



Nelleen Hall strolls her 6-month-old granddaughter, LaShonda Hunley, along Rucker Street. Hall lives in a house built by Alvin Lundy for her widowed mother, Minnie Adamson, and her four children in 1939. Hall and her husband, Henry, enlarged the house from its original two rooms. Their son, Henry Jr., and his family live next-door.



Photos by Margaret Bentlage/News-Sentinel staff

Jessie Lane Downs visits the Lane family cemetery, which is on a hillside behind her mother's house. The tombstone at right marks the grave of her father, Clyde H. Lane.

Happy Home reaped benefits of foundation that grew with faith, families and friendships

By Barbara Asbury
News-Sentinel projects editor

Some neighborhoods attract a lot of attention.

Others don't.

Fort Sanders, Fourth & Gill, Fountain City, Mechanicsville, Vestal — these are all pretty widely known.

But how about Happy Home?

It's been there — along a ridge between Middlebrook Pike and Ball Camp Pike — since 1918. It was built on faith and has survived on friendship and family.

News-Sentinel reporter Lee Davis discovered it in the fall of 1942. Davis had been tipped that there was a big cotton field in full boll "out there — just beyond



The Happy Home neighborhood takes up no more than a half-mile square along a ridge between Middlebrook and Ball Camp pikes. Settled by families of mixed white, black and Indian heritage, its name may well reflect the Cherokee influence, residents say.

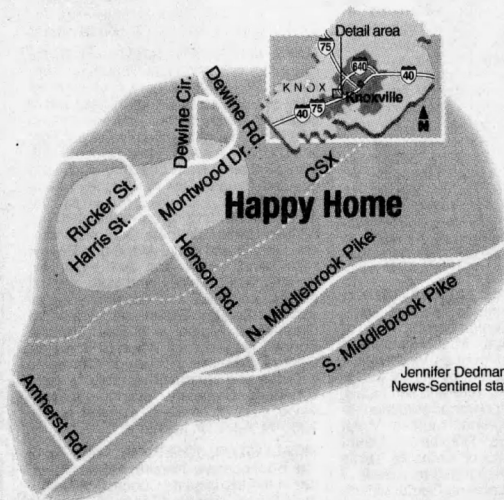
the oil pipeline terminal on Middlebrook Pike and three-quarters of a mile to the north."

Since it was unusual for someone to grow cotton in Knox County, Davis scrambled out there. What he found was not one but several cotton fields. To his disappointment, they had already been picked.

Nonetheless, Davis reported, "seeing Happy Home settlement itself was worth

the jaunt." Describing it as a farming community "with neatness an evident watchword," he noted that it had its own schoolhouse and "boasts a couple of churches, a civic club and 20 or 25 small farms and truck patches."

Farmer Gus Hall, 60, told Davis his cotton crop that year was his fifth one. The older schoolchildren pitched in to help pick it, he said, since the neighborhood's young men, including a couple of



his sons, were in the Army, training to fight World War II.

Gus Hall was married to Emily Jackson Hall, whose father, Andrew Jackson, was one of three men who, with their families, established and named Happy Home.

The other two men were Alvin Lundy and William Rucker. As workers on the Lonas farm on Amherst Road, the three, whose heritage was a mix of black, white, and Cherokee, had managed to save enough money to purchase acreage on the nearby ridge.

One day in 1918 the families loaded up everything they had and "came in a wagon from the Lonas home," says Mary Lane, widow of Clyde Henry Lane, one of Alvin Lundy's many children.

Mary and Clyde Lane set up housekeeping in Happy Home in 1939 and began raising their family. They lived next door to the schoolhouse, where children were taught from first through eighth grades in one room.

The school was a Rosenwald School, one of 5,075 schools built for black children in the rural South between 1913 and 1930 through an incentive program established by Julius P. Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Co. in that era.

Rosenwald Fund records, kept at Fisk University in Nashville, show the Happy Home school was built as a "one-teacher school" on 2 acres of land under the

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1926-27 budget. It was a frame structure with two windows and a door on the front, six windows along one side, a fireplace and chimney on the other. The total cost of \$1,819 was split three ways, the records say, with "Negroes" paying \$275, "the public," \$1,144, and the Rosenwald Fund, \$400.

All Rosenwald schools upon completion became public property. The Happy Home School was operated by Knox County until it was closed in the 1960s. The building now houses a family center operated by the city's Department of Parks and Recreation.

Jessie Lane Downs, 51, remembers that a good part of the school day at Happy Home was spent doing chores. The teacher and the students were responsible for hauling in the firewood each morning and keeping the fire going all day. They also cleaned the school, and Downs remembers having great fun slip-sliding across the wood floor on waxing day.

Jessie's older sister, the Rev. Margaret Yette-Mack, says she loved growing up in Happy Home, where everyone shared not only the bounty of the farms but a mutual trust.

"When my daddy killed hogs, everybody got meat. When the pears came in, everybody got pears. And nobody bothered to lock their doors; there was no need to."

Yette-Mack recalls going down the hill toward Western Avenue "where there was a big, rushing creek of clear, clean water. We'd collect watercress out of it."

That creek is Third Creek.

In 1953 Clyde and Mary Lane moved away from Happy Home, although they did not sell the land.

"I moved," says Mary Lane, "so my children could go to school."

Austin High School, a city school then, was the only high school blacks could attend, and no bus service was provided beyond the city limits.

The Lanes lived first on the campus of Knoxville College, where both Clyde and Mary found jobs. Later, they moved into a house on Linden Avenue. Clyde began working as a building contractor, plus serving as a sheriff's deputy.

The family also sang - for pleasure, but also for pay. They called themselves the Happy Home Jubilee Singers, and they sang at churches, tent revivals and anniversaries. They had their own Sunday afternoon radio show on the gospel station WKXV and later on WTVK, and they appeared on television on Cas Walker's "Farm and Home Hour."

They still sing together often, though some siblings live too far away. Eric Lane, 37, the youngest of Mary and Clyde's children, now is a part of the group, while Margaret, who is now associate pastor of the Oak Valley Baptist Church in Oak Ridge, has traded singing for preaching.

Clyde Lane died in 1969, just a few days before his 60th birthday. Mary Lane built a new house on their Happy Home land and moved back there in 1972.

Among her neighbors are Walter Bradley, 65, who lives in the house where he was born. Bradley's mother, Hattie Rucker Bradley, was the stepdaughter of William Rucker. She was widowed when Walter was a young child, and he recalls a childhood of being closely watched and supervised, with little time to make friends.

As an adult, Bradley lived in New Jersey and Indianapolis, but at retirement in 1994 he returned to Knoxville. His mother had lived



The Happy Home Jubilee Singers, composed of the Lane family, were at WKXV studios to appear on Cas Walker's radio show when they posed for this 1950s-vintage photo. Front, from left, are pianist Neil Dotson; children Mary Elizabeth, Jessie, Joanna and David; and dad, Clyde Lane. Rear are Walker, Clyde Jr., Martha, baby Sanford and mom, Mary Lane. (Walker, who died Friday morning at age 96, was a political maverick and millionaire grocery store owner who, through his radio and TV programs, was instrumental in the careers of many East Tennessee musicians - particularly in the country music field.)



Mary Lane, center, hugs her daughters, Margaret Yette-Mack, left, and Jessie Lane Downs, as they stand in front of the neighborhood's family center, formerly the one-room schoolhouse attended by the Lane children.

with him in Indianapolis since 1991, and she died the year they returned to Happy Home.

Now Bradley looks after his grandchildren and takes a leadership role in the community club. He is preparing fliers this week to publicize the fall children's program that the city has begun at the Family Center on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons.

Ervin Mason, a cousin to the Lanes, is a neighbor of Bradley's. A Robertshaw retiree, he looks after his parents, Cornelius and Lucinda Mason, who are in their 90s. They live in a stucco house Cornelius built in 1932. Ervin was 1 year old when his parents moved into the house.

Lucinda Mae Chesney Mason is a great-granddaughter of Pharoah Chesney, a legendary man, born as a slave on a plantation in Clarksville, Va., possibly as

early as 1785. Pharoah, surname then Jackson, was purchased in 1841 by John Chesney, who lived in a part of Grainger County that later became Union County.

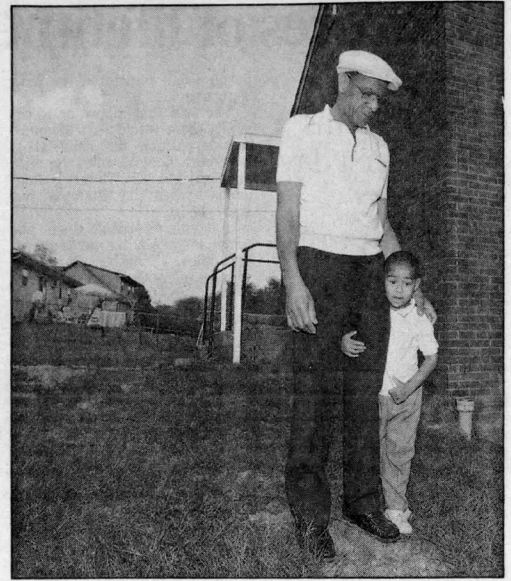
After the Civil War, John Chesney gave Pharoah 150 acres on Copper Ridge, and he lived there until his death in 1905. His life is recorded in a book, "Last of the Pioneers," written by J.C. Webster and published in 1902. A copy is in the Knoxville County Library's McClung Collection.

The Masons have copies of the book's pages, which they store side by side with another treasure, a Mason-Chesney family history compiled by Ervin Mason's

sister, Katherine Mae Mason-Chavis. Among the pages of family trees and photographs is one page with a computer-generated drawing of a wigwam, a log cabin and a modern two-story home with shutters. The text reads:

"From the Cherokee teepees to the Slave Log Cabins, we have survived and now enter into the 21st century with God's grace. The ... family pictures that deck the walls of our homes and are mounted in the halls of our minds ... are the solid rock on which we have built our homes with God's help and blessings."

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Margaret Bentlage/News-Sentinel staff

Walter Bradley comforts his grandson, Aaron Barnett, who holds on tight to granddaddy's leg. The brick building is the schoolhouse Bradley attended years ago; it is now a community center. In background at left are some of the residences of Happy Home.

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