

Florida Pays Survivors of a 1923 Racist Attack : Rosewood: Blacks were run out of town by a white mob. At last, the state allocates \$2 million in reparations.

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Willie Evans, 87 and blind, put on a new roof, installed new doors and windows, fixed up his bathroom and got a new TV.

Wilson Hall, 79, refurbished his home, bought a van and has talked of going to Africa.

And Lonnie Carrier Carrol, an 84-year-old invalid, will get the medical attention and therapy he needs.

All because 72 years ago, they were run out of their homes and out of their town by a racist mob. And because, after seven decades, Florida officials decided it was time to compensate them for their troubles.

"It's something," said Robie Mortin, 79, another beneficiary of the state's long-delayed act of conscience. "At least we can talk about it now. For many, many years we couldn't even talk about it."

In January, 1923, a horde of whites wiped out the black community of Rosewood. After a fruitless search for a black man accused of assaulting a white woman, the mob destroyed almost every home and building over several days. At least six blacks and two whites died.

But the incident faded into history, and eventually the only survivors of the 120 residents of Rosewood were those who were children at the time of the rampage. Most kept the memories of violence and burning houses to themselves until they started speaking out in the early 1980s.

Last year, several survivors recounted the Rosewood massacre before the Legislature, which then passed a \$2-million compensation plan. In January, the state distributed \$100,000 checks to the nine survivors; it already had paid \$50,000 to each survivor last year.

Arnett Doctor, a descendant of a Rosewood family who helped persuade lawmakers to pass the claims bill last spring, said the survivors are grateful lawmakers approved the compensation bill, but some believed "much more should have been forthcoming."

For some, there may be more. The \$2 million included \$500,000 to reimburse descendants of people who lost property in Rosewood.

Gregory Durden, chief of civil rights for the state attorney general's office, said it will be weeks before the state determines who receives those payments. Officials are tracing hundreds of Rosewood descendants to determine whether they are eligible for compensation.

"This has been a very difficult process," Durden said.

But for the survivors, it has been a rewarding process.

Wilson Hall's sister, 86-year-old Margie Hall Johnson, hasn't decided whether to renovate her home in Hilliard or buy a new one. Mary Hall Daniels, 75, has bought a new home in Jacksonville. Arnett Goins, 80, bought some furniture for his home in St. Petersburg and invested most of his money.

Robie Mortin said the money allowed her to quit her job as a nurse's aide for an 82-year-old invalid. She would like to travel to Greece this summer.

First, the mother of five and grandmother of 19 plans to volunteer eight hours a week at a nursery for pregnant mothers with AIDS and drug addictions--"These children are all so sweet. They need love and care."

Mortin was just 7 when she and her family fled Rosewood. In the affidavit she filed with the state, Mortin said her father came home on Jan. 2, 1923, visibly upset about what was happening.

He put Mortin and his sister on a train to Chiefland. She later learned that her uncle, Sam Carter, had been shot and killed; the mob had interrogated him because it suspected he had helped the alleged assailant escape.

When Mortin's grandmother, Polly Carter, tried to reclaim her property two years later, she was told "she owned no property in Rosewood and with a shotgun pointed at her (she was) told her never to return again."

Her grandmother, she said, told her never to discuss what happened in Rosewood.

"Now that it's out in the open I think the story should be told," she said. "It's been swept under the rug long enough."