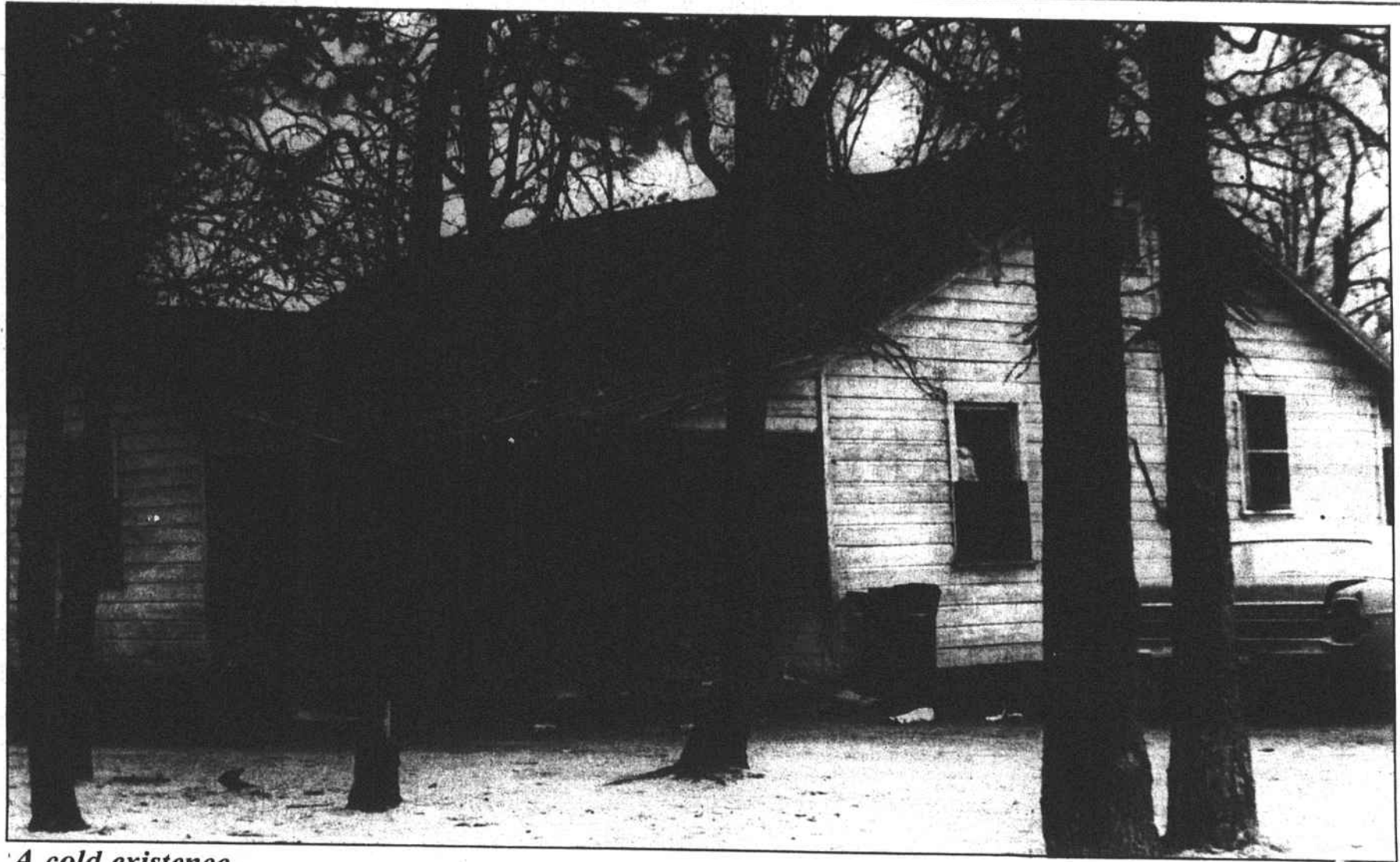


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### A cold existence

Hoke County residences like this one can offer little protection when temperatures drop below 20°. Families huddle around a wood or oil burner in

one room in order to stay warm. Routines, like getting children off to school, become secondary when every effort goes into staving off the cold, one resident said.

## Many Hoke Residents Are Trying To Survive

By Sherry Matthews

When winter chills hit Hoke County and temperatures fall below 20°, most area residents take comfort inside their homes, warming themselves next to a roaring fire or maybe just a heat vent.

For those in an insulated, well-heated dwelling, winter is "not so bad" or even "bearable," but for some county residents, the cold months mean a day to day struggle to survive.

Hundreds of Hoke residents, most below or at the poverty level, live in ramshackle houses, some with missing floor boards, patched windows and partial roofs.

In many of these residences, the wind whips through the crevices of partially hinged doors and windows, leaving beds and couches damp and cold.

Housing agencies have estimated that about 10% of Hoke County's residents live in substandard dwellings, many of which should be condemned. For most of these residents, cold weather means other activities stop, and efforts have to be directed to struggling to keep themselves and their children from freezing to death.

"It gets pretty tough for us during the winter," Doris Roper said. Roper, and 11 family members share a five-room house in Raeford.

The Ropers heat their home with firewood, bought from a near-by store.

"If we need wood, we have to get someone to take us to get it. We don't have transportation," Roper said.

"We don't like depending on somebody else, but it is our only hope," Roper said.

At times, the Roper family has run out of wood during the night, forcing someone out into the cold for logs.

"It is hard to send someone after wood during the night. It is so cold. But you have got to have it," Roper added.

For the Ropers, the wood heater, located in the front room of the residence, is the only means of heat.

"We just can't afford oil," she said.

"We got to make do with the wood," she added.

"What we got for heat ain't

much, but we survive...barely," Roper said.

The Ropers' heater keeps the living room "nice and warm," yet "a lot of times," the rest of the house is cold.

"We make do," Roper said. Just down the street from Roper, another family of 12 resides in a smaller home with a wood stove and a tiny gas heater to keep them warm.

Like the Roper home, one room stays "warm" while the rest remain bitterly cold.

"Lord, yes, it is hard to keep warm. Boy, it is bad during this time of the year," the head of the household said.

"Sometimes I just don't know what we are going to do," Mrs. Glazer said, preferring to keep her first name confidential.

Although most of the families have minor children, according to one Department of Social Services (DSS) employee, school is the "least of their worries."

"There is no motivation there," one DSS social worker said.

"It is hard enough to get a child, in a warm environment, to get up and get ready for school. You can

imagine what it is like for these kids," she added.

"There is really no incentive for these kids," Hoke DSS Director Ken Witherspoon said.

Witherspoon and his staff are "aware" of the problems that the children and their families face during the winter months and do what they can to "help."

"There are things being done to help these people through our programs," Witherspoon said.

One DSS program, the Low Income Energy Assistance Program, sparked some 1,300 applications.

"I believe we will be able to approve 85% of those applications," Witherspoon said.

Under the energy program, approved applicants will receive a "one time check" during February to pay for "much needed" fuel oil.

"That will help a little," Witherspoon said.

In addition, the Hoke DSS has spent nearly \$25,000 on the Crisis Fuel Assistance Program.

"We get a great many requests for fuel assistance," Witherspoon said.

"These programs help, but they

*"It is hard to keep the faith when you have to watch your children freezing...struggling to stay warm," a household member who wished to remain unidentified said.*

*"Sure you get bitter. It is hard not to."*

are short term solutions to a long term problem," he added.

For many, there is not even a "short term" answer to their problems.

"Getting food ain't a problem. It is the other things," Kate Sinclair said. Sinclair is another Hoke resident fighting the battle to stay warm.

"We need gas for the stove and wood for a fire," she added.

"Sometimes you just can't afford it, but that don't keep you from freezing when it gets this cold," Sinclair said.

"It has been tough this winter and the last 15 winters," she added.

For Eula Jones, whose family is also housed in an inadequately insulated dwelling, winter means another season of "watching" her

children suffer...trying to stay warm.

"Winter is so hard on my children," Jones said.

"You think, maybe, it will get better this winter, but it really never does," Jones said.

"It gets real hard when the children are hurting from the cold. When you can't do nothing to help...it is tough," Jones said.

For all these families and many more in the Hoke area, winter means a time of survival. Many of them have become bitter because of the experience.

"It is hard to keep the faith when you have to watch your children freezing...struggling to stay warm," a household member who wished to remain unidentified said.

"Sure you get bitter. It is hard not to," she added.



### A way to survive winter

For many Hoke County families, wood, either chopped or bought from a near-by store, is the answer to a bitter struggle against freezing during the cold winter months. Even the wood cannot heat a house complete-

ly when the wind blows through cracks in doors and windows. "We do the best we can with the wood. It has kept us from freezing to death," Doris Roper said.



### Heat resources

For those families that cannot afford the luxury of wood or oil during the winter months, old chairs, blocks and wood furniture supply enough warmth to get through each day without freezing.