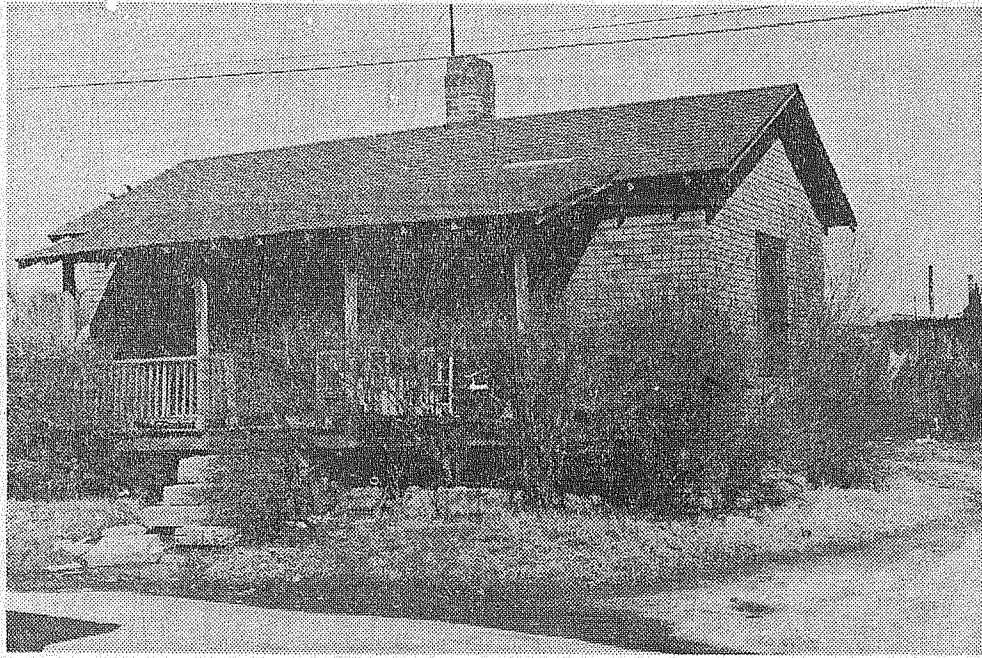
Glover receives no government disability aid. Mrs. Glover receives about \$150 per month from Social Security for the grandchildren and earns about \$130 a year helping with banquets at the Reeves YMCA.

Operates Cafe

She operates Nora's Cafe during tobacco season and clears about \$900 annually. "There's not much to it," she said. "I sell mainly sandwiches and stuff like that."

Asked about her new home, she said: "I love it. I've got now what I'd hoped for all my life. Right after we moved in, I still got up real early every morning. I was so used to having to get up and wait for the stove to get the house a little warm before I could do anything."

She added: "Now I don't even know when the wind blows outside. Used to, my windows rattled and the curtains stood out. The children are just as proud of it as I am, and I have no trouble getting them to clean it. Everybody on Johnson Street is proud of it. It used to be a slummy place. Now we have a much better community."

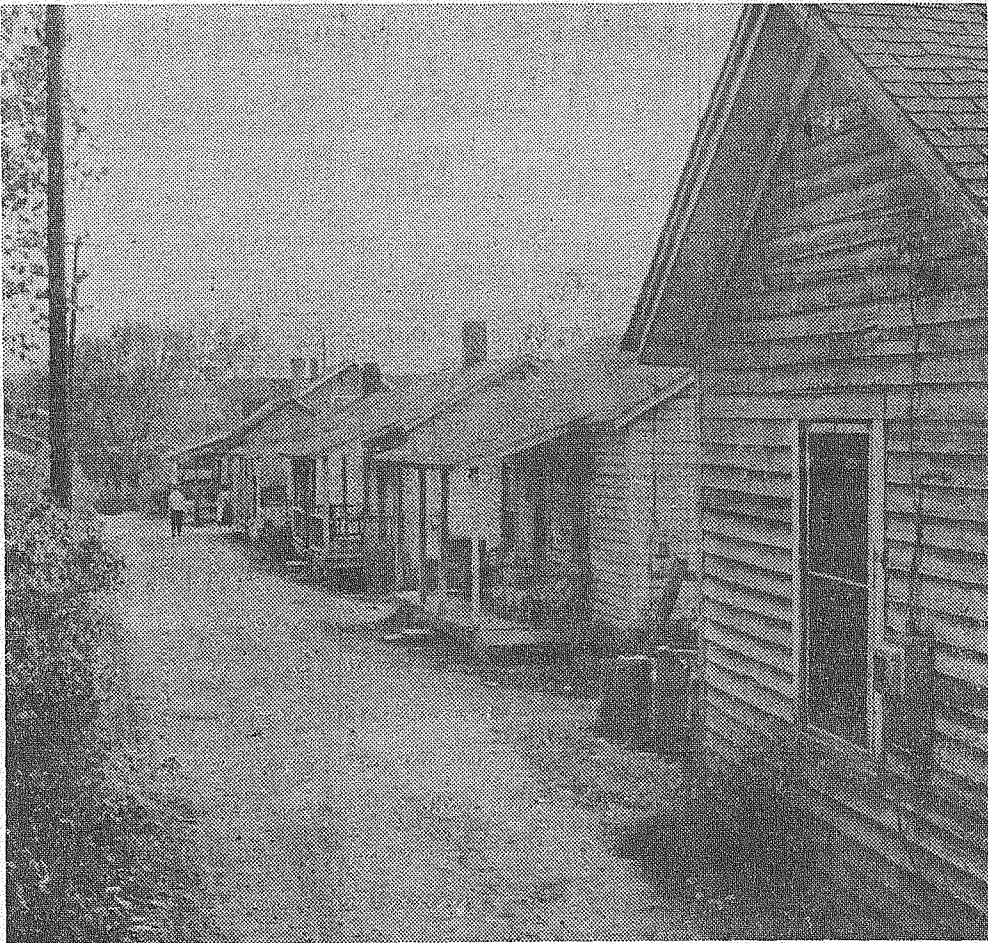


Staff Photos

When the wind blew, curtains stood out in old Glover residence.



Mrs. Nora Glover and grandson, Lamont, 3, in front of new home.



This is what area looked like before urban renewal program.

has obtained almost \$2 million in federal funds to clear the land and get it ready for construction.

Hemmings' assistant, Jimmy R. Boyles, said that 32 structures—22 of them residential and 10 commercial—were cleared in the first phase of the project and that 102 structures—78 dwellings and 24 businesses—are being cleared in the second phase.

Ninety-five per cent of the structures in the second phase of the project have already been demolished, he added.

According to Hemmings, 38 of the families whose homes were taken by the project have moved into the public housing units that now stand where their homes once stood.

Space was left in the project area for several churches, industries and homes. Hemmings said he hopes to have commitments for the space by next year, but does not expect its development to be complete by then.

When the project is completed, he said, it will take care of the only area of Mount Airy in need of total clearance.

But the work of the

redevelopment commission and the housing authority will not be ended. Other areas, he said, that need to be rehabilitated —

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