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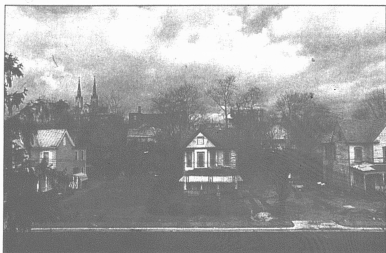
THE ROANOKE TIMES

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ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

www.roanoke.com

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"I try to keep the weeds and grass cut to keep the city folks off my back," said Ron Williams of Salem, who inherited 38 Gimer Ave. in S.E. from his parents and is trying to sell it. "Once a house sits vacant, it kind of dies from lack of attention." The houses on either side were torn down a long time ago.

On the brink of despair

Story by MARY BISHOP and S.D. HARRINGTON / Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS

THE ROANOKE TIMES

When commuters from eastern Roanoke County race into Roanoke along Jamison Avenue Southeast, they may not notice Donald Seis out on his porch.

They may not notice the peeling white paint and fake-brick siding behind Seis as he sits in his soiled armchair.

They may not notice the unpainted 6-by-6 stud standing in for one of the white columns on the decaying porch, or the unpainted squares of plywood covering the holes in the porch floor. One thing they definitely won't see is the beer bottles people toss into the yard, because Seis picks them up. They won't see the rats he's watched disappear through a crack in his kitchen cabinet, or the water that Seis says reeks of urine, acid seeps down his bedroom wall from an upstairs apartment.

They won't know the predicament of Seis, a man like so many others in the old neighborhoods around downtown — a renter with no car and little money who lives where he does to be near bus lines and his mental health counselor.

Sandwiched between the Roanoke Valley's sprawling suburbs and downtown Roanoke's upscale City Market, the neighborhoods that circle downtown are in deep trouble.

Seven of Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods — Southeast, West End, Hart Park, Mountain View, Gaansboro, lower North-west and the northern end of Old Southwest — suffer the city's worst conditions:

- 40 percent of residents are below poverty level.
- 27 percent of adults 25 or older have less than a ninth-grade education.
- More than 60 percent of residents

OUR SERIES

1 Meet the faces of Roanoke's inner-city renters. Profiles of historic Day, Gimer and Tazewell streets. The plight of vacant houses.

2 What's the business of landlordism and some of the people who are in it.

3 What other cities do about housing neighborhoods and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.



Ashley Draper, 5, sits on a worn sofa on the front porch of a rental house in the 600 block of Tazewell Avenue. Ashley and her family lived in the house last summer.

are renters.

The typical property assessment is about one-third of the typical assessment in the rest of the city.

• Nearly one in four rental houses has been cited for building code violations at least once.

• More than one-third of the city's house fires between 1991 and 1993 were in these areas.

• Even of the 14 murders in Roanoke last year were committed in downtown neighborhoods; about one-third of the drug offenses; 42 percent of the muggings; and more than two-thirds of the prostitution offenses.

These neighborhoods were the architectural showpieces of the late 1800s. Railroad managers and engineers lived along West End's Patterson Avenue in mansions with porches, turrets and fat columns who'd expect to see in a Civil War movie. "You'll find the descendants of those folks living out in Hunting Hills or South County," former City Councilman James Harvey said. Families who left the city for the suburbs.

By the 1950s, homes in the old neighborhoods were becoming worn out and unappreciated. Owners who couldn't afford to maintain them left for houses in new developments. Some houses sat vacant for years. Landlords bought others and divided them up. A big mansion on Patterson now has eight apartments.

Many landlords make only patchwork repairs — just enough to meet the city's building code.

The Invisible Inner City Investigates Life on Day Avenue Southwest, Horizon.



THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods

ON LINE

The Invisible Inner City: Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods is on line at:

www.roanoke.com/roaintimes

PLEASE SEE DESPAIR/48

Crowds brave cold rain to cheer as pontiff returns for pilgrimage

Poles treat the pope as a native son

Pope John Paul II hopes to play a healing role in a country riven by divisions between leftists and the church-backed Solidarity.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WROCLAW, Poland — Tens of thousands of Poles stood for hours in a cold rain Saturday to greet their favorite son, Pope John Paul II, at the start of his nostalgic 11-day tour.

The frail, 77-year-old pope looked tired and walked slowly an arrival at the airport in Wroclaw, the first of 12 cities he will visit. He seemed pleased by the shouts of "we love you," and wasted no time in asserting his right to be an authoritative voice in Polish affairs.

"Every return to Poland is like a return to the family home," John Paul said, his voice choked by emotion. "Although I happen to live a long way away, still I do not cease to feel a son of this land, and nothing which concerns it is alien to me."

The trip was John Paul's seventh to Poland since he assumed the papacy in 1978, a series of pilgrimages that have played a

vital role in bringing about the fall of communism and guiding Poland to democracy.

Although the Vatican dismisses any talk of a "farewell visit," many Poles worried openly that it could be John Paul's final pilgrimage.

One part of the pope's trip includes stops at his parents' tomb in Krakow, the school where he studied theology in secret during the Nazi occupation and the mountains where he skied. But he also hopes to play a healing role in a country riven by divisions among Roman Catholics and between former Communists and the church-backed Solidarity movement.

That the pope remains a revered figure was evident on a day of steady rain with temperatures that hovered around 45 degrees.

Crosses numbering in the tens of thousands lined the seven-mile route from the airport to the Gothic twin-spired St. John the Baptist Cathedral, John Paul's first stop.

"This is proof that the Polish people see the presence of the pope," said the Rev. Zdzislaw Pleasie SEE POP/12

Refugees, war crimes addressed Albright chews out Croat, Serb leaders

The meeting set the tone for the secretary's Balkan trip, conflicting claims of conflicting ethnic groups.

By BARRY SCHWED

ANALYST/12

DOJIN KXILBUZARI, Croatia — "How can you let this kind of thing happen?" the American secretary of state demanded. "These people did nothing wrong. You should be ashamed."

The Croatian reconstruction minister, easily a foot taller than Madeleine Albright, stood his ground Saturday as cameras and reporters pressed in. He insisted

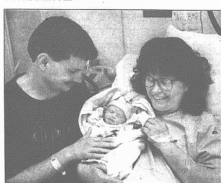
the government in Zagreb had no sign of knowing Serb refugees would be attacked by Croats, themselves refugees from Bosnia, just across the border.

Besides, he said, Serbs mocked the Croats on Orthodox Easter Sunday, shooting guns from windows and — he hesitated to go on, making provocative gestures.

Albright's confrontation with Reconstruction Minister Jure Radic of Croatia set the tone for her weeklong Balkan trip, conflicting claims of conflicting ethnic groups. Her goal was to press

PLEASE SEE ALBRIGHT/2

TWICE BLESSED



ERIC BRADY / THE ROANOKE TIMES

THE BIGGEST VICTORY in Indianapolis during Memorial Day weekend was in a hospital, not on a racetrack. Jane and Tod Stilson, formerly of Rocky Mount, gave birth to a healthy baby girl Monday, six months after Jane was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. Extra 1

THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

FROM A1

Despair

Neighborhoods with little stake in their rented spaces — the cheap, often public housing in the city — move in and out. Some even identify the houses, turning them into landlords in various ways.

The comments suggest that once freed from Roanoke's residential heart has become clogged with alien owners, displaced homeowners and transient renters.

Phyllis Overton raised her three daughters in 656 Southwest Avenue for more than 12 years. When she worked at Sunbrite Market on Mountain Avenue years ago, she tirelessly carried the day's slack down the street in a newspaper bag. "I don't walk down there anymore," she says, because people have been attacked on the street. "I'm afraid to go to my back yard to cut the grass. If my back fence opens, I'm scared to go back. I'm more scared than I've ever been since I lived here."

Daniel Baskin, an urban expert who's studied more than 100 metropolitan areas, says Roanoke Valley's special is approaching a distribution point.

In 1969, he said, the Roanoke Valley had 220,752 people living on 40 square miles of land. By 1990 suburban growth had brought the numbers to 178,277 people on 92 square miles.

So that means you had a 41 percent growth in urbanized population and a 27 percent growth in land, he said — almost a 1-to-1 ratio. What this suggests, he said, is that the more affluent are heading for the sprawling suburbs and leaving the poor behind.

That's nowhere near the worst city ratios in the country. In Detroit, it's 1-to-1.4; in St. Louis, 2-to-1; in Baltimore, 3-to-1. The national average is 2.3-to-1.

But in the nation's wealthiest cities like Portland, Ore., the ratio is about 1-to-1.

The larger ratios mean "major deprivation and abandonment of the poor community," Baskin said. "And Roanoke's zoning is verging on that."

Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods have lost an alarming percentage of families since 1970. West End and Hurt Park lost 62 percent. Gallopden, 70 percent. Belmont on Southwest, 24 percent, and Old Southwest, 48 percent.

The houses and the people in them have become progressively poorer. As central Roanoke's housing fell into disrepair with the middle and upper classes, poor people from a wider area took shelter there.

Roanoke helps more poor and troubled people than any city between Richmond and Knoxville, Tenn. Social agencies say the city has a magnetic appeal for newly poor people from other Virginia counties and other states. They're drawn here by the city's offerings of government-subsidized housing, medical care, mental health counseling and social services.

Since March, the city's Homeless Assistance Team has helped 106 homeless people in Roanoke. Seventy-one of them — 42 percent — came from outside the city, said Donna Norville, city housing development coordinator.

Outlying areas do not have the services, says Wendy Moore, director of Roanoke Area Ministries. RAM House — a day shelter for the homeless that cares for many out-of-towners. They don't have the shelters, they don't have the housing.

Last month a man and woman showed up at THF 31, a



MOST-TROUBLED NEIGHBORHOODS

A snapshot of Roanoke's core neighborhoods, which the Roanoke Times found to be the most-troubled neighborhoods in the city, according to U.S. Census data, property tax assessments, criminal offenses and fire data and building inspection records. The area's boundaries were determined by those of census tracts.

THE AREA

- Less than 5 square miles of the city's 42 square miles (12%)
- 59% white, 40% black, 1% other races
- About 10,000 people, a little more than one tenth of the city's total population
- About 9,000 vacant housing units, about 20% of the city's total units

POVERTY

- The median family income is \$14,803, a little less than half the citywide median income
- 22% of the population receive public assistance
- 40% of the people are below the poverty level
- 27% of adults 25 or older have less than a ninth-grade education

CRIME

- 11 of the 14 murders in Roanoke last year occurred in these neighborhoods
- At least 20% of the drug offenses in 1996
- 42% of the muggings in 1996
- 37% of the reported rapes in 1996
- 31% of the malicious wounding in 1996
- 67% of the prostitution in 1996

HOUSING

- About 60% of the housing units are rental, citywide, 43% of units are rental
- Nearly one in four properties has been cited for building code violations at least once
- The median assessed property value is \$20,000 compared with about \$60,000 in the rest of the city
- 38% of the city's total vacant units are in this area
- Since 1970, the area has lost nearly a quarter of its housing units
- More than one-third of the house fires in the city between 1991-95 occurred in this area

Roanoke agency that helps troubled people. They were on their way from far Southwest Virginia to Cumberland, just west of Richmond. They needed bus fare. Edleen McCall, THF 31's assistant director, said police picked them up near Wyckville and put them on a bus bound for Roanoke.

"They actually gave them a bus ticket to here (instead of a bus ticket to Cumberland). It happens all the time," McCall said. "They said, 'They'll help you in Roanoke.'"

For years, Harry Messinger's Greyhound buses brought homeless and poor people from Pulaski, Bedford and other towns in Roanoke in search of a better life, says the driver. Before he retired in 1988, he said, outside social workers at police got newly poor people on the buses headed to Roanoke.

Salem City Manager Randy Smith has heard that about the late George Eagles was Salem's police chief. Officers would pick up troublemakers in Salem, drive them to the Roanoke city line and warn them that police would lock them up if they came back to Salem.

A woman and her young children moved here from West Virginia last year after reading a classified ad for Roanoke apartments with "rent based on income." She moved into landlord Levin McCall's apartment at 810 Mountain Ave. S.E., paying a small percentage of the rent

under the federal Section 8 housing program for poor tenants.

After living there almost a year, McCall said, she recently moved out in the middle of the night, leaving behind broken windows, missing light globes and about 300 pounds of trash. He said he didn't know where to find her.

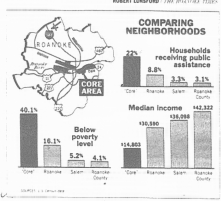
Roanoke is home to 80 percent of the valley's government-funded housing and 85 percent of its social services, ranging from food and clothing to counseling for sexually abused children, but the city hasn't had much help creating for the valley a poor

The tax-funded services are putting a strain on the city's finances. The amount of money Roanoke spends on health and welfare has doubled from \$9.8 million in 1987 to \$19.5 million last fiscal year.

Many of the families who live outside the city work within its borders, so its businesses, run on its public services and seek its entertainment. Then they go home and pay real estate taxes to another government.

"That's the cavalier attitude you have of some folks who live in the county and work in the city," former County Commissioner Harvey said. "As soon as they drive away at 10 o'clock, they never think about Roanoke's city again."

Roanoke Mayor David Bowens says the city helps with the cost of sheltering the poor. "Why is it that the voters that



offer the poor and the needy are only Roanoke's city issues? Lord knows, we've been the charitable magnet for 20 years now. The wealth of this community is elsewhere, and I want to know why these are not regional cooperation issues.

Roanoke County and Salem officials, accused repeatedly of not helping out, say they've done as much as they can.

County Supervisors' Chairman Bob Johnson doesn't appreciate the barbs from Bowens. He says the county has done plenty of cooperating with the city and ticks off the joint projects — the airport, the landfill, the county-wide library cards.

The city offers 3,865 subsidized housing units, the county, 390. "I think that's a quite a lot," said County Administrator Elmer Hodges, who said Roanoke has been developing subsidized housing and other social services for the poor a while too long.

"Cities tend to be larger (the poor) can go," he said. "They can get services there they can't get here."

Randy Smith, Salem's city manager, pointed out that Salem appropriated more than \$600,000 to community service groups for next year, which is about 1.2 percent of the total proposed general fund. "For the size of our budget, City Council appropriated a large amount," Smith said.

But nearly 70 percent of that money went to groups like the Salem Rowing Club, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the Roanoke Sports and the Bedford D-Day Memorial.

Less than one-third went to such groups as Total Action Against Poverty, Blue Ridge Community Services and Roanoke Area Ministries.

"I hear those people say Salem doesn't do enough," Smith said. "Can somebody tell me what more we ought to do?"

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The Times wants to hear its readers' views about Roanoke's oldest downtown neighborhoods and what is happening to them. If you have something you'd like to say, call 954-1911 or 954-2100 and go to mailbox 7824.

Our plan is to publish some reader comments during the course of our series. The Invisible Inner City: Poor, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods.

• • •

The influx of poor people has stressed Roanoke's old neighborhoods as well as its finances. From one street to the next, the last of old-time homeowners and a few new ones struggle to keep their neighborhoods from becoming so ragged and dangerous that no one wants to live there. The cycle begins anew each time a homeowner dies — Will the house stand vacant? Will somebody buy it and live in it? Will it be converted to rental units?

For years, Roanoke neighborhoods saw only one way out — upgrade the housing and drive the poor people to another part of town. Virginia Tech housing expert Ted Koebel says that's not a solution.

"The people aren't going to go away," he said. "It isn't as if they're going to take their poverty-level income, hike it over to Roanoke County and find housing."

Meanwhile, cities across America are trying to scatter low-income housing so that poor families aren't hemmed in and their neighborhoods labeled as places only for the downtown. City governments, banks and nonprofit organizations elsewhere have put together the money to rehabilitate old housing and build new homes within old neighborhoods, offering such apartments.

PLEASE SEE DEPARTMENTS



STEPHANIE ALLEN/DAVIS

DAVID HARTNETT, city building inspector, walks through an abandoned house at 615 Stewart Ave. S.E. last fall. Hartnett had forbidden the house, but the owner wanted to fix it up. A Roanoke General District Court judge earlier ordered the demolition of the house, and the city will hire a contractor to demolish it this summer.



STEPHANIE ALLEN/DAVIS

Broken windows, unpainted exteriors and general disrepair are indicative of the neglect suffered by much of the housing in Roanoke's inner city.



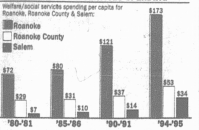
STEPHANIE ALLEN/DAVIS

Broken windows, unpainted exteriors and general disrepair are indicative of the neglect suffered by much of the housing in Roanoke's inner city.

THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

PER CAPITA SOCIAL SERVICES SPENDING



Source: Comprehensive Local Government Finance and Statistics by the State Office of Public Accounts

Despair

and losses for buyers and renters, rich and poor.

Roanoke is far behind other cities. There is comparatively little unity among banks, neighborhood groups and governments here regarding the urgency of saving central neighborhoods. Roanoke has few nonprofit housing corporations, few housing strategies, few experienced urban experts and an strong coalition of banks helping neighborhoods. The Presidents Council, a coalition of neighborhood leaders, focuses on strong neighborhood organizations. The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation preserves old buildings. Older city leaders like Harvey, the former councilman, want to tear down blocks of old houses and build new ones. Groups like the Southeast Roanoke Christian Partnership, Roanoke Neighborhood Environmental Organization, West Bank government and foundation money to rebuild its homes.

But the parties are not all coming together to talk about the whole picture.

City officials know that Roanoke's downtown neighborhoods are in trouble. They've been warning repeatedly to plan down town, to save, to preserve, and to conserve to do something — to rehabilitate old housing and build high-quality new homes so higher-income people will come back.

But the city has yet to find any clear-cut solutions.

That's what Frank Peacher, a Baptist minister who served on a 1988 housing task force that urged preservation of the old

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING UNITS IN THE ROANOKE VALLEY



Source: Housing Resources Development Authority, Housing Resources Development Authority, Housing Resources Development Authority, Housing Resources Development Authority

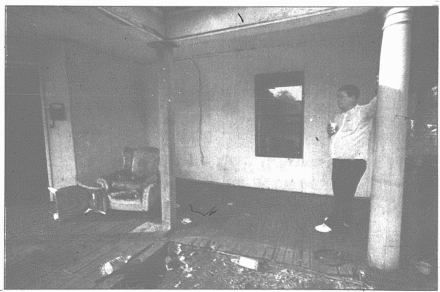
neighborhoods, said conditions have grown worse. "There have been no improvements in the whole thing. It has continued to decline. I don't remember any great thrusts to revitalize housing."

Donald Seis is scared that someday the city will condemn the house at 728 Jamison Ave. S.E.

"This place — it's ready to go down," he said of the house he moved into almost two years ago. "But I do help out. I try to keep the yard looking neat."

In April, a city building inspector ordered the owner, Tony Sparks, to repair the existing front porch and upgrade a 150-amp electrical system that should carry 300 amps to handle electricity for the five apartments.

Sparks said he will comply with the building code, but that he can't afford to do more without raising rents. His tenants, including Seis, couldn't afford to live there.



Donald Seis stands on the porch of his apartment building at 728 Jamison Ave. S.E. The building is owned by Gus Spahn, who bought it a couple years ago for \$60,000 and covered a hole in the porch with a piece of plywood. "This place, it's ready to go down," Seis said. "I don't want them to board it up. I don't have anywhere to go."

If Roanoke landlords thoroughly upgraded all their properties, he said, "you'd have thousands of people on the streets."

The type of people who rent his houses sometimes destroy the apartments anyway, he said. His clientele "is not the cream of the crop."

Landlords like him are doing a service giving poor people a place to live. Sparks said. "Certainly, we're in it to make money, but everyone is."

Seis pays \$120 a month for the one-bedroom apartment, utilities included. The 11-year-old mentally disabled man worked temporarily this year for a carpenter. But he was laid off and went back to his \$12-a-month disability income.

"I don't want them to board it up," he said of the house. "I wouldn't have anywhere to go."

By MARY BISHOP
 Mary Bishop can be reached at 961-3358 or mary@roanoke.com
 S.G. Harrington can be reached at 961-2259 or sharrington@roanoke.com



This house at Salem and 13th Street, South-west is owned by John Kape. It has been boarded up for more than five years. In 1993, city building inspectors ordered Kape to demolish the dilapidated porch. Kape recently painted part of the house.

Downtown's well-being vital to entire valley

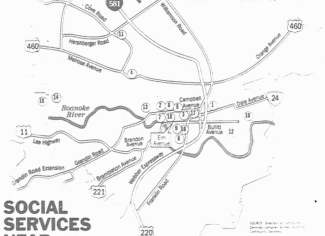
central Roanoke's prosperity said Mary Matthews, another board member of Old Southwest. A lot of people who live in the more-affluent parts of the county they still come downtown to the City Market for the only coffee to Starbucks in the Square. Nobody wants to drive through a neighborhood, a way gone to get to the meticulously restored farmer's market.

Martin Jeffrey, director of community development and director of the Total Action Against Poverty said that people who live just outside the city can't escape its troubles. "I think that they feel when they get home they're reminded from these issues," he said. "The problem of the entire city eventually reach the suburbs. It's far to say that the county depends on the city, whether it's in the Square or in the parks."

"Without a strong central core city, the region is not as strong as it could be," Roanoke City Manager Bob Herbert said. "If those folks on the outside don't get interested in the inner core, nothing is going to happen. When they're in Charlotte and asked where they live they say 'Roanoke,' even if they live outside the city."

Mary Bishop can be reached at 961-3358 or mary@roanoke.com

Our analysis of 93 nonhousing social service programs mainly for the poor, 79 are in Roanoke; Roanoke County and Salem each have seven such programs



- ### SOCIAL SERVICES NEAR DOWNTOWN
1. Th. Rescue Mission of Roanoke 402 Fourth St. S.E.
 2. Salvation Army shelters 800 Brock-Saunders Avenue S.W.
 3. Total Action Against Poverty's Transitional Living Center 23-24th St. N.W.
 4. TAP's youth and job training programs 400 Brock-Campbell Avenue S.W.
 5. Bradley Free Clinic 12-40 3rd St. S.W.
 6. RADH House 224 Campbell Ave. S.W.
 7. Samaritan's Inn 543 Salem Ave. S.W.
 8. TRUST 400 Brock-Em Avenue S.W.
 9. Presbyterian Community Center 129 3rd St. & Jamison Avenue S.E.
 10. Family Services of the Roanoke Valley 2208 Hensberger Rd. N.W.
 11. Refugee & Immigration Services 1106 North St. S.E.
 12. West End Center 1226 Patterson Ave. S.W.
 13. Virginia Veterans Care Center 4550 Shenandoah Ave. N.W. Roanoke
 14. Veterans Administration Medical Center Salem
 15. Blue Ridge Community Services, mental health, substance abuse and social assistance counseling 101 Elm Ave. S.W.
 16. Roanoke Department of Social Services 215 N. Church Ave.
 17. Roanoke City Health Department 515 Eighth St. S.W.

The Invisible Inner City: How the series was created

This series was born Jan. 20, 1996. A rented house on Salem Ave. in Southeast caught fire that Saturday night.

The fire prompted dozens of calls to the newspaper about substandard rental housing. Reporter Mary Bishop and S.G. Harrington spent more than a year on the story. They pored over old city directories and public records of all kinds. Sometimes they used city data-bases more often they had to build their own. Sometimes the city cooperated with the reporters, sometimes it resisted them.

Bishop and Harrington interviewed some 400 people — homeowners, landlords, bureaucrats, experts and neighborhood activists. Accumulating photos by Stephanie Klein-Davis also resulted in part faces with the words.

The reporters looked at all of the central neighborhoods in their research. To help keep their

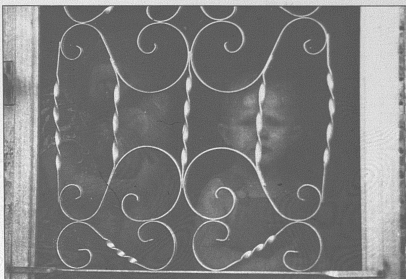
Bishop
 Harrington
 Klein-Davis

report at a human scale, some of the stories focus on three representative people. Day Avenue Southwest
 Glimmer Avenue Northwest and Tazewell Avenue Southeast

Bishop, Harrington and Klein-Davis also visited other cities to see how they handle central neighborhoods in decline.

We want to know what you think about what's happening to the old neighborhoods around downtown Roanoke, and we have set up a system to take your calls every day. Our plan is to report your responses and to make them part of the concluding installment, which will be published June 22.

Neighbors celebrate when somebody restores one of Day Avenue's beat-up old houses, but violence, arson, vacant houses and substandard rental properties keep dragging the street down



Violet Elkins, 6, hugs her stuffed animal while Howard Gregory, 3, looks through the screen door of the apartment at 656 Day Ave., where they live with their grandmother, Virginia Elkins. The family is buying the house through a lease-purchase agreement.



✓ Since 1992 on Day Avenue, police have responded to:	Murders 3
	Rapes 6
	Burglaries 74
	Larcenies 133
	Disorders 122
	Drunk in public 252
	Assaults 130

A snapshot of Day Avenue

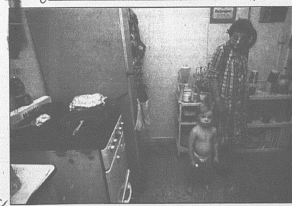
- ✓ 47 citations for building code violations on rental properties between 1982 and 1996, the highest number in the city
- ✓ The loss of almost a quarter of its houses in the last 50 years
- ✓ 54% renters, 33% owners, 12% vacant
- ✓ Median assessed property value: \$29,650, compared with \$60,000 outside the urban core

- ✓ Characteristics of Day Avenue and adjacent streets of Old Southwest: Whites: **89%** Blacks: **9%** Other: **2%**
- ✓ Per capita income: **\$9,846**, compared with **\$12,513** citywide
- ✓ Residents 25 and older with less than a ninth-grade education: **19%**
- ✓ Households on public assistance: **One in four**

SOURCE: Roanoke Building Inspector Records 1982-96 City Directories, city planning departments, Roanoke Police Crime Reports, telephone, 1991 U.S. Census

THE BEATING HEART

Bullet holes decorate a padlocked door (right) at 645 Day Ave., a rental owned by restaurateur Roland "Spooky" Macher. The dwelling was condemned more than a year ago. Meanwhile, at 647 Day Ave., (below) Mamie O'Brian's great-grandson, 2, squeals "buggy" as a cockroach scurries across the kitchen wall. O'Brian and several family members live in the upstairs apartment.



W

Story by **MARY BISHOP** / The Roanoke Times
 Photos by **STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS** / The Roanoke Times

William Myatt heard the gunshot loud and clear. It rang out about 11:45 on the Thursday night before Christmas last year.

But Myatt didn't call police. Neither did Yvette Russell, who heard it, too.

Myatt and Russell were Spencer Dickson's neighbors on Day Avenue Southwest.

It was the smell of the decaying bodies of Dickson and another man that finally provoked neighbors to call for help. When found Dec. 27, the men had been dead more than a week.

What took so long?

Myatt shrugs. He says he didn't call because Dickson was always firing guns. "He's fired out back, he's fired out front. Many times." Until the stench announced the truth, Myatt assumed Dickson was all right.

"We just thought it was natural from this neighborhood," Russell said.

The people of Day Avenue used to run downtown Roanoke.

Up and down the street 50 years ago lived Ida Clarke, a seamstress at Reed's Cleaners; Nathaniel Alexander, a Treasury Department investigator; Philip Jabbour, a shoe salesman; Edgar Vaughan, a Teletype mechanic at The World-News, then Roanoke's afternoon newspaper.

Businessmen lived on the street, too. Granville Hask, president of Grand Piano Co., made his home there in the '30s, as did Howard Bush, president of Clover Creamery.

There are still plenty of hard-working people on Day Avenue — architects, an insurance agent, a bee-truck driver, a motel auditor, a wine distributor and widows who take in boarders.

But most of the 97 houses on Day west of Franklin Road are rentals. Only 32 owners still live in their homes. Sixteen houses are vacant.

As homeowners died off and their children left for the suburbs, Day slowly turned into a street of apartments carved out of the old houses. Tenants come and go, wearing out the houses as well as the patience of the few homeowners left.

Day Avenue has the worst record in the city for building code violations in rental properties — more than 500 since inspections began in the early 1980s. Most of the renters are poor or working class. The street's crime volume, though down from a few years ago, is still among the highest in the city.

Once the home of workers who took care of Roanoke, Day now draws people who need the city's care.



THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods



Art Bowling moved to Day Avenue from South Roanoke more than five years ago, dubbing himself "Buffy in the Big City."

647 Day tells the story.

For most of its history, it was a one-family house.

Old city directories show that Archer W. Dunn, a roofer, lived there in 1914. Four years later, it was the home of Bussey Overstreet, a stockman at Brand Shoe Co.

Two families shared it in the '20s — those of druggist George Sherjov and Meredith Coyner, a hardware shipping clerk.

Other families, mostly of salesmen, had their years at 647. Then, in the 1970s, a flurry of renovations left the big homes of Roanoke's old neighborhoods divided into apartments. A slow drive down Day shows the transformation. Where once a single mailbox hung near a doorway, now rows of them are affixed to front walls. Goy Sparks, who's owned the house about six years, says the previous owner lived in the basement and rented three apartments there.

THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

FROM 1

Day

Mario O'Bryan lives upstairs with his granddaughter and three young grandchildren. Their rent is \$150 a month, paid out of the granddaughter's welfare check and O'Bryan's social Security and child benefits from a son killed in Vietnam.

O'Bryan led visitors on a tour of the apartment from the Old South side of the city that are popular with the poor. The streets are just a few blocks north. Freerzer tape held the electrical outlet to the kitchen sink. The refrigerator leaked water. The kitchen sink leaked water. A wild mass of wood scraps had been hammered into a hole to keep her gas stove from blowing out of her doorless bedroom.

"As had as things were, O'Bryan, 76, was relieved the house hadn't been condemned and her family put out on the street after inspectors came back here before."

"I know the Lord answers prayers," she said, "because I played all night."

City building inspectors cited Spence's O'Bryan's landlord, for electrical deficiencies and ordered him to upgrade the wiring. The city took him to court over it. He didn't show up for his November court date, but tenants said a month that the house was finally being repaired. "He did the repairs, pretty minimal, but enough that we had to dismiss the court case," inspector Jan Burgess said.

O'Bryan was still keeping her gas oven on all night, though, to help heat the place.

"It gets so cold in here," she said.

Sparks said he'd heard no complaints about the heating system. "It's always performed just perfect," he said.

Excuse for two houses, the 400 block of Day Avenue, where Spencer Dickason died, is entirely rented.

One elderly homemaker feels like the last of a dying tribe. She's a paper. They're selling dope

here like crazy," she said, eyes-brows raised.

"She bought her house almost 40 years ago, when there wasn't a prettier block in Roanoke."

Other homeowners surrounded her on Day, and she knew them all. "We had good people on the street," she said. "I didn't have sense enough to see that they'd die someday."

As they did, real estate man John Gardner bought the houses and sold them into apartments. Tenants from another street robbed and killed Gardner in 1978. After that, the old woman said, the properties went downhill.

Landlord Frank Wooding bought them and cleaned them up in the '80s. He moved into 406 Day, once the home of pioneering Roanoke photographer George David E. Tennant got into a brawl on a Saturday night, homeowners knocked on Wooding's door and he took care of it.

Wooding retired recently. He moved into a condo a couple of miles away and turned management of his properties over to Hall Associates Inc.

"And honey," the old woman said, "they don't give a hoot who they put in here. . . I don't even know who's on either side of me, and I'm going to keep it that way."

Dana Walker, residential portfolio manager for Hall Associates, said they do thorough screening of tenants. "It's absolutely not within our capability to put [the neighborhood] back the way it used to be."

Traci Marlian, the only other homeowner still on the block, is a yoga instructor and hypnotherapist. She said her patients are afraid to come to her house.

"In and out — that's what the neighborhood feels like now," she said. "In and out."

Frank Wooding is sorry. "I was there every minute of the day, 24 hours a day, every day, and that does have to make a difference. I got out because I lost all my patience."

"The tenants have changed drastically," he said, blaming it on drugs. "All that area is deteriorating."

Wooding said he'll sell his house.

Yvette Russell, one of the tenants at 425 Day who heard the gunfire when Spencer Dickason was shot, has a schizo-affective disorder. She chose to live near Blue Ridge Mental Health Services, where she gets her medication.

Her boyfriend and apartment mate, Dennis Fisher, is a nervous, very man who claims to have been killed in Russia, to have been on death row and to have killed two people in self-defense while in prison.

Fisher and Russell were living on Russell's monthly \$484 disability check last winter. The couch and chair in the living room of their furnished apartment were broken, so they were sitting on the floor.

It took Margaret Mize more than a year to sell her home at 544 Day, a 3,480-square-foot house of 10 rooms with big windows, three bathrooms and fancy woodwork around the porch and eaves. Mize was asking \$49,000 — a steal, according to architects who've seen it.

What drove potential buyers away, Mize and other neighbors say, was the noisy, all-night coming and goings at a rental house owned by Roanoke landlord Frank Rousas across the street.

Bob Powell, a former probation officer, bought Mize's house for \$41,000 in January. The night he moved in, someone broke in and stole his TV, his VCR and his tools.

Powell, who lived with Shirley Thomas, the former owner of the Irquois nightclub, who owns a house down the street. "Sure enough," Powell said, "they tried to set it to blow."

The next day Powell installed



Spencer Dickason, raising on his porch last August, lived in an apartment in a multi-unit block at 425 Day Ave., which is owned by Frank Wooding. Dickason and his Associates, Police believe that Dickason, 54, shot and killed a visitor in his apartment before committing suicide Dec. 19, 1996.

In the 300 block of Day last fall, a Hollins College dropout in her mid-20s was living in a run-down building, one of six apartments in and behind a rental house. She was paying \$175 plus utilities for the one-room efficiency that she said was often overrun with spiders and roaches.

Sitting on her shagreened bed late one morning, she said she moved there to be on a bus line and while walking distance of her mental health counselor. Many carless renters live on Day so they can walk to Roanoke's social services and Dickason by Hall Associates. Police believe that Dickason, 54, shot and killed a visitor in his apartment before committing suicide Dec. 19, 1996.

They also walk to the Samaritan's Inn or Roanoke Area Ministry's RAM House for meals. For health care, they go to the Bradley Free Clinic or a public health clinic.

Yvette Russell and boyfriend Dennis Fisher, holding Uriel the cat, met on a bus from Scranton, N.J., she said. They settled into an apartment last year at 425 Day Ave., managed by Hall Associates. What I liked about Hall was they didn't frown on us," Russell said, speaking of their mixed-race relationship.

dealt lock and slept with a shotgun by his side.

"Basically," he said, "we're trying to have to buy up the street. That's the only way to change it."

Frederick Michael Brewer pleaded guilty to the house and he listed the Rousas house as his address.

Rousas said he's made exterior repairs to his house and believes his tenants have quieted down. If they bother the neighbors, he said, "call the police." He has no control over these people. "I try to set it to do right."

Ann Bowling asks when she hears about misfortunes on Day Avenue. She moved onto the 500 block from South Roanoke five years ago. The move turned the gentle woman with the pageboy cut into an unlikely urban pioneer. "Bufty in the Big City," she calls herself.

She painted her home and another she bought as rental property around the corner in shades of rose and purple, hoping to start a congregation of paint jobs down the block. Across the street, architect John Shelton splashed his restored home in a deep purplish blue with a golden yellow trim, and new Bob Powell is painting his house.

But when they look out their windows they still see the Frank Rousas house and a boarded-up house owned by the estate of Charles Kopley, a landlord who rented to Roanoke's poor for 60 years.

Day's mix of social classes has made Bowling more open-minded, she says. She's content there.

Helicopter mechanic Calvin Atkins was not. He recently moved his family out of an apartment in the 500 block and said he'd never buy a house there.

"The noise, the violence. Nobody's been killed since I've lived here, but I've seen a couple

of people get beat up seriously. I hate it."

"It's a shame. There are beautiful houses."

On a ride along Day last fall, Roanoke architectural historian Leslie Gies dated homes as far back as the 1810s and '20s. "Gooch. Gooch. Gooch. What you say buildings," she said, stopping at 535 Day. "This is really high quality. There's not much of this in Roanoke."

Property values along Day rise and fall like a roller coaster. The city values landlord John Kopley's abandoned house at 356

Day on appraisal, and the house has been boarded up since then.

Neighbors said the house was still a treasure. They described its tongue-and-groove floors and woodwork carved with ivy leaves. Many Elizabeth Kopley, John Kopley's wife, who handles most of the family's rental properties, said 550 Day had been "in the hands of a Realtor and nobody offered to buy it."

Late the night of May 14, fire swept through the house, blistering Shelton's new paint job and breaking four of his windows. He believes a bystander and firefighters forced his house by hoisting it down. A fire marshal said the following week that the fire was caused by arson.

The next morning, Shelton and his friends perched through the burned-out doors and windows of the Kopley house. They saw nothing left to save. Shelton expects, he'll have an empty lot next door.

Crime on Day Avenue has fallen almost 25 percent since 1993 — it's dropped all over Roanoke — but the street record is still one of the worst in the city.

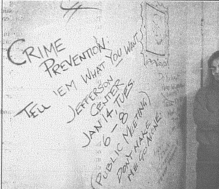
In the past five years, police say, there have been reports of — three homicides, 74 burglaries — 132 larcenies, 130 assaults, 118 disorders and 84 damages to — property. Records also show 56 public drunkenness complaints in that period — on average, one a week.

Every block of Day has its own set of troubles and tears — around Louisa and Harold — Hodges in the 800 block — mostly converting rental homes back into ones for homeowning families, coaching renters on how to maneuver through complicated federal loan applications to buy their houses and loaning their money and tilters to landlords — their yards.

REAR SEAT DRIVERS



Florence Woods (left) and Marie Hazelwood pose on Day Avenue, where Woods lived in the 1940s.



Trina Cline, a neighborhood leader in the 600 block of Day Avenue, leans against a doorway in her dining room where she invited neighbors to write on the walls during a party before she repaired.



Judy Conner, 38, gets a hug from her 5-year-old son, Cody Johnson, on the back porch of her Day Avenue rental house. She blames her frequent moves on high utility bills and landlords who never fix their properties. "When you have to move, you have to make adjustments. The kids have to adjust to a different school," she said. She pays \$365 a month to landlord Ronald "Dick" Dearing, not including utilities. She said Dearing is her best landlord so far.

Renters: A silent majority

Story by S.D. HARRINGTON / Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS
THE ROANOKE TIMES

Judy Conner is a veteran tenant.

"I've been in how many rental properties since I've been here?"

One, two . . . about seven," she said. She's lived in Roanoke 11 years.

Talking one day on her back steps at 347 Day Ave. S.W., she recalled some of the houses she has rented. At a place on Bullitt Avenue, she said, "The floor was falling in; the ceiling was falling in. It got so bad I had to call the inspector, and they came out and condemned the house."

Conner left another Bullitt Avenue house when heating bills climbed to \$400 a month. She held her thumb and index finger an inch apart to show the space around windows and between doors and walls. "That's where all my heat went."

"The reason I've had to move a lot is because the landlord doesn't want to fix nothing," she said.

The two times she complained to building inspectors, she said, her landlords evicted her. When she didn't move out within the allotted time, sheriff's deputies removed her possessions and put them at the curb.

Conner is tired of moving. Her children have to adjust to a new school, and the whole family has to make friends in a new neighborhood.

The 38-year-old divorced mother of four now rents from Richard Dearing. She says he's the best landlord she's had.

If she had her choice, she'd live in Roanoke County or South Roanoke. But most of the houses there rent for between \$600 and \$1,000 a month, Conner said. She pays \$365 on Day Avenue.

"It seems like . . . this is the area you



Juanta Jorgensen, who rents an apartment at 518 Mountain Ave. S.W. from Roland "Sporly" Mather, said, as a former resident manager, she has learned that if landlords "give a little [they] will get a little better clientele."

can afford; this is where you've got to live," she said.

Conner is like many of the renters in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods. They make up nearly two-thirds of the population in the oldest neighborhoods surrounding downtown. But it's an unorganized and practically unrepresented majority.

Many of its members move frequently, but usually only within the confines of other poor neighborhoods. They seldom stay long enough to develop a sense of belonging.

U.S. Census data from 1990 show that more than half of the residents in Roanoke's central neighborhoods had lived in their current home for five years or less. In one section of Old Southwest, only 18 percent of the residents had lived in the same house for more than five years.

Tenants' rights advocates say substandard housing and a lack of power to fix it keep renters from seeing the value of their neighborhoods and from trying to make them better.

Landlords argue that tenants who skip their rent payments make it impossible for the landlords to keep their properties in good condition. Others say some renters' lifestyles are so deplorable that they contribute to the decline of entire neighborhoods.

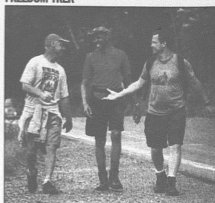
PLEASE SEE RENTERS/4S



THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods

FREEDOM TREK



RE-CREATING the walk 8-year-old Booker T. Washington made in 1865 from his slave owners' plantation in Franklin County to Malden, W.Va. are (from left) James Thibault, Welby Winstead and the educator's great-grandson, Larry Washington. They left Sunday from the Booker T. Washington National Monument in Hairy.

\$700,000 offered to charity Clinton's lawyer offers settlement to Paula Jones

Jones's lawyers quickly rejected the first settlement offer from the Clinton team.

WASHINGTON POST — President Clinton's attorney offered to settle Paula Corbin Jones's sexual harassment lawsuit Sunday with a large payment to charity, but insisted the president would not apologize or admit wrongdoing in an Arkansas hotel room.

After conferring with Clinton on Saturday night, attorney Robert Bennett said he would agree to pay the \$700,000 Jones sought in her original 1994 complaint as long as the money went to charity and "some portion of legal costs."

In offering the deal, Bennett made reference to Jones' statements that she sued to repair her reputation and would donate any proceeds after expenses to a

charity cause. "If she agreed to have us give a six or seven hundred thousand dollar contribution to a charity, I think I might very well recommend that," Bennett said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "But no apology, no admission of misconduct, and we're not going to line her pockets or her lawyers' pockets, because this [case] is about money."

The Bennett proposal came five days after the Supreme Court ruled 9-0 against Clinton's request for a trial delay until after he leaves office and marked the first time that the president's side has agreed publicly to a financial settlement in the matter.

Yet the idea appeared to be as much a tactical move to put Jones on the defensive as the basis for serious settlement negotiations, and Jones's lawyers quickly rejected it.

PLEASE SEE JONES/4D

Violent offenses down 7 percent U.S. crime rate takes biggest fall in years

Statistics don't reveal the whole picture, criminologists warn.

WASHINGTON — The nation's crime rate in 1996 fell for the fifth consecutive year, as violent crimes including murder and aggravated assault registered their largest one-year decline in 35 years the government has gathered such statistics, the FBI reported Sunday.

Criminologists and law enforcement experts attributed the drop to many factors, including aging of the baby boom generation, increases in police personnel, less-violent crack markets, more prisons for violent offenders and improved law enforcement targeting of crime areas.

But some experts warned that the new figures do not signal the nation's crime woes are over. The overall 7 percent decrease in violent crime nationwide, which left the U.S. crime rate at the lowest level in a decade, was led by an 11 percent decline in

murders, the FBI reported. In the last two years, the rate of killings has plummeted about 20 percent.

In addition, the other categories of violent crime — robbery, rape and aggravated assault — fell in every region of the country last year at an increasing rate. Last year's 7 percent fall in violent crime was nearly twice as big as the decline in 1995. There were 8 percent fewer reports of robberies last year; 6 percent fewer aggravated assaults; and 3 percent fewer rapes. Property crime, which includes burglary and car theft, also fell.

Although the FBI's preliminary figures did not contain a breakdown by age or race or provide the per-capita homicide rate — statistics that experts like to have in examining the data — Alfred Blumstein, a respected criminologist at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, suggested that an 11 percent drop in the number of homicides would work out to a rate of about 7.3 per 100,000. "That would be a stunningly

PLEASE SEE CRIME/4D

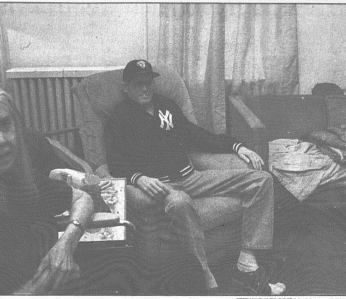
OUR SERIES

1 **WEE** Are the lies of Roanoke's inner-city renters. Profiles of historic Day, Gilmer and Ballew avenues. The plight of vacant houses.

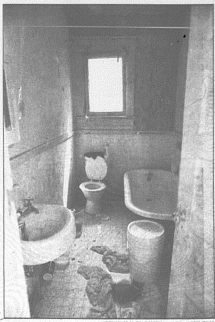
2 **WEE** What other cities do about decaying neighborhoods and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.

THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT



Angela Martin and her son Nathan Martin live in a downstairs apartment at 429 Day Ave. S.W. She was nearly stomped to death in a nearby laundromat and still suffered a stroke.

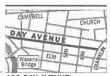


The bathroom of the Day Avenue Southwest house that Janice Hash rents from Frank Rozous has a plywood back wall. Cats make their beds on damp towels on the dirty floor.

FROM A1 Renters

"There are some people that want to live in filth, in my mind, and they are going to seek out low-income housing because they really want to live in filth," said John Bradshaw, a former Roanoke Planning Commission member. Bradshaw still plays a significant role in city planning as chief executive officer of Roanoke's biggest architectural firm, Hayes Sayre Matern & Matern.

"They don't mind the rats coming into the house and eating from the garbage can," he said. "They don't mind sleeping on a mattress without a cover on it. You tear down the dump, they're going to move into another dump, turn it into a dump. In my mind, it isn't economics but a sheer lack of will to live in something better."



400 DAY AVENUE
✓ 47% of the housing units are rental
✓ Approximate income is \$12,000
✓ Typical rent about \$270
✓ Nearly one half of the households receive some type of public assistance
✓ Nearly three quarters have lived there 2 years or less
✓ 60% lived there 1 year or less

"It's almost as if the tenants are unable to function on their own," he said.

Hardly can Roanoke's poor renters live in the suburbs. Out there, the rents are higher and landlords are pickier about credit ratings.

In a core of neighborhoods surrounding downtown, the median rent was \$230 in 1990, according to U.S. Census data. But in the rest of the city, it jumped to \$307. Further out — in Roanoke County — the median rent was \$371. In Salem, it was \$145.

Housing that qualifies for federal rent subsidies is also concentrated in downtown neighborhoods. Tenants who receive Section 8 rent subsidies must live where rents are below fair market for the area.

In 1993, more than 1,300 Roanoke renters received federal Section 8 rental subsidies, according to a report from The Enterprise Foundation, a Maryland-based nonprofit group that focuses on affordable housing. Roanoke County had only \$1 Section 8 renters. Salem had none.

Roanoke also has 1,500 units of public housing; Roanoke County and Salem have none.

Premier Legal Aid attorney Nancy Brown says there isn't enough decent, affordable housing for the poor in Roanoke. The houses are in terrible condition.

"If you change your attitude, then the attitude of your tenant is going to change," Hicks said.

Diana Walker, property manager for Hall Associates, says that your company does all it can to keep tenants out of the neighborhood.

"We do probably more extensive screening than anyone in town," he said. "If we weren't screening, we wouldn't have a vacancy problem."

Currently, about 10 percent of the units on the 400 block of Day Avenue are vacant.

Walker said the company aggressively evicts tenants who are known to be drinking drugs or generally causing problems. In the past six to 10 months, they have evicted about 10 tenants for disrupting the neighborhood, he said.

have a clean, safe place to live." When tenants damage property, they can be evicted, she said. "No landlord has to maintain property in a bad condition."

The 400 block of Day Avenue is 97 percent rental. Most of the former single-family houses have been chopped into three to six apartments.

According to a Roanoke Times survey of 15 households on that block, only a quarter of the tenants had lived in their apartment longer than two years. About 60 percent of them had lived there a year or less.

When a neighborhood has that much transience, community activists say, no trust is built among residents. Homeowners grow tired of getting to know every tenant who moves in and out. Tenants don't even bother getting to know their neighbors.

WHO TO CALL

Need help? Information? Want to get involved?

- Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, 344-2086
- Roanoke City Building Inspector/Office, 653-1208
- Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, 345-8255
- Roanoke Health Department, 857-7483
- Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority, 983-9283

"I got to the point where I don't know anybody and I don't really want to," said a longtime renter on the 400 block of Day. "You don't know who you can trust and who you can't."

Selachia Hicks, who rents an apartment with her boyfriend, Randy Cabbler, said there is a general lack of respect for her neighborhood by both the landlords and tenants.

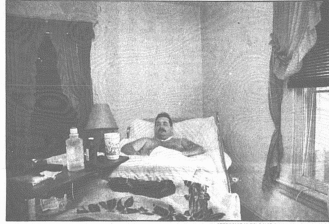
She believes Hall Associates Inc., which manages all the rental units on the block, could help by screening tenants better. And she says the company could affect the way the tenants feel about the neighborhood by keeping the houses in better condition.

"If you change your attitude, then the attitude of your tenant is going to change," Hicks said.

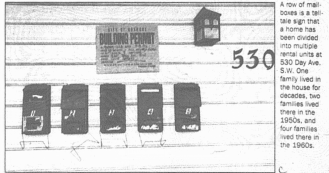
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Shid Wheeler is paralyzed after being electrocuted while repairing a house he rented on Tabernacle Southeast. His wife, Tina Wheeler, cares for him in this Highland Avenue Southeast rental house.



Associates isn't doing anything, Walker said.

"It's a low-income community. You've got your normal low-income problems," he said. Drinking, drugs, "people with too much time on their hands."

He said the landlord can only do so much.

"We're picking up litter several times a week," Walker said. But after a short time, there's more litter.

"If the company didn't care about the neighborhood at all, he said, it wouldn't spend the time picking up litter in the first place."

One longtime renter in the 400 block of Day Avenue Southwest grew tired of seeing people deal drugs outside his door.

He started talking to police (and for that reason declined to be identified for this story). He tried to get others involved, handing out fliers and going door to door to invite people to a renters' meeting to talk about about how to protect the neighborhood and how to get landlords to respond

to complaints.

There was a rumor that neighborhood drug dealers were staking out the meetings to see who attended.

"That's what irritates me," the organizer said. "I hear people

help the renters organize. They brought in Legal Aid attorney Henry Woodard to answer questions about landlord-tenant law."

"They've met four times since February and have branched out to other blocks. Eventually, the organizer would like to have an Old Southwest renters association.

But so far, only four renters from the 400 block of Day Avenue and four from the 500 block of Day Avenue are regulars to the meetings. Two others came to the first meeting but never returned.

Prince says setting up a tenants' organization is something Old Southwest Inc. has wanted to do for a long time.

"The tenants really have to get to know each other" to feel safer in their neighborhood, she said.

"Tenants have to feel that they have a stake in neighborhoods. Even though they are renting, this is their home."

Staff writer Mary Bishop contributed to this story.

B.S. contributed can be reached at 981-5330 or mbishop@roanoke.com

WHY IT MATTERS

"The cities take all the unwanted. They're dumped on by all the surrounding places and yet they're taken for granted. Where would the homeless go?"

SUBUELLA SHENDE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NORTHWEST NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Finding the truth amid the finger-pointing between tenants and landlords isn't easy. The Roanoke Times interviewed more than 150 tenants and landlords for this story.

Some tenants blamed landlords for pocketing rent money without putting anything back into their properties. When they request repairs, those tenants said, landlords often take months to make them and sometimes never make them at all. Yet when they fall behind in rent, tenants say, their landlords expects them to pay up immediately.

Landlords say tenants cause a lot of the damage themselves. And when some tenants don't pay rent, it makes it hard for that landlord to pay for repairs on other properties.

"Landlords, in general, have to take the rap," said landlord David Shepard Sr., who owns a Roanoke apartment with his son, David Shepard Jr.

He said city building inspectors don't build tenants accountable for damage and poor living habits — which, he said, often contribute to the deterioration of houses.

ONLINE
"The Invisible Inner City: Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods" is on line at www.roanoke.com/roastimes

THE ROANOKE TIMES

Business Classifieds
Deaths
Local
Sports
A2
B1
B2
C1
C2

CLOUDY
High mid 60s,
Low mid 50s,
chance of rain.
Details on A2.

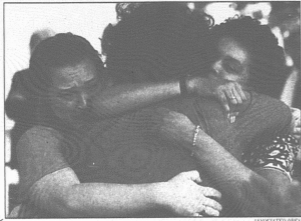
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

www.roanoke.com

TUESDAY, JUNE 3, 1997 \$900

Jury returns guilty verdict on McVeigh

Jennie Coverdale (center) is comforted by unidentified family members of victims after a Denver jury returned a guilty verdict on Timothy McVeigh. Coverdale lost two grandchildren in the April 19, 1995 Alfred P. Murrah building blast.



As Timothy McVeigh entered the annals of history as America's deadliest terrorist, one grieving father called his conviction "a very dull victory."

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DENVER — Timothy McVeigh was convicted Monday in the deadliest act of terror on U.S. soil, a verdict that brought jubilation and bitter tears to relatives of the 168 people killed in the Oklahoma City bombing. The jury will now decide whether he should pay with his life.

McVeigh sat at the defense table with his hands in a white-knuckle clasp and an impassive expression as U.S. District Judge Richard Marsh announced the verdict of guilty on all 11 counts of murder and conspiracy.

In the audience, tears welled in the eyes of the more than two dozen bombing survivors and victims' relatives. After the court session, they broke into sobs and embraced each other. One man thrust his fists into the air.

wedding ring and, of course, I just lost it. I started crying. It was wonderful.

The momentary joy was tempered by memories of the losses in the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The blast shattered America's sense of security and belief that this level of terror could never have come from within.

"You heard most of them clap. I couldn't do that because McVeigh has put me through so much... Welch said 'I thought I'd all be joy, but it isn't. A very dull victory. The bottom line is my little girl isn't coming back and I have the rest of my life to deal with that.'

The same jury that took 2 1/2 hours over four days to convict McVeigh returned Wednesday to hear evidence on whether he should die by injection.

It will be a mini-trial featuring what likely will be the most wrenching testimony of the

Reaction from families and survivors: McVeigh's fate, A7

PLEASE SEE GUILTY/17

Gilmer Avenue: Proud past, shaky future

Story by MARY BISHOP / Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS

See It In The Record THE ROANOKE TIMES
Few streets in Roanoke can claim the kind of history Gilmer Avenue can. A civil rights lawyer who helped desegregate the nation's schools grew up there.

The United States' first black ambassador was raised there. One of the country's barrier-breaking black filmmakers made a movie there. And that's just the 400 block.

"Long ago, if you lived on Gilmer you were somebody," said Pauline Epps, whose family lives there for decades. Gilmer is a main artery into the heart of old black Roanoke. It's the residential equivalent of the once-famous Henry Street commercial strip that the city of Roanoke wants to rebuild. But Gilmer isn't nearly what it used to be. It has lost half its homes and half its homeowners in the past 50 years. Renters have taken their places.

"The close-knit community is no longer," said Alice Roberts, who still lives in the Gilmer Avenue home where she was born. "The warm, friendly, caring spirit is rare. People move in and out [of] the block and you never know them or their names."



Janta Pritchett, 9, and Pee Wee "Stafford" Pritchett, 11, pose in front of the house their family rents at 401 Gilmer Ave. N.W. Civil rights lawyer Oliver Hill lived there as a child. He went on to become a lead lawyer in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, Brown vs. Board of Education, which desegregated the public schools.

places," Bruce said. "There wasn't no such thing as temporary work. Everybody had a regular job they went to every day."

The black elite, as racially termned in as the working class, were mingled among the laborers on Gilmer Avenue. Dr. Samuel Mendenhall, one of the city's earliest black physicians, lived across the street. David Schley, a pioneering black city nurse, lived on the corner. Dr. J.H. Roberts, a founder of Burrill Memorial Hospital, Roanoke's former all-black hospital, lived two blocks away.

The Johnson kids were influenced by all the educated people around them as well as by their parents' upward mobility. Bruce said, "All four children earned master's degrees. Bruce, retired now, taught school in Roanoke for 41 years.

Her birthplace is still in the family, but Bruce and her siblings grew disaffected with the plain two-story house and its narrow lot. They moved to bigger houses. A long-term tenant rents their homeplace now and treats it like her own, even replacing gutters when an leestorm tore them off.

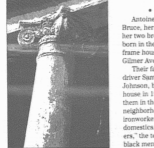
Bruce's daughter wants to keep the house in the family, but Bruce herself wouldn't go back. "The type of people who have come in are different from the people who were originally there," she said. "When you

OUR SERIES

- 1** The lives of Roanoke's inner-city renters. Profiles of historic Day, Gilmer and Tazewell avenues. The plight of vibrant tenants.
- 2** The business of landscaping and some of the people who are in it.
- 3** What other cities do about daycare neighborhoods and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.

WHO TO CALL

- Need help? Information? Want to get involved?
- Eagan Burns, historic Gaitorsboro Preservation District Inc., 342-0728
 - Northwest Neighborhood Environmental Organization, 344-5874
 - Roanoke Housing Department, 653-1208 or 653-2222
 - Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, 348-8250



THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods

Antoinette Johnson Bruce, her sister and her two brothers were born in the simple frame house at 206 Gilmer Ave. N.W. Their father, truck driver Samuel Johnson, brought the house in 1910. Around them in the Gaitorsboro neighborhood lived ironworkers and domestics and "help-ers," the term for black men who assisted white machinists, toolmakers and pipefitters, often doing the same work without the title or pay. Gilmer's people had solid jobs when Bruce was growing up in the 1920s — at the railroad, the Hotel Roanoke and the American Viscose rayon mill. "They used to work at established

Controversy ends in unanimous 'no' No raises, big or small, for mayor and City Council

Mayor David Bovens apologized, but said he still believes his job should pay \$23,000 a year.

By BOB CASEY THE ROANOKE TIMES

After residents delivered what was perhaps the most stinging indictment of city leadership to date, applause rang out in City Council chambers Monday when beleaguered council members did an about-face and unanimously rejected pay raises for themselves and the mayor.

Successive 0-7 votes killed proposed ordinances giving Mayor David Bovens a 28 percent salary increase, from \$18,000 to \$23,000 a year, and council member a 14 percent raise, from \$14,000 to \$16,000.

Council also cut a proposed 5 percent increase for six top managers to 3.3 percent, the average

raise handed out to mid-and-file city workers, effective July 1. That action affects City Manager Bob Herbert, City Attorney Wilburn Dilling, City Clerk Mary Park, Finance Director Jim Grisco, Fleet Estate Assessor Will Clayton and Municipal Auditor Bob Bird.

Meanwhile, Bovens issued a public apology for the dimension the proposed raises sowed among city workers and residents.

"We thought that we were doing the right thing," Bovens told the crowd in council chambers. "That may be hard for you to believe... Perhaps we don't always succeed. I take full blame and responsibility for this."

Bovens also called the raise issue "an absolute fiasco," although he said that in his heart, he still believes he and council deserve the raises.

The actions came after nearly

PLEASE SEE RAISES/A2

Girls, Girls, Girls indicted Grand jury aims 11 indictments at club, not dancers

See It In The Record **QUEST**
Instead of charging the strippers, Roanoke authorities want to nab the owners of a local club.

By LAURENCE HAMMACK THE ROANOKE TIMES

Girls, Girls, Girls was hit Monday with indictments, indictments, indictments. The striptease club — which three years ago became the first target of a Roanoke ordinance regulating nude dancing — is now accused of obscenity and unlawful exposure in a 31-count indictment.

Although indictments returned Monday by a Roanoke Circuit Court grand jury referred to 11 dancers with stage names like Passion, Kitten and Vixen, prosecutors are going after the

corporate entity of Girls, Girls, Girls of Virginia Inc.

"The root of the problem is the corporation itself," Prosecutor Dennis Nagel said of a business where dancers allegedly perform partially and totally nude.

So instead of seeking jail sentences for the dancers, managers or owners of the nightclub on Franklin Road Southwest, authorities are seeking as much as \$40,000 in fines.

The idea, Nagel said, is to require the business to comply with the law and to punish them in the pocketbook for decisions that were made to benefit their pocketbook.

After receiving complaints about Girls, Girls, Girls, city police sent a team of undercover

PLEASE SEE CLUB/A2

THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

FROM A1

Gilmer

have rental property, you're out to get the dollar and you don't investigate your tenants the way you should. The property just went down, and people just didn't want to live there anymore.

Gilmer Avenue has suffered the same plagues as other old neighborhoods near downtown — the deaths of aging homeowners, the sharp proliferation of renters, the dense of the long-term employment that once underwrote families, and the steady decay of some of Roanoke's oldest homes.

But Gilmer had even more going against it, urban renewal. The federally financed movement — which tore down more than a million black urban homes across America in the 1950s and '60s — knocked down 42 homes, a school and a church on Gilmer Avenue Northeast to make room for industries and Interstate 581.

White families, once in the majority on Gilmer's western blocks, had moved to newer housing long before. As racial segregation took root in Roanoke, the black homeowners of Gilmer Avenue neighbors for decades, headed out, too.

Restless have replaced most of them. Deters of Gilmer homes have burned or been abandoned. Many abandoned beyond repair. Others have been torn down for such projects as the new downtown bridge at Second Street and the Broad which is being built right now.

According to the 1946 Hill's Roanoke City Directory, 134 houses stood on the long stretch from the one remaining block of Gilmer Northeast through the first four blocks of Gilmer Northwest. Today, the number is 67.

There were twice as many homeowners on those blocks 50 years ago. Seventy of the homes were owner-occupied in 1946. City records and research by The Roanoke Times show that 28 homeowners remain there today. Everyone else is a renter.

In a report on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development five years ago, the city said that, in the excess tracts surrounding Gilmer, 55 percent of the houses need "substantial rehabilitation" and another 41 percent need moderate repairs. City inspectors found building code violations in 14 rental houses along Gilmer in the past decade. Some

rental houses have been condemned more than once.

A man renting a house that has been condemned twice shook his head outside the rundown frame house. "I'm here for now, but I'm not here for long," he said in March. In May, he was still there.

Gilmer Avenue is one of Roanoke's oldest streets.

In 1852, the people who lived there sprang Ya Sin, a clothing designer, redecorated her living room at 210 Gilmer Ave. N.W. This is Lastra. Her son moved in next door, and she has high hopes for the street.

They were bootmakers, blacksmiths and car-buffers at the railroad's Roanoke Machine Works. They were railroad engineers, brickmen, plumbers, tinners, stonemasons and saloon workers.

Gustavus W. Crumpecker, a downtown lawyer, lived at 110 Gilmer Ave. N.W. John W. Mills, a deputy U.S. marshal, lived at 100 John Conrad, a police officer, lived at 126.

The "black men and women" who began taking their places around 1910 and into the 1920s were solid workers, too. Railroad chef Richard Williams, Sany Barkhols, a nurse with the City Instructive Nurses Association, Abies Coleman, superintendent of service at the Hotel Roanoke.

While neighborhood activists around the city dream of a comeback for the wide streets of Southeast and Southwest Roanoke, such ambitions are rarely shared for the streets where these black people lived.

The railroad tracks, long the racial dividing line in Roanoke,

have been a line of demarcation for imaginative thinking about old black Roanoke, said Evelyn Bechel, president of the Historic Gainsboro Preservation District. Her group is pushing for renovation of the blocks of Gilmer closest to downtown.

"If you ask if I've heard architects or moneyed people speak of rehabilitating or beautifying this area," she said, "the answer would be to go. The only person I've heard say anything about it or dream about it is me."

By spring, though, the city was putting brick sidewalks and stone retaining walls on the first block of Gilmer, a block from the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center. The city also is planning to fix up houses and do landscaping on the block.

At the other end of Gilmer, a neighborhood group, the Northwest Neighborhood Environmental Organization, has restored nine old houses and was working on two more this spring. But the blocks in the middle are getting little attention.

Margaret and Alice Roberts have watched Gilmer's transformation with dismay.

The now-retired daughters of the late Dr. J.R. Roberts still live in the Gilmer Avenue home he purchased in 1915. The physician, called "Dr. Bob" by his patients, ran his practice nearby from 1913 to 1908.

The community regarded Gilmer Avenue as a beautiful street," Alice Roberts said. "You know not only your next-door neighbor, but everyone in the block, and the blocks that followed. You spoke to everybody. You shared each other's concerns, happiness, joys, as well as

sorrow and disappointments.

When your neighbor was basking, your doorbell rang — there was a pan of hot rolls for your family."

Children rode one neighbor's pony, Rosebald, played at another's pool table, and took art classes across a grocery store. On snow days, the city blocked off nearby Fifth Street Northwest between Patton and Harrison avenues and children rode their sleds down one of the steepest streets in town.

The Roberts sisters remember the grocery stores on every block of Gilmer near them —



STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS / THE ROANOKE TIMES

Row's in the 200 block, Dillard's in the 300, Lavorns Brothers in the 400. There was a bakery, an ice cream parlor and a milliner, too. The Cosmopolitan Building, on Gilmer just west of Jefferson Street and owned by 10 local stockholders, housed offices for dentist Edward Dudley, lawyer Jacob J. Hill and doctors Maynard Lane and J.H. Roberts.

In the blocks around the Roberts sisters, the offices and stores are gone now. Yellow city repair orders are nailed to deserted houses whose glassed windows are home just to birds, not people. As if to signify a dying street, the only business left is a funeral home.

In the 1910s and 1920s, Edward J. Dudley and his brothers, sons of a Gainsboro dentist, grew up at 405 Gilmer Ave. N.W.

His brothers went on to other cities and became a psychiatrist, a lawyer and a dentist. Edward Dudley became a lawyer.

In 1948, President Harry Truman named him minister to Liberia. When the post was upgraded to ambassador the following year, Dudley became the nation's first black ambassador.

Later, he was an assistant attorney general in New York State and was elected president of the Borough of Manhattan. He served as a domestic relations court judge in New York City and ran unsuccessfully for New York State attorney general in 1962.

From 1965 until his retirement in 1985, he was a judge on the New York State Supreme Court.

When the Dudley boys were growing up at 405 Gilmer, Oliver Hill was their friend two doors down at 401.

He went on to become a law school classmate and friend of the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Hill, a civil rights lawyer in Richmond, argued the Virginia part of Brown vs. Board of Education, the landmark case that desegregated American schools.

In the early 1920s, trailblazing black American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux made a movie on the 400 block of Gilmer. Oliver Hill's home had a lily pond with goldfish, and Micheaux shot a garden-party scene there. Hill still a child, had a walk-through role in "The House Behind the Cedars." It was a glamorous moment for Roanoke's black community, even though Micheaux scoldes says Virginia authorities blocked filming of the feature film because it was about an interracial couple.

Now, one of Hill's former law partners wants to install a historic marker at 401 Gilmer Ave. N.W. to honor Oliver Hill's childhood home.

But so far, 401 Gilmer has received no official attention at all — unless you count the 18 building code violations the City of Roanoke lodged against its owner a couple of years ago. The house is long out of the hands of anyone who knows — or at least — of Oliver Hill.

The big white rambling house with red shutters is rundown. An old refrigerator sat on the L-shaped porch last winter. Kim Patrick, 31, who lives in the two apartments there, was excited to learn that a famous civil rights lawyer grew up there and a movie was filmed in her yard in the 1920s.

"Maybe the landlord will fix it

"Now when you come in you close your drapes."

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"Maybe the landlord will fix it

"Now when you come in you close your drapes."



STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS / THE ROANOKE TIMES

The Moses store at the corner of Gilmer Avenue and Jefferson Street has been boarded up for years. At one time there were stores in almost every block of Gilmer. Now there are none.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALICE AND MARGARET ROBERTS

Oliver Hill (front) sits with his friend on the 400 block of Gilmer Avenue Northwest, circa 1918. Hill became a history-making civil rights lawyer in Richmond. Edward Dudley (directly behind Hill) became the nation's first black ambassador.

up," she said.

But William Brutton, who owns the house, said he had never heard of Oliver Hill or his connection to 401.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The Times wants to hear its readers' views about Roanoke's oldest downtown neighborhoods and what is happening to them.

If you have something you'd like to say, call in late at 981-0100 and go to mailbox 7524.

Our plan is to publish some reader comments during the course of our series.

The Invisible Inner City: Peering, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods.

"It's news to me," he said.

The house at 215 Gilmer N.W. shows how, with all the best

of intentions, a family home can slip out of the hands of those who care most about it.

Pearl Sewell, widow of Ernest Sewell, a waiter with Norfolk and Western Railway, lived in the house until her death decades ago. She left it to her nephew, Richard Sewell of Washington, D.C.

Richard Sewell and his wife, Helen, rented out the house. Helen Sewell said they used it only about three times during their long marriage. The last tenant left years ago.

The dark, weathered and abandoned house sits at the end of a row of attractive, well-kept dwellings.

Helen Sewell, widowed now and working on Capitol Hill, doesn't know what to do with it. She's asked Roanoke's congressman, Republican Bob Goodlatte, to help her find a real estate

PLEASE SEE GILMER AT

THE PEOPLE VS. TIMOTHY MCVEIGH

Federal charges against McVeigh

Count 1: Conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction	NOBILITY	RELIQU
Count 2: Use of a weapon of mass destruction	NOBILITY	RELIQU
Count 3: Destruction by explosion	NOBILITY	RELIQU
Count 4-11: First-degree murder	NOBILITY	RELIQU

Killing a federal agent on the basis of duty is covered by the second federal felony. The following victims fall on the category.

Cynthia Campbell Brown, 28	Nicky Murray, 20
Paul G. Brewsterman, 43	Kenneth McCulloch, 26
Paul D. In, 42	Clare McAdams, 20
Donald R. Leonard, 50	Alan G. Walker, 40

Guilty

case: survivors and relatives describing the upheaval in their lives. McVeigh will probably call family members to defend for many, and offer testimony about the disastrous FBI siege at Waco, Texas.

Juries remained under a gag order preventing them from discussing the reasons for their verdict.

Prosecutors contended McVeigh fired a Ryder truck loaded with a 4,000-pound ammonium-nitrate-and-fertilizer bomb to the Murrah building and set the fuse in a 20-tentped plot to avenge the disaster at the 1993 World Trade Center and spark a second American revolution.

The bomb went off at 9:02 a.m. on the morning into a swirl of flying glass, collapsing walls and crumbling concrete. It rained into an area the size of three, crushing the victims, in the words of one rescuer, "like grapes." Among the dead were 19 children and two adults, but had just been dropped off at the building's day-care center.

The hunt for the bomber yielded a 26-year-old, blond, blue-eyed, fresh-faced former Army sergeant who was raised in the small town of Pendleton, Ore., and was decorated for his actions as an armored-vehicle guard in the Persian Gulf.

McVeigh started as a guard. None of his attorneys comforted him or said anything to him.

As jurors were polled as to whether they were sure of their decision, the foreman started at McVeigh's name and then asked for their voice. "Yes," 20 red-eyed juries held tissues in their hands and appeared close to tears.

McVeigh was escorted out by four U.S. marshals. He shook headmaster Stephen Jones' hand and they exchanged whispered words. As he was taken out of the courtroom, he shook Christopher Hartzler's hand.

Peggy Brotzman, who listened to the verdict in an auxiliary courtroom, called it an "absolute thrill," but said vindication for her 43-year-old son and others wasn't complete.

"I can't live or not live until [McVeigh] is dead," she said.

Dan McKinley, whose wife, Secret Service Agent Linda McKinley, died in the bombing, said he felt a burden lifted off his shoulders as the verdict came back guilty. "I felt there were 108 miles of frowns."

Prosecutors Joseph Hartzler and Patrick Ryan spoke at a gathering of more than 100 victims' families.

Appeal process winds up executions for years

Twelve federal prisoners are on death row, but the government hasn't put anyone to death since 1963.

KNIGHT-ALDRIDGE-THREICE
WASHINGTON — If Timothy McVeigh is sentenced to death for blowing up the Oklahoma City federal building, he would join 12 other federal prisoners now awaiting execution.

McVeigh has the right to appeal his conviction, a legal process that usually takes several years. He also is facing a separate trial in Oklahoma that could result in another conviction and death sentence.

The federal government has not executed a convict since Victor H. Feguer was hanged in an Iowa prison on federal kidnaping charges on March 15, 1963. No

'They made the right decision. He was guilty. I hope he'll get the death penalty.'

They nudged, they cried, they cheered

Families, survivors and total strangers watched and listened as the verdict was handed down finding Timothy McVeigh guilty.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
OKLAHOMA CITY — For two years, the chain-link fence surrounding the site of the Oklahoma bombing has marked a grassy expanse of horror and tears. On Monday, it became a place of jubilation and relief.

Tourists joined with victims' families and survivors of the April 19, 1995, blast in a loud cheer that jury in Denver pronounced Timothy McVeigh guilty of conspiracy and murder in the attack on the federal building.

Not far from where the truck bomb exploded, survivor Paul Healy raised his thumb high in victory as the verdict sounded on one of the TV sets that had been brought down from the downtown sidewalk.

"Certainly I'm not surprised. I heard the evidence, I read the evidence. I experienced the evidence," Head said. "This gentleman came to town to make an awful, extreme political statement of murder and devastation."

For many the 2 1/2 hours of jury deliberating had been a long and agonizing wait.

Ruby Guzman, whose brother, Martin Cap, Randy Guzman, was among the bombing's 19 victims. The verdict came just over two years after the explosion gutted the nine-story federal building.

"I've been so relieved at that," said Guzman said that, for him, "There's no relief at all."

In the courtroom after U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch left the bench, one man raised both fists over his head. People emboldened and burst into sobbing. They walked out of the courtroom hugging each other and crying.

"I've been so worried that one juror would vote the wrong thing," said another relative who had traveled to Denver for the trial. Glen Seidl, who lost his wife, Jennifer, in the bombing, said the verdict was going to be, you never



Victims' family members, including Peggy Brotzman (at right in blue) and Sharon... (left in yellow) cheer Prosecutor Joseph Hartzler after hearing the verdict in the trial of Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh. (AP Wire Photo by Susan Paul) An ATF agent in the bombing, Brotzman lost her son Paul.

regret this. They made the right decision. He was guilty. I hope he'll get the death penalty," Alison said.

The verdict was also on the minds of customers who came into the Murrah building's northeast corner store managed by Janice Barber. She remembered one former customer, Terry Nichols, who was

TV station in his hometown of Decatur, Ga.

Asked if he thought McVeigh had anything to do with the explosion, Nichols replied: "I didn't say that. But prove that to me. This is based on emotion. These juries had a lot of pressure on them. Public pressure changes people's minds."

With word of an impending verdict Monday afternoon, car after car awaited in a parking lot at the Federal Aviation Administration center in Oklahoma City.

Drivers rushed toward vans and cars. Many were shouting and crying. "I hope he'll get the death penalty," one man yelled.

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Wendnesday Abandoned houses sometimes shelter the homeless, but that's about the best that can be said of them. They also shelter the mentally ill and curious children. And there are hundreds of abandoned houses in Oklahoma's downtown neighborhoods.

✓ Half the homes in the blue blocks from Williamson Road to 10th Street have been sold in the last 12 months
✓ Highest number of rental houses offer for building code violations in blocks 30 to 30 between 1982 and 1996
✓ Of the 113 homes left, 46% are owner-occupied - a better rate than the statewide 42%
✓ 8% are vacant
✓ 62 vacant lots

A snapshot of Gilmer Avenue

Map an assessed property value: \$14,000 on 10 blocks being resold since 1992 on Gilmer, since the neighborhood's environmental organization

3 types 1970s 75 lots 1970s 1980s

✓ Characteristics of Gilmer Avenue from Williamson to 10th and 16th Street:
Black 99% white 1%
Per capita income: \$6,240 (less than the average \$12,513)
Residents 25 and older with less than a ninth-grade education: 18% (fewer than 14%)
Median assessed property value: \$12,000 on Gilmer's seven-block block compared with \$60,000 outside the urban core

as a cousin staying at 19 Gilmer, Brown does repairs as the car. "It was a random blow," she said of the block, "a kind of hurt to see it. We're all people... and we can't afford to keep up our property the way we used to. It'd be better if it's just tear it all down. People coming to [Hotel Bristol] conversions, they don't need to see the random property."

Thelma Washington looks down at 15 empty lots on that

Gilmer

agent to sell it. Neighbors who walk by the house every day and witness its steady deterioration wonder what he is doing.

Many Williams, across the street from the Sewell house, has been in her Gilmer Avenue home almost 64 years.

He is the late Rounkoe funeral director Christopher Chamberlin Williams, built in the 1920s. He first lived a

IN LINE

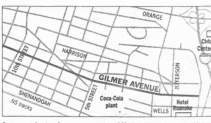
The Invisible Inner City: Poverty, crime and decay in Ranook's oldest neighborhoods

www.ranook.com/routines

block away and was one of the first black homeowners in that part of Galoisboro. He told his daughter that whites marched on Gilmer and shot at homes when the first ones were bought by blacks.

At the C.C. Williams Funeral Home near their home, Mary Williams took care of the flowers. She dressed the bodies of women and children. She fixed their hair and sewed lace on dresses that needed a special touch.

In the evenings, the Williamses sit with neighbors in the four brick houses on the block. She's afraid to go outside at



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Map Bishop can be reached at 983-3258 or maryl@ranook.com

CLOUDY
High mid 60s.
Low near 50.
Details on A2.

THE ROANOKE TIMES

Business C1
Classified C1
Deaths B2
Local B1
Sports B6

ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

www.roanoke.com

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 1997 \$00



Samuel Mooman, 84, lives at 1630 Rorer Ave. S.W., which is surrounded by abandoned houses. He owns the one with a collapsing porch across the street, but he's on a fixed income and can't afford to fix it up or tear it down.

Abandoned houses: Blight on the inner city

See *For the Record* June 5
Story by S.D. HARRINGTON / Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS
THE ROANOKE TIMES

Roanoke building inspector David Hatchett found an open door at 705 Highland Ave. S.E. A neighbor had complained that someone was staying in the house, which Hatchett had condemned months before.

Like a nervous vice cop, he popped his head into and quickly out of the doorway before going in. The house proved to be empty, but previous encounters with squatters had made Hatchett cautious.

He tells the story of a vacant Southeast house he had to check out in 1986, a year after he was hired by the city. The place hadn't been occupied for years—logically — but Hatchett found a dirty mattress on the floor with a pile of clothes on top of it. There was a stove made from a 50-gallon drum with a flue stuck through a hole in its top. Nearly was a chair with a hook on the seat.

The house had no plumbing. In the bathroom, the sink, toilet and tub contained feces that had been covered with ashes — like litter boxes for humans.

As Hatchett was leaving the house, the man who had been living there suddenly appeared in the doorway.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he recalls the man asking.

Hatchett told the man the house was condemned and no one was supposed to be living there. Hatchett left, warning that he would be back with police.

OUR SERIES

- 1** The lives of Roanoke's inner-city renters. Profiles of renters Day, Girner and Lachewell continue. The blight of vacant houses.
- 2** Wages: The business of landlording and some of the people who are in it.
- 3** What other cities do about decaying neighborhoods and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.

When Hatchett and police officers returned, the man was gone. Hatchett ordered the house to be demolished.

That night, a fire broke. Fire officials said it was arson.

Hatchett and other building inspectors say they spend about half their time on houses like this — dilapidated structures that are left vacant when owners die or are abandoned when they no longer can afford to maintain them. The houses sometimes get tied up in legal battles or get turned over to indifferent buyers. They often stand vacant for years.

Homeless people find shelter in them. Drug dealers find havens. And neighborhood children find dangerous playgrounds.

These houses might Roanoke's downtown neighborhoods and dampen property values. They drive up fire insurance rates for neighboring homeowners. They place heavy demands on the police and fire departments.



THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods

PLEASE SEE BL16A28

High-paid workers to be laid off

GE's Saem plant cuts 125 jobs

Salem's biggest employer did not cut any of the 900 workers in its hourly production ranks.

By JEFF STURGEON
THE ROANOKE TIMES

General Electric Co.'s Salem plant is cutting 125 high-paying jobs, about 6 percent of its local work force. The company Tuesday called the move tough medicine to help it stand up to rivals.

"This business has a bright future," company spokesman Mike Allee said. "Right now we have a cost issue that needs to be addressed."

GE deals with manufacturing and the third-largest sales. A7 employer in the Roanoke Valley did not cut its hourly production ranks. The factory has enough work right now for those 900 employees, company officials said.

But 125 of its nearly 1,200 salaried professionals and technical personnel are headed out the door within eight weeks. Twenty more volunteered to leave in return for a severance package or, if older than 55, retirement



SALEM OPERATIONS
OPENED: 1956
EMPLOYED: 2,555;
SALES: 1,200 million

OVERALL DIVISION
Industrial Products and Systems
includes lighting, electrical distribution and control equipment; transportation systems; electric motors and related products; electrical and electronic industrial automation products including drive systems, installation.

REVENUES	EMPLOYEES
engineering and repair	1994 \$32.4 billion
of drive systems	1995 \$32.2 billion
and GE Supply, a network of electrical supply houses.	

SIZE: 19,000 employees in 31 locations worldwide, including Canada, India, China, Singapore, Malaysia.

SOURCE: THE ROANOKE TIMES

benefits.

Those forced out include engineers and managers. The company would not be more specific about job descriptions of those affected or give an average age.

PLEASE SEE GE JOBS49

Testimony about funerals can't be used McVeigh's judge vows no 'lynching' antics in courtroom

Defense lawyers can't use the sentencing hearing to grandstand about the siege at Waco, Texas.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Determined to keep Timothy McVeigh's sentencing hearing from becoming "some kind of lynching," the judge Tuesday barred prosecutors from presenting victims' wedding photos, a poem by a victim's father and testimony on funeral arrangements.

U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch also said he won't allow McVeigh's lawyers to turn the hearing into a trial of the government's handling of the siege at Waco, Texas. The hearing on whether McVeigh should get the death penalty for the Oklahoma City bombing begins

today. In addition, Matsch prohibited testimony from any bombing survivors and victims' relatives who were prejudiced by testimony from the trial. These witnesses will be questioned before they testify in front of the jurors who will decide if McVeigh should live or die.

"We have to guard this hearing to ensure that the ultimate result and the jury's decision are truly a moral response to appropriate information rather than an emotional response," he said.

The jurors who convicted McVeigh of murder and conspiracy in the heart of Main Street is a half-mile long, stacked with antique shops, a lunch counter, a five-and-dime and other businesses.

PLEASE SEE MCV06H412

Former community Santa Claus gives a gift residents of Lowell, Mich., will long remember

Banker leaves \$12 million to his beloved town

Despite his wealth, Harold J. Englehardt lived modestly, eating two meals a day at a local diner; oatmeal and a soft poached egg for breakfast, marinated chicken with baked potato for dinner.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOWELL, Mich. — During the Depression, Harold J. Englehardt went from farm to farm raising money for a new bank. Over the years, the bank president made deals on a handshake, dressed up as Santa Claus at Christmas and passed out Halloween candy in a top hat.

Everyone suspected he was wealthy and knew

he was generous, but not this wealthy or this generous: As his death, he left \$12 million, the bulk of his estate, to make life better in this western Michigan town of 4,000.

Tuesday's announcement brought quick ideas for how to spend the money.

"Wow," said Marlene McCormick, a secretary for a Main Street dentist. "We've always wanted a community pool around here."

"I'd sure like to see more activities for kids that don't cost the parents a lot," said Linda Hamp, a clerk at Springgrove Variety store.

Englehardt died April 1 at age 90. His gift will be used to create a fund that will distribute about \$500,000 in grants each year.

His will directs a five-member committee — his great-nephew, a bank executive, the city manager and school leaders — to find projects that fit his broad goals.

He mentioned education, programs for the poor, nonprofit groups and religious organizations, said James Bossert, president of FMB State Savings Bank. "I told him, 'When the fund is established, Lowell's going to remember you for a long time,'" great-nephew John Durling recalled. "He said, 'That's good. I really love Lowell.'"



Englehardt

Lowell, 15 miles east of Grand Rapids, is mostly a bedroom community with people who work elsewhere. The heart of Main Street is a half-mile long, stocked with antique shops, a lunch counter, a five-and-dime and other businesses.

Englehardt moved here from eastern Michigan in 1922 to become a cashier at Lowell State Bank, which folded in 1929 after the stock market crash. Out of work, he bought the ailing Lowell Granite Co., which made grave markers. But his real passion was banking, and he traveled to area farms trying to raise \$2,000 each from investors.

By 1934, State Savings Bank was open on Main Street. Even in his 80s, Englehardt still ran it.

PLEASE SEE BANKER42

THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

FROM A1

Blight

Driving through Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods — including West End, Belmont, lower Northwest and upper Old Southwest — reporters for The Roanoke Times found more than 200 boarded-up houses. That's more than 7 percent of the houses in those neighborhoods.

The house next door to Samuel B. Mooman in the 1600 block of Rorer Avenue Southwest has been vacant 15 to 20 years. The owner died.

Another house three doors down is vacant, with 4-by-4 posts bracing the porch roof.

Across the street, part of the porch has collapsed on a house that's been vacant for three years. A yellow police ribbon is wrapped around the rest of the porch. Most of the white paint has chipped off, leaving only wood siding that's

WHY IT MATTERS

Housing stock is Roanoke's IRA. If you tend it, things will get better.

OWEN SCHULTZ
ROANOKE ENTREPRENEUR

now gray from years of weather.

The house next to that house — with plywood where windows used to be — also has been vacant for several years.

Mooman owns the house with the partially collapsed porch. The 84-year-old retired Norfolk and Western postal worker bought the house from a landlord, thinking he could rent it to generate some extra income. But after about four years, tenants tore up the house, he said.

The house is too dilapidated to be repaired, he said. And he cannot afford to fix it up even if it were salvageable.

Building inspectors ordered Mooman to demolish the house last year. But he can't afford to do that. Demolition could cost up to \$8,000.

The city will have to do it. Then the city will place a lien on the property, which will further deflate its value.

Mooman sees little hope for

Thursday: Tazewell Avenue has limits on the number of consecutive nights a person can stay.

They don't have no choice but to find the nearest place," Rickman said. A squatter in a vacant house will use crude heat sources to stay warm — a fire in a tin can, or even an open fire.

"Any open structure is considered a fire hazard," Rickman said. "It's just an invitation for people to come in and do something wrong."

But when vacant houses burn, neighboring houses can be endangered — particularly in neighborhoods where houses are only a few feet apart.

For about five years in the early 1980s, Alvin and Paulette Milliner lived in a wood-frame house in the 300 block of Church Avenue Southeast. It was their family's first home.

The Milliners spent hundreds of dollars painting it and fixing the roof. But while they invested in their home, the house next door is



STEPHANIE KEEL-DAVIS / THE ROANOKE TIMES

For seven years, Alfred Randolph could look out his window on the 1700 block of Rorer Avenue Southwest and see the house at left — a weather-beaten structure with plywood nailed over its doors and windows, weeds growing out of its rain gutters and a waist-high jungle growing in the back yard. That house hasn't had a drop of paint on it in over 40 years," Randolph said last August from his front yard, which has manicured shrubs and flowers he spends hours tending each week. The city finally razed the house last winter after Alfred Randolph had been nagging it for years.



STEPHANIE KEEL-DAVIS / THE ROANOKE TIMES

When city building inspector David Hatchett checked an abandoned house in 1986 at 1113 1/2 Street S.E., he found a sink, toilet and bathtub filled with ashes to cover up the human faces in them. A homeless man had been staying in the condemned house.



An idle chair sits on the porch of Samuel Mooman's vacant house at 1629 Rorer Ave.

327 Church slipped into disrepair.

About a year after the Milliners and their young son moved in, city building inspectors condemned the house next door. The owner was ordered to demolish the house.

In March 1981, Paulette Milliner wrote a letter to Roanoke's building commissioner saying that homeless people were sleeping in the house and that they would likely catch a fire.

The property changed hands a couple of times, and inspectors continued to send letters to the owners. Genevieve McCue started to make repairs but stopped when he got into a dispute with his roofer. A lawyer for the

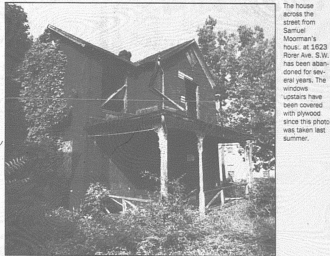
next owner, P.E. Stock, wrote the city rejecting the demolition order on grounds that "the building is quite safe and has been so certified by engineers."

ON LINE

The Invisible Inner City:
Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods
is on line at:
www.roanoke.com/roetimes

Paulette Milliner's fears caught up with her in May 1984 — more than three years after her letter to the city.

Someone set fire to the vacant



STEPHANIE KEEL-DAVIS / THE ROANOKE TIMES

house. The Milliners and their 1-year-old son were not home. But their house was destroyed — three years short of being paid off.

The family's efforts to recover its losses in court failed. The Milliners now live in a mobile home park in South Salem. Paulette Milliner says they had enough of Roanoke.

The city has tried to get vacant houses into the hands of someone willing to invest in them. For about 10 years, the city's housing development office published a catalog of vacant houses. Owners could list their properties free of charge.

Dan Pollock, housing development coordinator, considered the catalog a success, although it is difficult to track how many houses were renovated as a result of the program.

It cost the city between \$5,000 and \$6,000 to publish the catalog — less than the cost to demolish one house.

But the city discontinued the catalog when it had to make cuts in the amount of federal Community Development Block Grant money spent on administration. Federal regulations allow only 20

percent of a community's CDBG allocations to go toward administrative functions. The catalog was considered such a function.

In a few cases, the city has been able to get federal and state funding into the hands of developers willing to renovate vacant houses. But more often, the city has chosen to demolish the

percent of a community's CDBG allocations to go toward administrative functions. The catalog was considered such a function.

"The Times wants to hear its readers' views about Roanoke's oldest downtown neighborhoods and what is happening to them. If you have something you'd like to say, call InfoLine at 983-9100 or go to mailbox 7824.

Our plan is to publish some reader comments during the course of our series.

The Invisible Inner City:
Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods.

structures. In the past five years, Roanoke has spent more than \$600,000 boarding up and tearing down vacant buildings, most of which were longtime vacant houses, Pollock said. About two-thirds

of the money came from CDBG funds. The rest came from the city's general fund.

When the city boards up or demolishes a building, it places a lien on the vacant lot in an attempt to recover the costs.

But because vacant lots have very little value in Roanoke's older neighborhoods, those costs are often difficult to recover.

"Despite the money Roanoke has spent on demolishing vacant buildings, Pollock says, it is not a permanent solution to a neighborhood's problems.

"You've still got a vacant lot," he said. The lots become overgrown with weeds and sometimes become dumping grounds. They still blight communities.

He compares neighborhood blocks to rows of teeth. When a house decays or is demolished, it leaves a hole in its neighborhood just as the entire mouth is affected when a tooth decays or has to be removed.

"After you pull the tooth, you've got to put something back," Pollock said.

S.D. Harrington can be reached at 883-3322 or shannon@roanoke.com.

WHO TO CALL

Need help? Information?
Want to get involved?
• Roanoke Housing Development, 853-1208 or 853-2222
• Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, 348-8250
• East Side Housing Development Corp., 774-7408
• Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority, 983-6281

his block. Renters are the only new faces. But they don't stay long.

"When children grow up, they leave and come back," he said. "Nobody's coming back."

Nearly half of the 132 structure fires in Roanoke during the past two years were in vacant houses, according to statistics from Roanoke Chief Fire Marshal David Rickman.

"That pretty much tells you we have a serious problem with vacant structures," Rickman said. Community services like the Rescue Mission, Roanoke Area Ministries and the Salvation Army form a magnet for the homeless in Roanoke's downtown neighborhoods, he said.

Groups want top fishing nations to slash the \$50 billion-plus received from governments

Nature Fund, U.N. blame subsidies for global fisheries crisis

Haddock, cod and grouper are among species that are particularly vulnerable.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GENEVA — Government subsidies that have so bloated the world's fishing industry that it is wiping out fish faster than they can reproduce, the United Nations and

a leading environmental organization said Monday.

The World Wide Fund for Nature and the U.N. Environment Program urged top fishing nations to slash the \$50 billion-plus subsidies, which they blamed for the global fisheries crisis.

Governments pour the money into overproductive fishing fleets

that continue to lose money and deplete fish stocks at an alarming rate, they said.

A World Wide Fund for Nature report estimates the world's fishing industry spends \$124 billion annually to generate revenues of \$70 billion. That means taxpayers have to make up the other \$54 billion.

Uncontrolled fishing and the throwing away of unwanted catches have decimated world marine stocks, driving once common species like cod and halibut to commercial extinction and threatening the livelihood of tens of millions of people, the U.N. and nature groups said.

Subsidies artificially inflate

the profitability of fishing, stimulating new investment and encouraging fishers to remain in over-fished waters, WWF International Director General Claude Martin told reporters.

During the past four decades, the capacity of the world's fishing fleets has increased five-fold while the productivity of most of the

world's major fishing areas has declined, the WWF and U.N. report said.

Species particularly vulnerable are those that congregate to spawn, such as haddock, cod and grouper, along with those that migrate across national fishing zones where they are heavily fished in each of the zones, such as tuna, billfish and sharks.