

Chilton County residents face storm damage, but no deaths

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MAPLESVILLE — Chilton County residents from here to Clanton counted themselves lucky as they dug out from extensive damage Monday.

No one in the county died and no one was seriously injured.

One family even survived a direct hit on their mobile home.

Anthony Wright, 44, said he, his wife, Deborah, and granddaughter Iasia Burnett survived the blow at Smitherman's Mobile Home Park near Clanton "by the grace of God."

Wright said they were leaving for

a nearby shelter when the tornado struck.

"I opened the door and it blew off. (The wind) lasted 15 minutes, but it seemed like an eternity," he said.

The trailer was destroyed, and visitors Monday wondered at how they made it.

In Maplesville, the town's former mayor, W.C. Hayes, surveyed one of several downtown buildings he owns and marveled there were no deaths or major injuries.

"This could have been so much worse, especially given the time it came through," Hayes said.

His building had a plate glass window smashed from flying debris, and its interior was flooded.

In Chilton County, Maplesville probably took the hardest hit, with 13 houses destroyed and 36 houses with major damage, said Bill Col-lum, the county's Emergency Management Agency director. The Maplesville area also had one business destroyed and three damaged. Col-lum had not yet completed a damage assessment of the Clanton area.

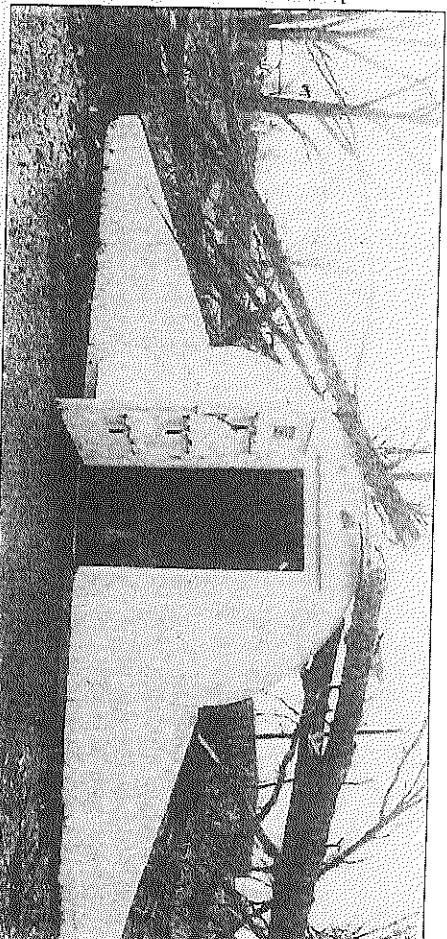
The destroyed business, A&B Cooling and Heating, lay in the path



The Birmingham News/Michelle Campbell

Community members helped clean up heavy damage resulting from a tornado that passed through Maplesville on Monday. Darlene Taylor helps clean up Rita and Tommy Little's home on County Road 10.

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The Birmingham News/Frank Couch

A storm shelter in Chilton County withstood the force from a fallen tree during Monday's storm.

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of the tornado as it seemed to skip down Alabama Highway 22 from Maplesville to Chilton, dropping down occasionally to twist the tops off trees, topple power poles, snap lines, take off roofs — and smash the heating and air conditioning business.

The cinderblock and wood-frame building that housed A&B Cooling and Heating, at about the halfway point in the 12 miles to Chilton from Maplesville, was reduced to rubble. Its tin roof was wrapped around trees across the

street.

On up the road toward Chilton, at Smitheman's, about five trailers were mangled and at least 10 sustained lesser damage in the park where about 25 trailers sit.

As Tonya Scarbrough, 36, huddled on the floor of their trailer with her 13-year-old daughter, the tornado shook them like they were in a big tin can.

"I thought it was the end of my life," said Kacy Scarbrough, the daughter.

Some of the park residents made it to the nearby shelter.

Marbella Aguilar, 25, said her family escaped in time. "Me and my husband

heard it on TV and we all went to the shelter," Aguilar said.

Chilton Police Chief Bill Stillwell noted how remarkable it was that his city had no injuries.

"We dodged a bullet," was how he put it in a news release.

State EMA Director Art Faulkner surveyed Maplesville Monday and echoed those sentiments at a statewide level.

"The state is very fortunate we did not wake up to a catastrophic event," Faulkner said. "However, one fatality is one too many. And if that's your house, it's just as bad as it was for those people last spring."