

1-1-1966

A Withholding Action - Low Income Plus Homesteading Equals High Standard of Living - Part I

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Recommended Citation

Smart, Rose (1966) "A Withholding Action - Low Income Plus Homesteading Equals High Standard of Living - Part I," *Green Revolution*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/greenrevolution/vol4/iss1/2>

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THE GREEN

FOR HOMESTEADERS, ON-TO-THE-LANDERS,
AND DO-IT-YOURSELFERS



REVOLUTION

SCHOOL OF LIVING, BROOKVILLE, OHIO 45309
PUBLISHED MONTHLY

Volume 4, Number 1

January, 1966

25c per copy, \$3 per year

Lower Mill Creek, Appalachia, Tries The Green Revolution

This is the first of a series of articles examining how home and community production could serve various areas and groups in our country and the world.

The Save the Children Federation (SCF), which is allied with Community Development Foundation (CDF) has offices at 345 E. 46th St., New York City, and in Norwalk, Conn. The purpose of these organizations is to guide children, their families and their communities toward self-reliance through self-help. The following article tells the story of Lower Mill Creek Housing Project, as reported by Helen Gunther in the Summer 1965 issue of *World Reporter*, their publication.—Editor

By Helen Gunther

Last spring Charles Wesley came up the nearly impassable road to Lower Mill Creek, Ky. Lower Mill Creek is a remote hamlet in the vast Appalachian sprawl, where poverty is a condition of life. Charles Wesley is

rock walls were hammered into place and painted. A foundation was put under Gilbert Messer's house. Five houses were covered with weatherboard. Flooring was nailed down in Ike Hubbard's house; Mitchel Messer's porch was floored; windows and screens were installed at Crit Gambrel's house. Jeff Grub, who is on old-age assistance, was too sick to take part. But his two sons came home from Ohio to work with the others.

The wives of the men joined in the painting and repairing. Now they had some incentive to make curtains and spreads, too. Long before winter came to the hollow the work was completed.

Plans for the Future

The families of Lower Mill Creek have begun to believe in themselves. In another month—thanks to Charles Wesley's encouragement and a small SCF/CDF grant for cement, bricks and roofing—the men will be breaking ground for a community center. It will give their wives

A Withholding Action— Low Income Plus Homesteading Equals High Standard Of Living

By Rose Smart

Part I

The September editorial, "The Homestead—A Withholding Action," prompts me to look at another facet of homestead withholding—the financial one.

While we (the Ralph Smarts) do not keep our income below a taxable level, it is below the national average and we make it a goal and a game to see just how much good, substantial living (and fun!) we can get from our dollars. Since Ralph's business is his own, he can vary his dollar-earning time up or down according to our needs. Occasionally it is decided for us when the demand for his home appliance repair service unaccountably slacks off. Whatever the reason, we much prefer to have him at home instead of off the place earning money.

Do We Really Need It?

When it comes to spending dollars for which you have exchanged time, one of the first things to get straightened out is this: is the purchase a real need or is it merely to keep up with the Jones family or to show off

or consume in some other equally foolish, irrational way? For us this does away with new cars, rarely-used clothing, wall-to-wall carpeting, all jewelry, breakable dishes, etc., ad infinitum. However, it allows us to purchase some things the mythical Joneses might buy, too, such as records, books, wine, camping trips.

One way we determine if a purchase is "needed" is to let it go awhile. If it continues to be "needed" in a nagging, uncomfortable, persistent way, we plan to buy if we can. For example, if our car begins to cost more in repairs than a new one would cost (a "new" second-hand one, that is), we then plan to buy one. If I find I am putting patch on top of patch on somebody's underwear, but in the meantime the fabric has gone rotten between the patches, it is time to order new ones (isn't it?). This way of looking at money is so habitual that I rarely buy an item at the grocery store, for instance, unless it is on a list I brought with me. To keep a sense of perspective, we occasionally spend small amounts on a whim, for "kicks." I came home with a beautiful antique carving set for Ralph's Christmas

present recently, when what he really "needs" is a nice dress shirt. I bought him a book of poetry, too, in place of the shorts he needs.

You know about buying for cash. The interest on debt you pay is someone's income. Do not buy "on time" and you won't have to earn that extra money.

We Build It Ourselves

On a homestead, you build your own house and other buildings, of course, or fix up old ones. Here, at Sycamore Hollow Homestead, for the price we would have paid in town for a cheaply built small house on a small lot, we have 4 acres of park with our own creek and woods and a roomy, comfortable, well-planned, well-built house, plus a barn housing chickens, rabbits, goats and all the needed bedding and feed, plus a combination greenhouse and shop, plus an equipment storage building. We have a small mortgage, but we could have (and should have) continued to build as we were able to pay cash (as we did for the first two-thirds of our place). Our mortgage loan is from a friend, though, and when we cannot meet a payment he is not at the door with an eviction notice.

We Grow Our Own

Concerning food, our goal is to raise perhaps 70% of what we use. The garden produce costs so little it is difficult to estimate the cost. Milk costs us 10¢ a quart to produce, meat 40¢ a pound—with all the animal feed purchased. (If we worked a little harder around here we could produce much of the animal feed and cut the milk and meat cost considerably.)

The coldframes and garden give us fresh raw salads the year round. My canning closet holds a thousand jars, not all of them filled for we don't need that much as yet. (The canning jars were purchased secondhand at 25¢ a dozen or scrounged for free from a junkyard or friends.) We are not yet raising our own wheat and it costs us 3¢ a pound. The flour mill (cost \$100) has paid for itself. Before we had it we ground our wheat by hand. Our Enterprise juicer (retails at \$160, but cost us only \$80 since I was given a wholesale price at the time of a homestead festival here) pays for itself in juices used fresh and canned, fruit and nut butters, and ice cream.

(to be continued)

Heathcote Notes

Some accounting is doubtless overdue from the first residents of the Old Mill—Dee and the "Terrible Trio" (as they call themselves and perhaps sometimes are)—Jerry, 15; LaVerne, 13; and Keith, 7. What more fitting time than betwixt Thanksgiving and December, as the first snow flurries appear in the hollow, chased now and then by bursts of sunshine coming through restless gray clouds.

After the rigors of our few months here and facing the realities of winter, there is much indeed to be grateful for. The pervading feeling is one of warmth, warmth we have felt from and warmth we feel toward those who have made our continued stay here possible. This includes many unseen contributors of financial, material and moral support; the spontaneous results of four different group endeavors: the June Youth Rally, the July Workshop, the Labor Day Workbee and one other group of some 15 September weekenders. Most critical, however, when it came to winterizing the south end of the mill, has been the sustained and the intermittent efforts of certain individuals.

Tim Lefever and son Evan, who despite a jam-packed schedule of activities, manage to find a few hours or a day in which to bring materials (supplied at cost and not yet remunerated for) and to do skilled work in many departments (electrical, carpentry, water and gas systems; you name it)—and with speed—have been invaluable.

From Hugh Graham, thanks to his engineering, with assorted assists from others, we have a fireplace (sealed and useless last summer) as our chief source of warmth and cheer. Along with an Ashley stove in one of the upstairs bedrooms, this means wood heat (unless severe cold necessitates a small portable heater, especially in the bathroom). Hugh has served as treasurer and given generously of his building know-how.

Leo Rainer's three-week donated labor stint deserves an accolade, because it was almost entirely masonry work—critical sealing around doors and windows, over areas of inside and outside walls. Leo cheerfully took on this unpopular (and often chilly) job with skill and tenacity, working from dawn till late evening with time out only for meals. He certainly held up his end of the bargain with

James Iden Smith, who had offered \$200 to the Building Fund if it could be matched by other contributors. Instead of cash, Leo offered time and labor, and thereby we have all gained immeasurably. Mr. Smith's generosity, as we all know, goes along with a cheerful persistence at work. In his several visits here, no job has been too menial and his concern for others is always great.

Walter Sprague's special contribution of time, many skills and much effort almost qualifies him as a "resident" of the mill. This he may well become, though at this writing he is away for several weeks, tending to commitments in Illinois, primarily in connection with his profession of servicing pipe organs. The Hamiltons anticipate his return.

Meanwhile we Hamiltons revel in our cozy, new little kitchen adjoining the "Hearthroom" on the ground floor.

Now for a stable, permanent core group to take up residence at Heathcote to help plan and carry out an on-going program.

—Dee Hamilton



THE MESSER children: a new foundation for their home and a new future for their community.

an SCF/CDF counselor. An immovable object—poverty—was about to meet an irresistible force—self-help.

In the hollow stood nine splintery shacks. Some lacked privies and all lacked running water. Charles Wesley talked with the polite, stoical men who, with their families, called those shacks home.

Two of them were coal miners who occasionally were able to find a little work. Three others, unemployed for years, were subsistence farmers who worked the stubborn soil. Two, the best of the group, raised tobacco. Two were on old-age assistance.

Charles Wesley's first efforts to rouse them to group action met with both apathy and suspicion. You can't change things, the men argued, you can just accept them. Sure they wanted snug, weatherproof houses for their wives and children. But where was the money supposed to come from? They didn't even have enough for food or clothes or doctors' bills.

Would they be willing to work together to rebuild their homes, Charles Wesley asked, if help was provided by SCF/CDF? Yes they would—and they proved it.

Apathy Turns Into Action

First the men worked out a budget for each house. Those who could contributed a little cash. Next they worked out a plan for the number of man-days each was to give to their housing project.

For the first time, Lower Mill Creek was alive with activity. In Lester Smith's house, sheet-

a convenient place to weave rugs for sale, and a place for their children to get together. Already they're talking about the project to follow—a playground for the children.

Doubts Appeal Of Home Production

A list of simple self-help activities (including gardening, the milling of flour, baking bread, root cellar vegetable storage, compost privy, etc.) was sent to the director of a school and community center in Kentucky, with a query as to how members of their institution would receive them. Her reply is below. —Ed.

"There are some good proposals and worthwhile ideas, but personally I doubt if they would have wide acceptance here. This would depend on the approach. Many of our people are quite ready to accept the glitter of urban life and money-based economy. They want education to fit into such a life, not escape from it.

"For the most part, our people are not doing so bad right now. Those with sufficient initiative to carry out successful homesteading are already living in something of this way. We have the land; we know how to do it ourselves, and we often help one another. We could use more information at points of course. On one creek, eight or ten nice ranch houses have been built with the men helping one another. (continued on page 4)