

West 11th Settlement No Solution For Eugene's Negro Families

(Continued from page one)

we say back yard? There is a front yard on each side of the West 11th Ave. settlement. There is no garbage service nor are there septic tanks, nor neat

plant a garden you can't. Every season the ground is cracked and gaping cracks in the pavement worry that their children may break a leg.

Shallow Water
The shallow wells were dug in an effort to get water; they were unsatisfactory—the water was too murky and salty to be used for washing clothes. Water must be carried in milk cans from Eugene. It's precious

water. Whenever Lane County is observing that rain has been heavy lately—and long there is danger of flooding in the Willamette—the ground saturated around the homes on West 11th. There's just enough water to float the garbage and to cover the walking paths and make living miserable.

The Amazon slices through this area. The great dredging machine that pulled buckets full of mud from the channel bottom last year dumped it into the yards and mounds. No children have been off this slimy mud row since the water, yet.

Encroaches
Several residents, like Sam Hurd, are fearful the U.S. Engineers intend to move the bridge again. While the Amazon takes 18 feet off his property, it'll lop off some 90 feet in the next move, he figures.

These fears are not without foundation. A U.S. Corps of Engineers administrator, who declined to be identified, said Tuesday that long-range plans call for changes in the Amazon's course.

The Negroes note that the Amazon dredging had reduced some of the flood menace. It also created problems. One bridge, its foundation weakened by dredging, washed out Oct. 15, 1950. That bridge had provided a second access to the homes from West 11th when the other approach was closed by mud.

Build Own Bridge
Three weeks ago the Negro community got tired of waiting for the bridge to be replaced—though they watched similar bridges being rebuilt nearby—and have just completed the project themselves. They provided their own materials and labor.

These community-spirited people laid gravel on the muddy path between their homes—12th they call it—but it still needs considerable amount of gravel to pack to raise it out of the cozy

the kids could use a weather shelter for mornings they wait for the highway for a school bus. Speaking of buses, there is a transit service to Eugene but folks think twice-a-day service would be a Godsend.

Need Water Supply
The Negro folk list an adequate water supply as the most pressing need of their inadequate and undesirable location but housing is to be kind, sub-standard.

They do not conclude that the community is dreary because it sits in dirt. There is evidence of a sincere effort by the mothers to keep their children and homes

Welfare Burden
An investigation disclosed these people are not a burden on the welfare agencies.

Max Dudley, Lane County Public Welfare Commission head, said, "The Negroes have proportionately given us less trouble than the white people. We have, at present time, only one case on the books of a Negro and that is for old age assistance. We've found them cooperative."

The Salvation Army can find instances of emergency assistance given Negroes in the past year. Mrs. Ralph Vaughn, of the S. A. office, said, "These colored people have never been a burden on us."

Clara Pirtle, chief of the American Red Cross' Lane chapter, observed that while her organization keeps in close contact with the West 11th area "We find the people are quite self-sufficient. We have helped them some but they have asked for very little in the past year. Incidentally, Mrs. Reynolds is a member of our program and we are very grateful of his service."

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white or colored, the Oregon State Employment Service is unable to provide data for an unemployment survey of the Negroes. Guy Lang did note Tuesday that he felt the FEPC Act, had generally, been beneficial.

Why West 11th?
With such dismal conditions, why have the Negroes settled on West 11th Ave.?

When one colored spokesman talked with a representative form the governor's office about living conditions of approximately 200 Negroes in Lane County he was asked, diplomatically, "Why don't you go back home?"

"Back home! THIS is my home. I'm here!" Many local Negro folk trace their "Eugene" residence back through 1941.

In March, 1948, many Negroes were forced to vacate county-owned land to make way for the new Ferry St. bridge. A citizens' committee of 15 whites and 7 Negroes was formed to relocate these families.

'No Man's Land'
This committee wanted to avoid locating the Negroes in a separate district, but found vacant houses scarce and those few not available to colored folk. A number of others secured small shacks for high rent in the Glenwood district in an alley off of South Concord Ave.

Five Eugene realtors handled sales of available lots on West 11th Ave.

The late county judge, Clinton Hurd, protested that the area is "no man's land" and advised against its consideration for housing anyone. But the urge to own a piece of earth was strong and immediate. The average lot 52x160 went for \$300. Some are 52x128 minus the Amazon ditch.

Sam Reynolds' four lots came to \$3500, however. They held an unfinished house, Sam valued this house at \$300 and notes that the 2x4 foundation is in need of replacement. At \$30 a month, he'll be buying this property for some years to come.

The two lots containing a small two-room shack, and which the colored folk wanted as the site for a church of their own, was purchased for \$2000. That's no typographical error: \$2000. They

built their own church, too, and dedicated it to everybody's God.

These lots were sold in such a manner that submission of a subdivision plat to the Central Lane County Planning Commission was avoided. Structures went up without building permits and show it, according to the League of Women Voters of Eugene who investigated the settlement in early 1951.

It might be of interest to note that here are five acres of property (within shouting distance of the Negro Methodist church) which sold in 1945 for \$1000. Currently this land is listed at \$4000 with a two-bedroom house, a bunkhouse and outbuildings. In addition to the four-year-old solidly constructed—shiplap and concrete foundation—house, the owner of this property observed that his five-member family lived in the bunkhouse until the permanent dwelling could be built.

Within that \$4000 price, too, is a 22-foot well and an electric pump. This piece of land has a pear, an apple and a plum tree, in addition to decorative trees.

Can you call the Negro development a settlement? City-Coun-

ty Planning Consultant Howard Buford shudders at the implication of the word.

Impossible Problems
"It is unreasonable, economically, to install water in the area and if water were obtained the sewage problem would remain impossible. The water table of the area is so high there is no means of taking care of the effluent. The cost of getting water would be nothing compared with the cost of sewage facilities."

"It is a crime that these people were allowed to locate on that property when there is other land available. It would be far better to relocate these people. Relocating them would cost only a fraction of putting facilities into that swamp," Buford noted.

This is a quick glimpse of life among the Negroes of the Eugene area.

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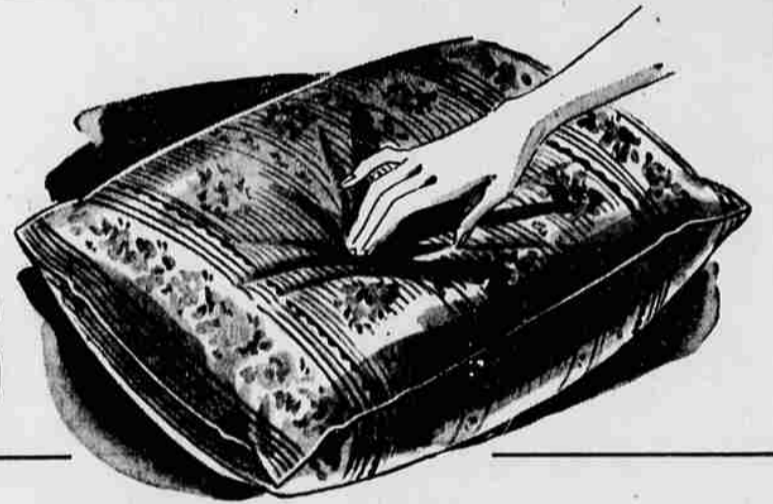
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