**Black Springs Blighted Area Stirs Concern**

**Nevada State Journal**

**Sunday March 26, 1967**

**By Cheri Cross; Journal Staff Reporter**

**(Editors Note: This is the first of a three-part series dealing with the problem of civic improvement in what is probably Washoe County’s most blighted area—the community of Black Springs, located on old Highway 395, about 6 miles north of Reno.)**

Old broken boards, bottles and cans and mattresses thrown helter-skelter from one end of the community to another.

Charred remains of several homes.

Holes in the streets large enough to swallow a child.

Uncapped fire hydrants and tangled fire hoses

Automobiles long-abandoned along the edges of the roads.

A disaster area? Yes. But this “disaster” was not created by a flood or tornado or any other act of God.

This area is right in our own community—located a few miles north of Reno near old Highway 395.

It’s called Black Springs—a predominantly Negro area which developed in the early ‘50s to accommodate the colored airmen at nearby Stead Air Force Base.

While the community itself is an eyesore, the residents have two main problems—bad roads and no sewer system.

PROVIDE INCENTIVE

Those who are most aware of the problem feel that if the streets were improved and a sewer system were installed the incentive would thus be provided for the residents of the area to pitch in and clean up their community.

But there is where the problem lies. The people want the county to help, but the county cannot accept the streets until they are brought up to county specifications, nor spend taxpayer’s money on improving private property.

The county’s position will be explored in part tow of this series on Monday. How did the Black Springs situation evolve? Twenty-five years ago the only residence in the area was a tumble down shack about a mile north of the present community, “the old black spring place.”

**J.E. Sweatt Reno realtor who brought the first resident in area, said he obtained a few acres of land around 1950, “Had it surveyed and layed out in lots 100x130’ and marked off the streets. I had the streets graded in and was entitled to sell five or six lots a year.”**

“A colored man contacted me what I thought about selling to colored people; I thought it over; they’re entitled to have their own homes. And that’s the way it started.

“Other colored people came in and I bought a few more acres laid the streets out nicely, 50 foot streets.

Sweatt said that after he had sold some 15-18 lots and a few homes had been built, he was approached about installing a water system. He said he invested 25,000 in the system.

“The water is absolutely pure,” Sweatt says. The mineral content is excellent.” He had been selling the large lots for $300 and after the water system was installed he raised the price to $550.

The area was not a formal subdivision and therefore not under county subdivision ordinances.

Sweatt said he had gravel put in on the roads and added gravel each year to keep the roads in shape until a couple years ago. “Not good but not bad.” He explained. They wouldn’t get real bogged down in bad weather. Those people wanted good roads.”

**More than $9,000**

So about four or five years ago he continued he obtained an estimate from the county engineer which indicated that it would cost more than $9000 to bring the roads up to county standards.

“I wasn’t really obligated.” Sweatt said. “If I had put in for a subdivision I could have charged 2000 a lot. “

The county has said it will accept the streets as soon as they are brought up to standard and Sweatt is more than willing to deed the streets to the county.

However, he says, he is not a position to fix them himself. He feels the residents should pitch in and pay their share and Ill pay mine.

He said he will have private contractors bid on the road project and will put it to the people.

Residents of the Black Springs community feel that something should be done to help them and that there has been too much buck passing.

Generally they don’t expect anyone to come in and do the work for them but they want help. Some feel that stricter enforcement of the county ordinances would help.

“People out here will do everything put on them by ordinances: says Thorman Carthen of 21 Eugene Street, Black Springs. “But when they don’t help you, what do you do?” Carthen feels that urban renewal is not the answer. “The people don’t want to be moved,” he says. “I have nine children and we have a lot of room outside with space to run and play.”

**Couldn’t Maintain It**

The residents put up a firehouse but couldn’t keep it up. Now we don’t have a fire station and we cant get the proper amount of fire insurance. The area is served by the Sparks Fire Department.

“We’d like to have a clean and decent community too” Carthen said. “It’s a bad reflection on the whole state of Nevada.” If they charge us a tax to get us our streets and sewers, we don’t care, just do it, we want it done.”

Another Black Springs home owner, Phil Osborne, who lives on North Street there says most people don’t have the finances to do what should be done.”

“We’d like good roads and a sewage system. We were going to sell bonds to get the roads fixed but I haven’t heard anything about that in seven or eight months.

Of the trash in the area he says, “If we had someone to get on them other residents to clean up they’d do it but they won’t do it themselves. “

Eddie Scott of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is well aware of the situation in Black Springs.

There’s not much incentive to do much improvement when you don’t even have streets,” he said. “Once they have good streets, I think the people will start improving and be more enthused about improving.”

“Something will have to be worked out in sewage too,” he added, “Because it’s too crowded to have so many cesspools. The area is served by individual septic tanks and cesspools, which overflow into the yards during heavy rain or thaw.

He said perhaps the county could lend the equipment o get the trash out, if the people in the area would respond to a community cleanup, fix-up, campaign.

“Another solution,” Scott suggested, “would be to have the firemen pile up all the burnable trash and have fire practice.”

If the area were cleaned up, he said, some builder might become interested and build new homes with low financing.

**Tomorrow: Black Springs as viewed by county officials.**