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Homesteads and bungalows: African American architecture in Langston, Oklahoma

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University of Delaware, 1994
HOMESTEADS AND BUNGALOWS:
AFRICAN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE IN LANGSTON, OKLAHOMA

by

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Vernacular architecture studies frequently attempt to answer questions of class and ethnicity by documenting local building traditions. This research is motivated by the paradigm that asserts architecture communicates for a past culture. When closely analyzed, houses generate new perspectives into the ways people lived day-to-day. In particular, scholars examine structures lived in or built by African Americans to recover intricacies and meanings of daily life.

This thesis focuses on the domestic architecture of Langston, Oklahoma and how the people of Langston define that architecture. In 1889 the Unassigned Lands of Indian Territory, now central Oklahoma, were opened to settlement. African Americans founded the town of Langston as "the only distinctively Negro city in America." The first structures erected in Langston were dugouts or cellars. As circumstances allowed, residents constructed one-room log houses and two-room frame houses. Interviews with longtime residents reveal that the majority of people lived in one-room log houses while frame houses for wealthier settlers were the exception.

By 1915, all new houses built in Langston
consisted of modest bungalows with a gable entrance. This transition to a bungalow occurred throughout the rural South during the first half of the twentieth century. Even with the building of newer bungalows, homesteads continued to be occupied and altered well into the 1970s. Oral histories detail subtle changes enacted upon the landscape by Langston residents. These accounts of life within a house illuminate the larger life of the community outside the home.

Focusing on activities that surrounded the house such as entertaining and quilting places active people at the center of discussion. Through the history of houses and households, the impetus for change in material life and a picture of daily life in a small African American town emerge. The juxtaposition of oral history and architectural history uncovers the diversity of people's experiences on the much mythologized Western frontier. This broadens the discussion of settlement in the West and within the African American town of Langston, Oklahoma and begins to describe the substantial meaning houses hold for the people and history of Langston.
When I arrived in Langston, Oklahoma, at seven o'clock on a Friday night in July of 1992, one cafe was open. A rectangular concrete building, Larry's Mealhouse, sat directly on State Route 33. Inside, out of the sunlight, six vinyl booths lined the front windows with a counter and stools in the rear near the kitchen. Over the jukebox posters of Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. were displayed on the wall, next to recent photographs of the Langston University football team. The cafe was empty of customers. Larry, the owner and chef, was cleaning the kitchen. The room smelled of red dust and greasy hamburgers, comforting smells of a small-town cafe.

I was ravenous and ordered a Special, a 1/4 lb. cheeseburger & fries & can soda for $2.75. While I ate, Larry and I talked. I said that I was interested in the history of Langston, especially its domestic architecture. Larry told me that he had recently moved back to Langston from Oklahoma City to renovate this cafe. In the nineteen-seventies he had attended Langston University and this cafe was one of the few places to go. I related that I wished to look at the houses of Langston for my master's thesis. He recalled studying for his master's in Special
Education at Oklahoma State University. He then suggested that I talk with Cigar Jones and Mildred Robertson about the older days and houses of Langston.

Until that July evening Langston was a two-dimensional town for me, illustrated and discussed in books, articles, and footnotes. Historians, sociologists, and journalists have long been interested in Langston because it was founded, settled, and lived in completely by African Americans. Observers of Langston usually conclude that Langston was a failed, if not novel, experiment or as historian William Loren Katz expresses 
"...a black dream crushed."¹

I had driven half way across the country with quotes running through my head. Like A.G. Belton's letter to the American Colonization Society;

...we as a people believe that Africa is the place but to get from under bondage we are thinking Oklahoma as this is our nearest place of safety...²

or the encouraging words of the Langston City Herald to southern blacks:

...come to make for themselves homes in this fair land where every man is a man and every


²As cited in Katz, Black West, 250.
woman is a woman...without regard to the color of their skin.\textsuperscript{3}

These quotes attest to the aspirations that underscored the founding of Langston. This incredible hope brought people into Oklahoma, onto a new land. "A city on a hill of seven hills," as Rev. David Hinds referred to his town of Langston on an August afternoon, recalling the Biblical reference of John Winthrop before the founding of Plymouth.\textsuperscript{4}

When I arrived, I had no idea what Langston would be like. I was interested in looking at the architecture and talking with people about buildings. Viola Jones, Langston's mayor, had been encouraging. Old houses and early town-meeting books were surviving, she had informed me over the telephone. The secondary literature made Langston sound like a ghost town, barely hanging on and way beyond its prime.

What Langston really is though is a community of great complexity that cannot easily be defined by the terms "success" or "failure." Langston is a small town, very much like other small towns in Oklahoma, but also unique. Unique, because it is the product of an American

\textsuperscript{3}"Home Sweet Home" \textit{The Langston City Herald}, December 26, 1891.

\textsuperscript{4}Personal communication, David Hinds, August 11, 1992.
society that could not envision blacks participating equally with whites in politics, economics, or education. Langston is the physical manifestation of a handful of African Americans to that subjugation, a response to racism. Langston is many people's dreams of a fair and truly democratic lifestyle built in the middle of Oklahoma.

Today, Langston is still a thriving town, that continues to embody hope and ideals for African Americans who live there. People make sacrifices to continue living in Langston, like Richard Trice who drives forty-five minutes to work in Stillwater or Rev. David Hinds who commutes an hour to Tinker Air Force base near Oklahoma City. People also continue to move to Langston in an attempt to avoid white racism and create a better life, echoing Langston's founders' goals more than a century ago. For instance, Jennifer Campbell left the southside of Chicago for Langston in 1990, so she could attend the University and raise her two sons. Langston will continue to draw settlers until African Americans have found equitable opportunities within American society.

Architecture formed one small part of the vision that built Langston, but an integral, defining, and

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5Personal communication, Jennifer Wolf, December 19, 1992.
revealing one. If the land was an opportunity to create something new, then houses were the physical embodiments of that creation. Langston represented a chance to build a community outside the American mainstream of regulated and customary racism; a town supported, run, and benefiting African Americans. However, racism did not fail to permeate Langston in overt and subtle ways. Fortunately and unfortunately, Langstonians were aware of larger economic and social trends.

Vernacular architecture studies often describe and interpret houses built or used by various ethnic groups. A greater critical awareness toward the myth of one "American experience" compelled scholars to explore the phenomena that were pieces of that "one experience." By studying distinct ethnic groups, what was particular to the German-American, African American, or Italian-American experience, scholars hoped to expand the accepted notions about architecture. However, the result frequently demythologizes one generalization, only to create various monolithic understandings of assorted experiences. So, an "African-American experience" is often discussed as if such a reductionist view of the past actually existed.  

6 See Werner Sollors, "Of Mules and Mares in a Land of Difference; or Quadrupeds All?" *American Quarterly*, 42, No.2 (June 1990) 169. Sollors suggests that the deconstructive argument has not been applied with rigor to abstract generalizations based on gender or ethnicity. See
group of people cannot easily be categorized by one over­
arching generalization. Personal choices are based on a
broad range of circumstances, interpretations of
architecture must also attempt to embrace the breadth of
those motivations. The diversity of experiences within
the African-American community of Langston, Oklahoma
becomes evident by listening to and talking with people
about their houses and looking closely at the
architecture.7

also W. Lawrence Hogue, Discourse and the Other (Durham,
Adrienne Edgar, "Anthropologists! Fold Up Your Tents!" The
reviewing Writing Women's Worlds by Lila Abu-Lughod
(Berkeley, California: University of California, 1993)
argues that scholars' generalizations about the Muslim
Arab world is pernicious and that anthropological labels
cannot neatly sum up people's experiences.

7Some of the fascinating studies that use oral
history to illuminate the complexity of architecture are
Gerald Pocius, A Place to Belong: Community Order and
Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland (Athens, Georgia:
University of Georgia Press, 1991); Ann Marie Adams, "An
Inside of Suburban Living: Intention and Experience in the
Eichler Homes" (Forthcoming in Winterthur Portfolio);
Michael Ann Williams, Homeplace: The Social Use and
Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North
Carolina (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press,
1991); George W. McDaniel, Hearth and Home: Preserving a
People's Culture (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple
University Press, 1982); Charles Martin, Hollybush: Folk
Building and Social Change in an Appalachian Community
(Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press,
1984); and Henry Glassie, Passing the Time in Ballymenone:
Culture and History of an Ulster Community (Philadelphia,

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I have gathered this story by listening to people speak about land, houses, and Langston. This paper combines people's contemporary recollections and interpretations of their experiences and my own readings of houses, oral histories, and documentary sources. I am definitely an outsider doing ethnography with an historical focus in Langston. My main goal is to describe the diversity of experience with regard to architecture. While drawing heavily on people's memories of Langston, this paper does not attempt to describe the present-day circumstances in Langston, except as they relate to the history and houses of Langston. I hope the descriptions of life in Langston's houses will compel scholars to think critically about "an African American architecture" and realize the multiplicity of experiences within all African American communities.

Oral history allows us to recover the multiple uses and meanings objects hold within a community. Conversations with Langston residents centered around memories that individuals communicated about their own environment. The residents' memories let me see what the people of the area deem important about their houses and communities. This approach directed me away from scholarly concerns towards an inside view about Langston's houses. However, the real importance of oral history in
regards to past material culture is its reflexive nature. A reflexive approach moves the researcher away from an aggrandized position of authoritative speaker and into a role of a person in a continuing dialogue concerning the importance of culture. This illuminates the preconceptions that inform researchers' interpretations and hopefully begins to replace some of those concerns and ideas. This approach also forces the researcher to open his/her work to many opinions and conclusions. The dialogue that developed (and continues) between myself and the residents of Langston forced me to look at architecture in a different way.8

Interviewing taught me the residents' language for describing and discussing their town of Langston. First I learned the way people communicated information concerning the layout of Langston or they gave me directions. Telling someone the way to find a particular house or street conveys more than geographical specifications. The words chosen for directions reveal friendships, relationships between buildings, religious

8See especially Annmarie Adams, "An Inside of Suburban Living: Intention and Experience in the Eichler Home." Adams describes the gap between a family's actual experience of a house and an architect's conceptions of proper activities within the same space. The idea of the reflexive nature and ethnography is well described in Elaine J. Lawless, "I was afraid someone like you...an outsider...would misunderstand," Journal of American Folklore, V. 105, 417, (Summer 1992) 302-313.
affiliations, economic connections, and class distinctions. Residents' descriptions also provided me with an important understanding of the emic sense of the layout of the town. For instance, streets are never referred to by their official names. The only street names mentioned during conversations are Monument Street and Meridian Road, officially named on the town plan Washington and Logan Boulevard. Most often directions are given by the name of a person's house that is known by everyone participating in the conversation.

Next the language used to describe the town moves beyond geographical or social factors and encompasses the significance that particular buildings hold for the speaker. The way a resident describes the town hints at his or her sense of Langston's meanings. When people describe an event or an object, they choose to highlight factors and ignore others. This selection process makes listening to conversations a subtle act of noting not only what is spoken but also what is left unsaid. The conveyance of meaning through conversations is especially relevant to oral history. When conversations move from a description of where a house stands to what it was like to experience the house as a newlywed or teenager, the amount of implied and conveyed information skyrockets. To use an archaeological metaphor, the first sense of a conversation
is a lone potsherd found during a surface collection while the second is a family's ceramic trash pile located next to a kitchen of a house that still stands. The latter example has a multitude of artifacts surrounding the ceramics. One sherd then can be placed into a context with other materials and activities. The archaeologist can begin to place objects in relation to each other. The description of the site can be one of overlapping and perhaps complex and contradictory information. What oral history can add to architectural history is immense. Specifically, talking with people who built or currently use their homes has the possibility of raising new questions. Relying on the forms of houses makes it difficult for a researcher to imagine the variety of activities that occurred in the spaces. For instance in a recent study of frame farmhouses of the upper Midwest, Fred Peterson states that a one-room "...farmhouse functions primarily for the basic needs of eating and sleeping." He suggests that one-room houses intrinsically had fewer activities, especially social, than houses with more space. People in Langston who lived in one-room houses may find his conclusion untenable in light of their own experiences. With this note in mind, I

Fred Peterson, Homes in the Heartland: Balloon Frame Farmhouses of the Upper Midwest, 1850-1920 (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1992) 27.
cannot over-stress the degree to which this study grew and changed from speaking with the current residents of Langston. The people significantly shaped my understanding of the houses and brought to light ideas concerning the community that I had entirely missed or misread.

This paper began as a master's thesis for the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture at the University of Delaware. This paper develops interpretations from focusing on architecture. I see architecture as the starting point for discussions of behavior, symbolism, and social expressions. While focusing on details of houses, especially construction materials and floorplans, a particularistic description of the houses is not the primary intent of this paper. The houses are the focus, but exploring and describing people's experiences of Langston's architecture is the goal of this paper.

Bernard Herman in his study of architecture and history delineated two strands of material culture studies. He suggests two categories, "object-centered" and "object-driven," to explain approaches to material culture. Object-centered research favors "the construction of artifact typologies, explorations of technological innovation, and questions about aesthetic
will be treated. Next the history of houses will be outlined as defined by different residents of Langston; homesteads, bungalows, and Langston Housing Authority houses. Throughout these general sections, I will pursue aspects of daily life in Langston that intrigue me and that provide depth and activity both to the architectural spaces and the land of Langston.

During the course of the research and writing of this thesis, I have incurred many enjoyable debts. Bernard Herman advised this thesis and his provocative ideas inspired and influenced much of this work. He continually provided me with new questions and has the generosity to never offer the answer.

Friends scrupulously read preliminary drafts, enhancing it in many ways; Hilary Anderson, Adrienne Birney, Allison Elterich, Gabriel Lanier, Tom Ryan, and Nancy Van Dolson. Their comments shaped this thesis in numerous ways.

Michael Bruce, curator of the Oklahoma Territorial Museum for the Oklahoma Historical Society, gave me access to their documents concerning Langston. Likewise Marsha Weisiger, architectural historian for the Oklahoma Historical Society, provided me with much information on African American towns in Oklahoma. Ronald Keys, curator of the Black Heritage Center at Langston
University, let me roam freely through Zella Black Patterson's archives and other papers concerning the history of Langston University. Margaret Morris, Director of the Langston Housing Authority, provided me with a comfortable room and her own memories of life in Langston.

Finally, the people of Langston, Oklahoma made me feel welcome in their community, took time to talk with me, and continually made me think about their houses in new ways. A few of those who helped me and made my stay in Langston more comfortable include: Mizura Clement Allen, Mrs. Brown, Henry Coleman, Adam Collier, Thelma Cumby, Jeff Franklin, Amanda Gross, Rev. David Hinds, Jr., Mrs. Hinds, Joe Jacobs, Viola and Jim Jones, Charles Jones, Cigar Jones, Chester Milton, Earl Mitchell, King Neal, Wallace Owens, David Petty, Mildred Robertson, Rev. Scott, Erma Simington, Waymon Snellgro, Hobart Starr, Junior Stroud, Richard and Lacressa Trice, Stanley Vic, Queen Esther Williams Vic, Stanley Vic, and Jake Watson. Their casual comments and thorough descriptions made this thesis more complex. They are the real architects of this thesis.
Chapter 1

"THEY PLOW THAT GRASS."¹

Ask someone to imagine Oklahoma and John Steinbeck's desolate world of the Joads or Dorothea Lange's sparse images of the Dust Bowl first come to mind. Parts of that image hold true for the ecology of Oklahoma, but most of those conceptions lack precision. Explicating changes that people laid onto the environment begins with nature. Human decisions that alter the natural world are either in response to nature or an attempt to control it. The relationship between nature and people demands give and take.

Historians portray pioneers as either powerful dominators (positively) or arrogant enforcers (negatively) of the land. While American settlers greatly altered the environment, often causing irrevocable damage, natural processes continually redefined people's visions. Sand and soil, rain and drought, heat and cold limited the form


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of buildings, farms, and towns that people constructed.² Picturing the natural landscape encountered by settlers of Langston requires a discussion of weather, soil, and indigenous plant life.

Geographers refer to the Langston area as the southern part of the tall grass prairie in the Central Lowland Province. This land is on the eastern edge of the southern Great Plains. The Great Plains cover the area between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River, from central Texas to the Canadian border. The northern Kansas border divides the southern and northern Great Plains. Flat land, semi-arid weather and a multitude of grasses characterize the southern plains (Figure 1.1).

Sixty million years ago, in a monumental geological moment, the continental plates shifted creating the Rocky Mountain Range running from northern Canada to southern Mexico. This geological action is now labeled the Laramide Revolution. Since that time, the mountains defined the plains landscape. Without the mountains, the plains would not have taken shape. Runoff from the mountains carried looser sediments east and redeposited the soils on the plains. Eventually this action produced one of the most continually smooth landscapes on earth.

Sweeping definitions rarely convey the subtleties of the natural world and the land around Langston exhibits variation common to the fringes of the Great Plains.

Living in the west has long been defined by access to water. Unlike the humid and wet east, people in the west find water in short supply. The Great Plains was originally called the Great American Desert due to Zebulon Pike's comparison of the area to the deserts of Africa during his 1806-7 trip along the Arkansas River. This misnomer for the area continued to be used by Stephen Long on his 1819-20 expedition along the Platte River, and by nineteenth-century maps and atlases. While not a desert, this semi-arid area has always been greatly affected by shortages of water. Serious droughts occur somewhere on the plains every twenty years (1890, 1910, 1930, 1950, and 1970). The droughts settle on the land and remain for up to five years. This aridity has created a tenuous environment for human habitation.¹

The Cimarron River runs two miles north of Langston. Twenty-eight hundred miles west in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of northern New Mexico the headwaters of the Cimarron form. Born of the mountain's runoff, the river winds north through Colorado and the panhandle of Oklahoma twenty miles into southern Kansas. There the river turns southeast through Oklahoma towards its confluence with the Arkansas River, west of Tulsa and ninety miles east of Langston.

The shallow Cimarron flows a mile wide near Langston. Explorers first called it the Red Fork of the Arkansas or the Salt Fork because of the high amount of salty sand in the river. Deep pools punctuate the red water and provide excellent habitats for catfish. The Fitzgerald and Soldier creeks flow north to the Cimarron on either side of Langston. In the late nineteen-sixties, the Fitzgerald Creek was dammed to create a community reservoir, Langston Lake.

Besides the river and creeks, rainfall brings additional water to the area. In a typical year thirty-two inches of rain will fall concentrated in the wet spring and late summer. This amount is considered plenty for good crops when it is well-distributed throughout the year. Dry spells occur in mid-summer most years. Further west in the semi-arid Oklahoma panhandle, precipitation
falls to sixteen inches a year. East near the Arkansas border, rainfall rises to forty inches a year. In 1954 the Langston area received only thirteen inches of rain, whereas in the wettest year (1915) it rose to thirty-nine inches. Seasonal fluctuation and the lack of predictability from year to year determine the extent of natural and agricultural plant life.

Indigenous vegetation of the area changes according to the water. During wet years the long grasses and the trees of the area thrive. Short grasses cover the land in dry years. The proximity of plant life to the Cimarron River and its creeks creates two distinct ecologies. Rich bottom lands surround the waters. Beyond these narrow belts, shallow prairie soil on top of sedimentary clay and sand make up the land. Hardwoods and long grasses dominate the bottom lands. In the higher, more sandier areas short grasses grow best.

The landscape seems monotonous to some eyes. Its apparent plainness covers everything. Red sand, a few trees, and a predominant sky command the place. But look closely, a stream runs through the few hills. Trees are short, twisted, and gnarled. Grasses cover the land.

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"Much of the preceding information on the ecology in the Langston area is found in the United States Department of Agriculture with Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Soil Survey: Logan County Oklahoma (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1960)."
Short grasses thrive and once supported massive herds of buffalo. Long grasses hold the soil in place and grow near the scarce water. A variety of plant life cuts the barren surface. Washington Irving, traversing this land in 1832, captured this diversity:

We now came once more in sight of the Red Fork [Cimarron River], winding its turbid course between well-wooded hills, and through a vast and magnificent landscape. The prairies bordering on the rivers are always varied, so beautifully interspersed as to appear to have been laid out by hand.5

The varied, magnificent landscape Washington Irving described is what Amanda Gross and I see when we walk out her front door (Figure 1.2). We look across a rolling landscape dotted with scrub cedars. Standing on her porch we see gray sky, tall brown grasses, red dirt roads, and evergreens (Figure 1.3). It's December, winter, and we are one mile north of the river that Irving described in 1832. I ask Amanda Gross to describe the land. She begins with her garden directly to the west of the house.

My garden spot I have out there is good. Folks ask me what do you fertilize? I don't fertilize my garden. I just plow it and get it worked up real good and plant my stuff. I have a good garden.6


Her garden is similar to others in town, Adam Collier's, Erma Simington's, Jim and Viola Jones's, Richard Trice's. Most older folks and some younger ones grow vegetables, roots, and herbs. Mildred Robertson listed the vegetables and fruit people once raised: cane, Alberta peaches, cling peaches, wild plums, possum grapes, persimmons, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, greens (collards, mustard, spinach), and white corn. Adam Collier added tomatoes, okra, dill, turnips, carrots, onions, and garlic to the list. Old untended gardens can be spotted during the summer months by the four-foot onion-garlics or allium vineale with cloves on top, aptly called drumsticks, sprouting up here and there.

I ask Amanda Gross about earlier days, "When you had to clear the area down by the Clement's what was it like?" Mrs. Gross tells me:

It was trees, persimmon trees, and all other kinds of trees. You had to dig them up by the root. Cause you cut them down, and then you dug them up, you stacked them, you burned them, or throw them in the creek.

The area by the Clement homestead is one mile east, one mile south, one mile east of Langston on perfectly

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7Taped interview, Mildred Robertson, August, 12, 1992.

8Personal communication, Adam Collier, August 8, 1992.

straight roads, reflecting the original 1870 surveyor's perfect squares. A creek runs through it, and since the area has not been farmed in ten years, trees are returning and covering the land.

Many of the men in Langston formerly cut fence posts for farmers, white or black, who needed their land cleared of trees and brush for agriculture. The Langston men received their pay per finished post. Jeff Franklin, Amanda Gross's brother who lives a block away from her, was paid ten cents per post in the nineteen-twenties. Straight tree trunks of elm or oak made the best posts, hence the name postoaks. If you were lucky and skilled, you might get two posts from one tree. Cutting posts would have been good money, if there was no catch. The drawback required the person to clear the undergrowth of vines, stickers, blackberries, and scrawny trees along with the trees suitable for making posts. Jeff Franklin recalled coming to blows with one white farmer about what he was being paid to accomplish. Franklin said that the farmer paid him for cutting posts, ten cents, not for

10 John Morris and Edwin McReynolds, Historical Atlas of Oklahoma (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965) 56. The land of Oklahoma, except the Panhandle, was surveyed beginning in 1870 by Ehud Darling. The Indian Meridian ran north to south with the Unassigned lands to the West and the Iowa, Kickapoo, Powtawatomie and Shawnee, Creek, and Cherokee lands to the East. Langston was founded on the eastern-most edge of the Unassigned Lands in Logan County on the Indian Meridian.
cutting every tree and the vines under the trees.  
David Petty also recalled when he "...worked for seventy-five cents a day, and it was a day, boy. From can't you see to can't you see..." cutting posts and clearing undergrowth.  
Fencing had long been an important and controversial aspect of farming in the Plains.  
Fenceposts were required to hold the barbed wire in place and the men who labored to obtain the posts had to be paid. Langston men often accomplished this task.  

After undergrowth and trees were cleared the prairies had to be prepared for planting agricultural products. Historians speak heroically, if disdainfully, about settlers plowing under the prairie grasses. Donald Worster states:

...the grass was destined to disappear too- to be turned under the plow, not in isolated patches here and there, but across millions and millions of acres. When the plowing was done, the land would fall apart, and the outcome would be the most desolate event that humans had ever experienced on the plains. 

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11Personal communication, Jeff Franklin and Stanley Vic, July 16, 1992.
12Taped interview, David Petty, December 12, 1992.
13Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1931) 280-320. With the marketing of barbed wire in the early eighteen-seventies, farming in the relatively treeless Western states became profitable as fencing became affordable.
In a children's book of the nineteen-fifties, a similar theme is emphasized:

Grass held the soil in place, for it was stronger than the winds and rain. Beneath grass the soil lay still. When the grass was plowed under, the soil was at the mercy of the winds. And great winds sweep the Plains, unblocked by hills or trees...

These two accounts are correct in the empirical point that if grasses are plowed and drought arrives, then dust storms occur. However, a patronizing stance towards the plowing of the prairie grasses is too easy to adopt in retrospect. The tearing up of the prairie grasses was a crucial ingredient of America's late-nineteenth-century culture.

Plowing was seen as a requisite part of improving a farm, of preparing land for crops. Under the Homestead Act of 1862, 40, 80, or 160 acres of land could be claimed by any person who stayed there for five years, made "improvements," and paid a filing fee. In 1891 in

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16 Donald Worster, Dust Bowl, 83-86. Worster goes a long way to detailing the connections between farming practices and culture that lead to large scale farming, absentee farmers, and the dust bowl.

17 Ibid., 83-86.
anticipation of the opening of lands owned by the Iowa, Sac and Fox, and Powatomie tribes the Langston City Herald detailed "How to Take a Homestead":

As evidence that you do claim it, you must make some visible improvements. Drive a stake with your name on it; cut timber to lay the foundation of a house; do a little plowing or some other act that will show to others that you have occupied that particular piece of land.18

Claiming land under the provisions of the homestead laws was directly connected to what was referred to as "improvements," perhaps better called alterations. Plowing was an integral part of establishing a person's claim to land. The largest acreage (160 acres) of a quarter of a square mile of land was thought to be sufficient to support a family engaged in farming or cattle ranching. But what did it feel like to plow the soils under and how was it actually achieved? Amanda Gross described the process when I asked, "Did you have a lot of prairies, also with just grass on them?"

"Grass, yeah, you had grass. But you see when they go to plowing, they plow that grass. Cause then the people would set a fire and burn the grass before they would plow it. Cause you had to dig, cut and dig those trees out. And that grass you'd burn it."19

18"How to Take a Homestead", Langston City Herald, December 26, 1891.

"Ok, and then plow and plant it?"

"Uh-uh, might plow it two or three times, and then plant it, then you had to cultivate it... and you'd chop it. Many times you'd chop, 'cause every time the grass go to coming up, you'd go back out there and chop it again."20

Amanda Gross' description tells of burning the grass to make it rich in carbon and nitrogen, of plowing the soil multiple times for aeration (as she continues to do in her own garden), and the persistence of native grasses. Frontier landscapes are often portrayed to be an encounter between men and land. Amanda Gross' detailed description of plowing land illustrates that women were closely involved in the changes of the land. The farming of the area was an arduous process which required continual attention. The success of farming was dependant on many hands working together.

When the earliest American settlers encountered the land that eventually became Langston, the area must have appeared wild to their eyes. Compared to the regions left behind in Texas, Kansas or the South, the country around Langston was undisturbed. Nobody had ever intensively farmed the land. Timber still stood near the streams. Short grass covered the hills. The lands were

20Ibid.
pristine, untrammeled nature to nineteenth-century eyes. The pure state made it seem a perfect place to begin anew. The was seen as a place where prejudices, hatred, and limitations of the South's ways would be overcome.
Figure 1.1. The land surrounding Langston, Oklahoma to the east of the Indian Meridian.
Figure 1.2 Amanda Gross standing on the front porch of her house in Langston, Oklahoma, December 1992.
Figure 1.3 The land to the east of Langston, Oklahoma.
Chapter 2

"THE ONLY DISTINCTIVELY NEGRO CITY IN AMERICA"¹

The United States Government opened central Oklahoma to a landrun on April 22, 1889. Almost two million acres sitting in the center of Indian Territory had been ceded by the Creek Nation in 1874 for the settlement of other displaced Native American tribes.² Because no tribes had been allotted the land by the United States government, it became known as the Unassigned Lands (Figure 2.1). The opening of the area was a great opportunity for African Americans to begin anew. Waymon Snellgro, a resident of Langston since 1900, recalled, "You still had plantations and all that stuff down there...

¹Langston City Plat, Logan County Courthouse, Guthrie, Oklahoma, 1890.

²The lands to the east of the Unassigned Lands were leased to the Iowa, Sac and Fox, Kickapoo, Pottawatomie and Shawnee, and Seminoles. These eastern lands, as well as the rest of Oklahoma, eventually suffered the same fate as the Unassigned Lands and were opened to landruns. For general histories see Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (New York: Macmillian, 1974 fourth edition) 626-629; John Morris and Edwin McReynolds, Historical Atlas of Oklahoma (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).
[in Alabama]. [Settlers] Saw a better life in Oklahoma.3

In a letter from A.G. Belton to the American Colonization Society in 1891, he voiced what Oklahoma represented for southern blacks:

We as a people are oppressed and disenfranchised we are still working hard and our rights are taken from us times are hard and getting harder every year we as a people believe that Africa is the place but to get from under bondage we are thinking Oklahoma as this is our nearest place of safety.4

The publishers of the Langston City Herald also presented central Oklahoma as an unparalleled opportunity. An article that ran repeatedly on the front page encouraged African Americans living in the South to relocate to Oklahoma:

3Taped interview, Waymon Snellgro, August 10, 1992.

FREEDOM! Peace, Happiness and Prosperity. Do you Want all These? Then Cast Your Lot With Us & Make Your Home in Langston City...and to open to the race new avenues through which they may obtain more of the good things of life.\textsuperscript{5}

Over thirty all-black towns were founded in the 1890s in central Oklahoma in an attempt to escape white oppression and "obtain more of the good things of life."\textsuperscript{6}

Langston, named for John Mercer Langston, a black congressman from Virginia, was founded in 1890 by Edward

\textsuperscript{5}"Home Sweet Home," \textit{Langston City Herald}, December 26, 1891. The only direct connection between articles and eventual residents of Langston is found in Zella Black Patterson's miscellaneous papers held at Langston University's Black Heritage Center. In "George Black Sr., Son of Great Grandpa Samuel Black, 1849-1940", Patterson says that George Black read an "advertisement concerning the 1891 Run in Oklahoma and Indian Territory" and moved to Logan County, Oklahoma where he claimed 160 acres, "broke out farm land with a yoke of oxen and built a log cabin." See also Edwin Redkey, \textit{Black Exodus}, 100. Redkey suggests that the \textit{Langston City Herald} was distributed throughout the South as promotional literature.

P. McCabe and William L. Eagleson. A white real estate speculator, Charles Robbins, purchased, surveyed, and platted the land. McCabe was an active Republican politician in Kansas who lived in the all African American town of Nicodemus before beginning Langston. McCabe and Eagleson desired settling enough black residents in the Unoccupied Lands to achieve a black majority and gain political control of the area. McCabe even attempted to visit with President Benjamin Harrison in an attempt to ensure his own political power, and thus safeguard rights for African Americans. As early as April 1882, an all-black convention in Parsons, Kansas, showed interest in African Americans settling Oklahoma when they asked Congress to reserve every third section of land in

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7 A biography of McCabe's long and complex career needs to be attempted; until that time the best information on McCabe, especially his Oklahoma years, is found in Hamilton, Black Towns, 5-42, and 99-119; and Katz, The Black West, 255-261. Hamilton also provides good information on the career of William Eagleson, 99-119.

8 Not much is known about Charles Robbins' relationship with McCabe and Eagleson, or his political beliefs. Numerous land transactions between McCabe and Robbins appear in the 1892 Logan County Deed book where McCabe sells Guthrie lots to Robbins. In the uncatalogued censuses of the Oklahoma Territorial Museum.

Oklahoma for southern blacks. In 1888 the *Topeka Citizen* of Kansas proclaimed:

> Let every colored man who wants 160 acres of land, get ready to occupy some of the best lands in 'Oklahoma', and should it be opened up, there is no reason why at least 100,000 colored men and women should not settle on 160 acres of land each.11

McCabe's and Eagleson's idea of a black majority never came to fruition. However, the institutions that they founded in Langston more than a century ago continue. Some institutions founded by the earliest settlers, most notably Langston University, prosper.12

Langston, although founded and settled by all African Americans looking to improve their lives, is not a utopian city. If any ideals were shared by the settlers, then it must have been the desire to escape persecution by whites as in Belton's characterization of Oklahoma as "...our nearest place of safety" in his letter to the American Colonization Society.13 Or as the article "FREEDOM!" in a March 1892 *Langston City Herald* suggests:

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12 For a thorough history of Langston University, originally called the Colored Agricultural and Normal University of Oklahoma, see Zella Black Patterson, *Langston University* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979).

Langston is a Negro city, and we are proud of the fact. Her city officials are all colored. Her teachers are colored...Remember, it is not a picnic we are inviting you, but to join hands with us in an active and earnest effort to better our conditions and open to the race new avenues through which they may obtain more of the good things of life.14

Having race in common united the settlers on one level where they might "join hands...to better our conditions..."15, but they were still a diverse group of people. While the settlers of Langston moved to the town in response to widespread racism in the South, ultimately they were a diverse group who came from different backgrounds and had individual ideas about the way life should be lived. Some had been born in Indian Territory and were probably once slaves to the Five Civilized Tribes. Some had lived in Texas, as slaves or free men and women. Others moved from the Deep South where they had been enslaved. And still others, like Edwin McCabe from Troy, New York had never experienced slavery and had always been free.16

Mildred Robertson, an 87-year-old resident, echoed the hope of freedom that Langston represented by

14"FREEDOM!", Langston City Herald, March 18, 1892.

15Ibid.

16Katz, The Black West, 255.
comparing her family's economic situation before moving to
Oklahoma in Mississippi. She stated that:

My people lived down at the bottom of
Mississippi close to Louisiana. And the name of
the town was Centerville...Well, they had a
little more freedom in Oklahoma. They didn't
have nothing, but they had a little more
freedom, cause those people [in Mississippi]
worked the year round and bought their groceries
at the store and when they gathered their cotton
crop and paid this man off, they didn't have
nothing much to live on.17

Mrs. Robertson's statement emphasizes the feeling of
opportunity Oklahoma represented for southern blacks,
namely leaving the stifling atmosphere of tenant farming
under whites in the South.

African Americans were not complete strangers to
the lands of Indian Territory. When the Five Civilized
Tribes were forcibly removed from Florida, North Carolina,
and Tennessee to reservations in Oklahoma in the 1850's
and 1860's, their slaves accompanied them. Only a handful
of these African Americans settled in Langston, and most
remained in eastern Oklahoma, especially around Muskogee.
In the 1904 Agricultural Census only E.W. Butler, "a 35
year-old colored male," is listed as born in Indian
Territory before the land was opened to non-Native

17Taped interview, Mildred Robertson, December 16,
American settlement. Since the area was occupied only by Indian tribes, Butler was probably with Native Americans at his birth. This suggests that the number of African Americans who settled in Langston actually associated with the Five Civilized Tribes was relatively small. A few residents still remain on Tribal Roles, like Waymon Snellgro who is on the Fawnee list.

The 1904 Census also details states of origin and birth for all Langston residents. Looking at the birthplaces of the one hundred forty-six adults over twenty years old reveals the geographic diversity of the settler population. They were born in seventeen different states, although the majority (91) came from eleven southern states. One-fifth of all the settlers were born in Texas (32) and almost half moved from Texas to

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18 1904 Langston Agricultural Census, uncatalogued censuses, Oklahoma Territorial Museum, 2.

19 Personal communication, Waymon Snellgro, August 6, 1992. Residents listed on the 1904 Agricultural Census from states where the Cherokee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Shawnee, and Creek had originally lived may have been slaves of these Native American groups. Taking this into account would increase the number of possible slaves of Native American groups near 30.

20 The ninety-one adults from the south were born in: Mississippi (13), Tennessee (12), South Carolina (11), Georgia (11), Kentucky (9), Alabama (8), Arkansas (6), North Carolina (5), Louisiana (4), Virginia (4), and Florida (2).
Oklahoma (60). For instance, Henry Everly was born in Louisiana in 1840, but moved to Oklahoma from Texas. His two sons, fifteen-year old Clarence and thirteen-year old Niles, were born in Tennessee and Texas respectively. This suggests that Everly lived in Louisiana, moved to Tennessee by 1889, moved to Texas by 1891, and by 1904 settled in Langston, Oklahoma.

Another example of movement in the South among early settlers to Langston is the Ayers. A.L. and Ann Ayers also moved from Texas to Oklahoma. A.L. was born in Georgia while Ann was born in Alabama. Both, A.L. and Ann, were fifty years old in 1904. From Langston's 1904 Agricultural Census it becomes clear that, like the Henry Everly and the Ayers, traveling across the South and living in many places before settling in Langston was common for early settlers. Movement from one state to another, and especially to Texas, was a frequent

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For another interpretation of the origin of Langston's settlers see Jere Roberson, "Edward P. McCabe and the Langston Experiment", Chronicles of Oklahoma, v. 51 (Fall, 1973) 343-355. Roberson suggests that most black settlers came to Oklahoma from Kansas. While Kansas blacks had a decided advantage in terms of settling Oklahoma, the 1904 Census has only eight of the one hundred forty-six adults over twenty years of age having moved from Kansas to Oklahoma and none of the residents were recorded as being born in Kansas.
experience among settlers of Langston. People may have traveled to Texas in anticipation of the opening of the Unassigned Lands or Texas may have been seen as an opportunity to leave the South, just as Oklahoma was later seen as a promised land. Continual movement appears to be an integral, if undesired, part of late-nineteenth century African Americans' lives in the post-Reconstruction South.

While the formation of Langston signaled a desire to establish the city and its people outside American society to avoid racism, the founding of Langston was part of an old American tradition. Just as Ann Hutchinson and Roger Williams left Massachusetts and founded Providence because of religious persecution, so the people who came to Langston sought freedom through separation and

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22 All above information from 1904 Langston Agricultural Census, Oklahoma Territorial Museum, uncatalogued holdings. In Zeila Black Patterson's "George Black Sr., Son of Great Grandpa Samuel Black, 1849-1940," Patterson states that George Black Sr. was born a slave of Wallace Maxwell in Washington County, Virginia, in 1849. Black then moved to Travis County, Texas between 1862 to 1873. This paper was based on Census Records and oral history and further substantiates the great amount of movement of African Americans in the late nineteenth century.

movement. When disenfranchised Americans seek to build "a city on a hill" as John Winthrop originally said of Plymouth, they are expressing an American sensibility that somewhere in the world exists a remedy to the ills of inequality. In 1893, only four years after Langston was founded, Frederick Jackson Turner struck a chord of renewal and opportunity similar to Langston's founders in a paper read before the American Historical Association. He stated:

> American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with new opportunities...furnishes the forces dominating American character.25

Turner emphasized aspects of change and the creation of new traditions in his portrayal of a frontier's growth. While characterizing the desire of Langston's settlers for substantial change, Turner's description does not acknowledge that new settlements do not spring forth as totally original creations. New towns do not encompass completely new ways of living. People carry traditions with them into new lands and reshape the ways of life to fit the new experience. The new creation is no


duplication of old ways, but also not unrecognizable. The new culture is somewhere in between, a combination of old and new, of originality and tradition.

If the land held promises of freedom, then people's new houses embodied their aspirations, their hopes, and their ways of living day-to-day. In Langston people changed their housing frequently. People adopted new structures, rebuilt old structures, and most importantly altered their domestic lifestyles. Older residents of Langston designate three broad classes of domestic architecture; homesteads, bungalows, and Langston Housing Authority houses. By listening to people and looking at houses access into the variety of experiences that compose parts of the total narrative of Langston's architecture is approached.
Figure 2.1 Map of Oklahoma showing Unassigned Lands from *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* by John Morris and Edwin McReynolds.
Chapter 3
HOMESTEDS

When the United States government opened the Unoccupied Lands to settlement, African Americans seized the opportunity, moved into the land, and began to build new lives. Houses were an integral part of the new experiences. Few of these dwellings survive today. Frequently, however, the structures survive on homestead sites outside Langston city limits. Four houses from the beginnings of African American settlement in Oklahoma around Langston were identified and measured (Amos, Lounds, Jones, and Clement homesteads). People's recollections greatly augmented the information of the extant structures and helped place the standing houses into a specific historical context.

If the builders of Langston chose to preserve, reuse, or build alongside older buildings, then my research would be simple. All of the houses from different periods would be represented. The landscape would resemble an accumulation of all structures from past
years. All architectural evidence would survive and a researcher could statistically account for all houses built in every year. House construction in Langston, however, was pragmatic and influenced more by economics than preserving a standing historical legacy. In Langston, abandoned houses were left to deteriorate in the sun and rain. Heating stoves caught fire and houses burned. People removed expensive flooring and milled lumber and incorporated the reusable parts into new houses. New foundations buried older foundations. Thus, the totality of Langston's architecture is lost, but a portion remains on the land. What survives is not a complete picture but a fraction of what was built.

A few older houses survived to the present. The structures were occupied, cared for and occupied until recently or they were simply too far in the country to make their materials accessible and desirable for salvage purposes. More recent houses that still survive are often in the hands of the family that built the structures. Langston, like most communities, has a greater survival rate of more costly houses. For instance, the few larger, rock houses survive in good condition while dugouts or frame houses are more quickly abandoned or reused. Thus, today the appearance of the community's architecture is
not a homogeneous style or form, but includes important examples of past building traditions of Langston.

To eyes trained in art history the Langston domestic architecture appears unimpressive. As one architectural historian of the Oklahoma Historical Society stated, "...I have not been impressed with either the quantity or quality of the town's [Langston's] houses...".¹ No large commercial buildings with Italianette brackets, incised Neo-Grec detailing, or flourishes of color adorn the Main street. No masterworks of eastern or Chicago architects are seen. Another observer, however, with romantic ideas about the simplicity and beauty of rural life might discover in central Oklahoma the architecture of a bygone era. This observer could perceive Langston's architecture as more morally correct than architect-conceived structures. The beauty might be seen in forms that reflect their functions, a beauty of efficiency and pragmatism, a beauty of organic architecture.

Both of these extremes obscure active people from the construction and enactment of architecture and focus on pictures presented only by the buildings' shells. In these instances the houses are read completely from the

¹Personal communication, letter from Susan Allen to author, June 17, 1992.
outside with ideas and concerns that are imposed on the architecture of Langston. For instance, one published article that addressed architecture in Langston concerned itself with large, grand public buildings. The focus was mainly on Langston University's buildings, the Langston Elementary school, and the old City Hall. Domestic architecture was left out of the picture of the community and judgment passed in the process.²

Aesthetic appraisals or judgments constitute a major part of architectural analysis. What makes the houses of Langston beautiful? From an outside point of view the houses might seem to embody an efficiency and neatness. One story in height they rest comfortably on the ground. They reflect the feeling of the plains, flat and sparse. They fit well with the place. Most Langston houses have symmetrical facades with one door and two windows. Porches invite passersby to visit the house's occupants. Irregularly situated on the streets, the houses' sites create a diverse landscape. The houses appear cohesive in their symmetrical parts and in the repetition of a similar house form throughout the community. But how is their beauty defined locally within Langston? Are the designs seen as cohesive,

confrontational, or something else? Are the aesthetics outsiders see in these houses related to what users see daily? In what ways does the aesthetic dimension of the houses help us to know more about the society and its interactions on a day-to-day basis inside and outside the houses?

One way to begin discussing the aesthetic dimensions of the houses as experienced by people in the community is to listen to people describe the kinds of houses built in Langston. People divide things according to their own conceptions and concerns. Scholars use typologies and periodization to arrange a mass of information along lines of similarities and differences to make discussion easier. People of Langston also divide houses into specific groups that allow the houses to be discussed and understood.

The typological paradigm is borrowed from archaeology which groups objects based on similarity of characteristics.3 For instance, ceramic sherds with a white glaze are different than those covered with green

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decoration. Or, bottles made of green glass are separated into a different type than clear bottles. The characteristic for division in these instances is a formal trait of the object, not a functional one. Archaeologists employ typologies to assemble artifacts into patterns. This eases artifactual comparison between different sites to occur. The meaning of a site that contains a large percentage of green bottle glass differs significantly from a site that has only a few pieces of the glass. The variation in occurrence can be attributed to a combination of temporal, geographical, racial, or class distinctions. More significantly, differences reflected in the archaeological record may suggest a distinctive way of conceptualizing the material world by past people who inhabited the area. However, do these typological groupings really reflect the complexity of the past world or are they only relevant to other specialized scholars.

The question is: what criteria separates houses into typological groups? Should they be grouped by material differences? For instance, are rock houses fundamentally different from frame houses? Or, should separation be based upon the layout of the floor plan? This would delineate a difference between four-room and one-room houses and between one-floor and two-floor houses. Or, should differentiation be based on when
houses were erected? This might divide housing into
discrete groupings of ten years, for instance, 1889 to
1899 and 1939 to 1949. Or, should the criteria for
division be the decoration on the exteriors? This might
group together all houses that are painted the same color.
Or should features of an architectural style be seen as
important for types? Using this standard, houses
displaying a diversity of surfaces and elevations
associated with nineteen-fifties designs would be grouped
together. A typology is simply a heuristic device that
allows for comparison, calculations and linkages between
structures. However, typologies are often given great
emphasis and are believed to reflect how people organized
and thought about the material world.

All of the above typological approaches have been
applied at one time or another by scholars concerned with
houses. The key to separating many houses into a few

'The breadth of scholarly work on typologies is
beyond the immediate concerns of this paper. See Fred
Peterson, Homes in the Heartland: Balloon Frame Farmhouses
of the Upper Midwest, 1850-1920 (Lawrence, Kansas:
University of Kansas Press, 1992) 25-34. Peterson's
discussion provides a good listing of different scholars' approaches to developing a typology of architecture. However, his conclusions, and descriptions of the various theories is often too dismissive. All students of typologies in vernacular architecture studies should look closely at Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1975) 13-65. Glassie argues that categorizing by form reveals ideas in mind of past people.'

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kinds is ultimately determined by the goals of the researcher. What do I hope to accomplish by dividing houses into groups? By studying the houses of Langston, I wanted to detail an aspect of the African American architectural tradition that has not been discussed. Specifically, I wanted to begin a discussion on African American architecture in the West. And more significantly, I wished to approach this project in a manner that would allow the people of Langston to educate me as to the meaning, use, and importance of their buildings. The most interesting projects that have attempted to reconstruct the meaning of buildings within a community have employed a combination of historical data, oral histories, and interpretation. The main concern of this paper is to describe the houses as people in Langston do (and not all people in Langston agree about how the

houses are defined), so their definitions and descriptions receive the most weight. For people in Langston, homestead designates not a single form of house, but various kinds of houses associated with earliest settlement. People in Langston group dugouts, one-room log houses, and two-room frame houses together under homesteads.

Cellars or Dugouts

The least costly homestead for a settler to build was the dugout or cellar. By digging a sizeable hole into a hill or flat ground, a house could be constructed. Trees, taken from cleared bottom land, shored up the sides and roof of the house. The floor was red clay that with increased use became "like cement." Clay chinking filled the gaps between the roof's timbers. Inside, the cellar was one room roughly eight by ten feet. Residents entered the cellar either by descending stairs or through a ground level door.

6 These two terms were used interchangeably by residents during conversations. This might reflect that many houses dug into the side of a hill were later used as cellars after other houses were constructed.

7 Taped interview, Jim Jones, August 8, 1992. Also see George McDaniels, Hearth and Home, 68-72. Thanks to Gabriel Lanier for pointing out McDaniel's identical quote on earthen floors. McDaniel considers earthen floors as surviving traditions of a West African practice.
One example of an African American family's dugout survives only through an early, undated photograph entitled "Mansion in Oklahoma" (Figure 3.1). In Guthrie: A History of the Capital City 1889-1910, Lloyd Lentz III states that the picture was made near Guthrie circa 1890.8 William Loren Katz also suggests that the photograph is from the Guthrie area.9 Guthrie is ten miles southwest of Langston. While the exact location and date of the photograph are unknown, this image is intriguing because it shows an African American family standing in front of a dugout. Their house has a triangular front made of vertical logs and a door frame. Other logs support the dirt roof and a stove pipe appears towards the rear of the roof.10 Comparing the resemblance of this family's dugout to resident's descriptions of dugouts in Langston provides supplementary evidence into early housing in Langston.


The Jones and Clement homesteads both have surviving cellars separate from the houses. Both are said to have never served as early dwelling and were constructed after the houses. Jim Jones said that the extant cellar immediately to the west of his grandparents' homestead was identical in construction and size to an earlier dugout that his grandparents occupied.\footnote{Personal communication, Jim Jones, August 14, 1992.} The Jones cellar has wooden stairs leading down to a frame door. Inside the room is twelve by eight feet with a red dirt floor and dirt walls. The roof is now tinned, sheet iron nailed to logs.

The Clement cellar is in a much deteriorated state, but is similar in arrangement to the Jones cellar. The measurements of the Clement cellar are roughly 11' x 9'6". Mizura Clement Allen said that when her father Howard Clement moved from Paris, Texas to Oklahoma in 1892 he first built the family's two-room frame house and then the cellar.\footnote{Personal communication, Mizura Clement Allen, July 14, 1992.} Mrs. Allen added that the cellar was never used as a house by her father, but used only for storing food and avoiding storms. Unlike the Jones and Clement dugouts which were not built as residences, the Dirks
family occupied a cellar in Langston as a permanent house for at least forty years.

The Dirks cellar was located in the northeast part of town off Meridian Road, an agricultural area primarily used for cotton fields. Mildred Robertson remembered, "Oh, well some of them people who lived over there in a dugout, the Dirks." They cellars was carved out of a hill in a narrow ravine that was too hilly for agriculture. Local tradition claims that the cellar was built before 1900. Robert and Amanda Dirks and their son, Leonard, are listed on the earliest surviving Langston Agriculture Census of 1904. Robert was thirty and Amanda was thirty-four. They both moved to Oklahoma from Texas where they were both born. The Dirks family also appears in the 1905 personal tax. He was assessed four dollars, the second lowest amount in town behind Frank Scott who was taxed one dollar. Bob Dirks took out an advertisement in Langston's newspaper, The Western Age, in

13 Taped interview, Mildred Robertson, August 12, 1992.

14 1904 Langston Agriculture Census, uncatalogued censuses, Oklahoma Territorial Museum, J. Robert and Amanda Dirks probably had at least one other son, Alfonzo, who was fined $4.50 on March 4, 1918 for "...driving car after night without lights...". This incident is recorded in the Langston town meeting book, Langston City Hall.

15 1905 Personal Tax Records, Logan County Courthouse, Guthrie, Oklahoma.
August of 1908. He called himself "The Wood Man" and said that he was "prepared to furnish nice seasoned wood ready to burn."\(^{16}\)

The Dirks' cellar has left barely a trace. While no longer accessible, the house was described by Mildred Robertson. The Dirks' house had two rooms, "one for cooking and sitting, the other for sleeping."\(^{17}\) The dugout also had a substantial rock chimney that served the fireplace. Mrs. Robertson remembered: "that lady (Amanda Dirks) could make a cake and put it (in a) like skillet over there and cook that cake in the fireplace."\(^{18}\) Amanda and Robert Dirks lived in their cellar well into the nineteen-forties, a fact that should cause us to rethink the notion of dugouts as temporary, impermanent structures.

While cellars were built and used in Langston from initial settlement at least until the 1940's, their survival on the present landscape is rare. Where they do survive, the structures are significantly altered. Tinned, sheet iron roofs, and concrete floors and walls were common structural improvements in the buildings.

\(^{16}\)The Western Age, V.14 #12, August 7, 1908.

\(^{17}\)Taped interview, Mildred Robertson, August 12, 1992.

\(^{18}\)Ibid.
Older residents of Langston most frequently recall a one-room log house as the typical homestead of a settler. The *Langston City Herald* testifies to the efficacy of a log house when it instructs settlers in 1891 to "...cut timber to lay the foundation of a house...",\(^{19}\) as one improvement to make a land claim. The relative ease of assembling logs for buildings is suggested in the Langston Town Meeting Book. On March 8, 1892 "...Lawyer A.L. Ayers presented a bill [$4.00] from King for hauling logs to build the City Prison."\(^{20}\) King was never paid and the Langston Jail was eventually built of rock, but the logs were most likely used for a settler's new house.

While one-room log houses were an extremely common form of housing before 1940, their survival rate is low. However, the majority of older residents in Langston recall growing-up or raising children in a one-room log house. For instance, Mildred Robertson, Amanda Gross, Joe Jacobs, Jim Jones, and Adam Collier all resided in a log-cabin during the twentieth century. The houses were frequently remembered to be similar in size and plan to the only extant log house, the Jones house (Figure 3.2).

\(^{19}\)"Home Sweet Home," *Langston City Herald*, December 26, 1891.

\(^{20}\)Langston Town Meeting Book, Langston City Hall, March 8, 1892.
In 1892, one year after Langston City Herald's advice to new settlers, Frank and Queen Jones constructed their own twenty by sixteen feet log house (Figure 3.3). Built from pine trees that grew on their 140 acres, the gaps between the logs were filled in as Amanda Gross described "with ashes and clay on the outside...". The Jones house had a stove on the northern end, a loft accessible by a ladder, a door to the west, and two board windows in the north and south walls.

Amanda Gross described the process of covering the inside of a log cabin:

> ...on the inside, I went around to the stores and got paper boxes...open them up... and covered the walls...that was to make it warm... The cardboard boxes would then be covered up by newspapers. As Amanda Gross recalled:

> Well, I wouldn't change that [newspaper] so often cause I'd go around that and read a lot, off the wall cause you got to take a flour and make a paste and put the newspaper on the

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21 Many thanks to Jim and Viola Jones for showing me this log-house and sharing their extensive knowledge of Langston with me.


23 Ibid.
Jim Jones said that his parents also covered the inside of their house in a similar manner. Evidence of the wall treatment survives in the Jones log house and in the post-1940 additions. The cardboard and newspaper treatments of the interior walls were done for aesthetic and utilitarian reasons. As Amanda Gross describes, the cardboard not only kept drafts out and people warm, but the newspaper also provided visual entertainment and education.

Focusing on the naming of rooms in a house hints at the various uses and meanings of the space. Exact words for a one-room log house vary from person to person. This personal variation, however, falls into a list of seven names composing a common lexicon (living room, sitting room, cabin, log cabin, homestead, bedroom, and front room). Nearly everyone who lived in a one-room log cabin can reel off the various names of the structure. So, while individuals are communicating in a personal way with a specific word for the building they are also informed about how the rest of the community is referring to the house.

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24Ibid. Also see Charles Martin, Hollybush, 28-31. Martin describes in precise detail newspaper decoration in eastern Kentucky.
Jim Jones noted when speaking about his grandparents' log house where he was born in 1927, "Sitting room, bedroom, living room, room, or log cabin. People used all those names depending on what you were doing there." Explicit in Mr. Jones' naming of the room is the changing character of the space. The one room can be defined by the actions, the space, or the materials. The space is a bedroom when people are sleeping, a sitting room when people gather, a log cabin because of materials. This variety of names suggests a flexible way of imagining the space. Although only one room, it encompasses many spaces. The physical space does not have a specialization inherent to it, yet the activities appropriate to the space are innumerable. The actions within the room change significantly and subsequently change the meaning of the room, but the room remains unchanged.26

25 Personal communication, Jim Jones, August 5, 1992.

26 See Thomas Hubka, Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1984). Hubka develops the idea of spaces for very specific tasks, like milk house or wood house. The idea Hubka discusses is nearly the opposite of what is happening in Langston's one-room houses where one space is utilized for many different activities. See also Michael Ann Williams, Homeplace. She describes a similar idea of specialized spaces within one undifferentiated space.
Furnishings alter the functional possibilities of a room. Furnishings, often moveable and decorated, play an important part during social activity. Comparable to a stage set, furniture directly affects human behavior. Reverse the equation and human behavior affects furniture. While obvious this point emphasizes that furniture is chosen by people for a variety of reasons (economic, social, aesthetic, even political). Certain behavior is seen as appropriate when specific furniture is present. Erving Goffman notes that, "...the setting involving furniture, decor, physical layout, and other background items... supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within or upon it."27

In a one-room house residents altered furnishings to create new "scenery and stage props" to suit their actions. Like an ongoing collage, the room was transformed from a space for breakfast, for work, for dinner, for sleeping, or for special occasions. A common understanding of the mood created by a particular ensemble of furnishings and decorations exists within Langston. However, untangling communal meanings of a grouping of objects is most difficult and perhaps accepting that the task before us is more like reading a poem than solving a

mathematical problem may help.\textsuperscript{28} No lexicon records the various possibilities of an object's meanings, like a dictionary does for words. In fact many objects have meanings deeply personal and difficult to translate into words.

For instance, Adam Collier has two plates commemorating one hundred fifty years of the Methodist church's existence hanging on his wall. The communicative value of these plates speaks directly to Adam and Arvenia Collier's membership in the Methodist Church. If, however, you know that the United African Methodist Episcopal Church of Langston sits directly across Washington Boulevard from Mr. Collier's house and that when you sit on his front porch, the church is your view (Figure 3.4), then the plates take on a different level of personal significance. The plates become a reflection of the church across the street, the merging of personal and public space. And when I ask Mr. Collier about the plates on the wall, he replies that his wife got them in 1973 when she went to a Methodist convention in Tulsa and when you realize that she passed away only two years ago in 1990, the meaning of the plates deepens to an even more.

\textsuperscript{28}Personal communication, Bernard L. Herman. Herman often uses this apt metaphor for attempting to understand the physical world and human interaction with the built environment.
personal level. The plates are visual reminders of Arvenia, Mr. Collier's wife of nearly fifty years, and the plates hang prominently above the table where Mr. Collier takes his three meals a day. However, someone else might examine the two plates without any knowledge about their context on the wall in Mr. Collier's home and see an earthenware plate with a flowing green and white glaze with a molded religious design. The plates might be read as a lingering expression of an Art Pottery aesthetic by the Frankoma Pottery Company in Sapulpa, Oklahoma or as an expression of religious devotion. With these formal analyses, however, the personal significance of the plates is forgotten. It is as if the plates exist only as physical objects on their most blatant, denotative levels. When in reality the plates are extremely rich in personal meaning, and connotations. Attempting to describe the many meanings of the plates within their context (which privileges the user and not the researcher) makes us see the many different ways to appreciate and study objects. Particularistic analysis, or object-centered analysis to use Bernard Herman's term, considers

29 Personal communication, Adam Collier, August, 11, 1992. I am greatly indebted to Mr. Collier for letting me into his home and taking time to make me see these concepts.
the plate only from a few of its multiplicity of meanings. In the end, object-centered analysis is important, but disappointing because it prioritizes a small number of aspects of an object. Ultimately its goal is to explain the object as a thing unto itself, not a thing linked intimately with human behavior. Usually object-centered study ends at construction techniques and materials. Focusing only on the object does not consider the various meanings of the object within a specific context and is unconnected from the existence of human emotion and memory. Emotion and memory work on a level of inexplicit, ambiguous, and connotative meanings. Answers to inquiries of objects posed on an emotional level and that respect the object's context are extremely difficult to recover. This difficulty may be one of the reasons researchers avoid asking questions that may result in vague or contradictory answers. Researchers like to have neat and tidy answers (construction technique and material) to their questions to provide their own pursuits with meaning. In the end, however, this fixation on answers, and not interpretations, leads to a narrow range of questions asked and, thus, a narrow description of the past.

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To return to the original idea that individual actions of interior decoration are important to explore because they reflect and define the past's complexity, I would like to focus on beds. Beds within a one-room house illustrate the role of furniture in creating different atmospheres for different actions. Bed frames and mattresses occupied a good portion of the space in a one-room log house. Mattresses stuffed "like big pillowcases" with hay, chicken feathers, or corn husks rested on cast-iron or wooden bedsteads. Amanda Gross described the log cabin she lived in with her husband during the nineteen-twenties and thirties. She placed four beds in the 400 square foot cabin (20'x20'). These beds would have taken up two-fifths of the total interior space. Likewise, Jim Jones said that three beds were always present in the sixteen-by-twenty log house he grew up in and an additional bed was setup when his grandmother visited. Beds, thus, spatially dominated a one-room house and people used the beds in a variety of distinctive ways.

Curtains or hanging sheets decorated and transformed beds within the interior. These unfinished

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31 Taped interview, Mildred Robertson, August 21, 1992.

32 Personal communication, Jim Jones, August 16, 1992.
quilt tops, quilts, canvas sacks, or tie-dyed sheets hung from wire or rope wrapped around nails in the ceiling. Amanda Gross when asked about any partitions within the one room described how she would "sheet it off" with two curtains made of quilt tops.\textsuperscript{33} The draperies extended eight feet into the room and she would "push them back to the wall" when they were not needed.\textsuperscript{34} The number of curtains hung varied "according on how many people in your house."\textsuperscript{35} Sheeting off beds created smaller rooms within the one continuous space. Amanda Gross said, "This (sheet) would cut this (bed) off from this (area) over here... That's the way you divide yourselves."\textsuperscript{36} The use of curtains helped individuals differentiate space for themselves and for others.

Sheets and curtains provided more than psychic comfort and privacy. They also insulated the sleeper from drafts and kept warmth nearby during the Oklahoma winter. When someone went to bed, curtains were pulled away from the wall to enclose the bed. For instance, when a child retired to bed before the adults, a curtain was used to separate him or her from the adult's space. Large beds

\textsuperscript{33}Taped interview, Amanda Gross, August 21, 1992.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
were not completely immobile pieces of furniture. Jim Jones spoke of his childhood mattress being stored in a corner and brought out every night. Amanda Gross also noted that, "when my mother came to visit, we set a little bed for her in this corner," near the wood stove and hung a sheet around the area.\(^{37}\)

The visual statement of the hanging curtains depended upon the color and design of the sheet. Pushed back against the wall the curtains were small splotches of color and when drawn out the drapes were large compositions. The quilts were often bright shades while the sacks were cut-up, dyed, and changed into a variety of colors. While utilitarian in function, the curtains were also meaningful aesthetic expressions. These hanging sheets were swaths of brightness and color within the home, objects to be admired and objects to be seen. As Viola Jones recalled, "You couldn't help but see them, cause they stood out when they were up."\(^{38}\) Since the curtains were fashioned by the women of the household, the fabric communicated an ability to create a work for family and guests to admire and use.

\(^{37}\) Taped interview, Amanda Gross, August 21, 1992

\(^{38}\) Personal communication, Viola Jones, August 8, 1992.
While everyone interviewed remembered the use of curtains in one-room log houses, they were (and are still) hung in bungalows. The four-room bungalows with their separate, walled-off bedrooms did not need curtains for dividing sleepers from one another. However, curtains often divided the front room from the dining room. Adam Collier recalled that his wife, Arvenia, had curtains draped in her house in 1940 when he moved-in.³⁹ Today, he has an orange cotton sheet hanging between the front room and dining room. He also has two sets of curtains in the rear washroom to create a closet and a storage space. When asked why he hangs these sheets, Mr. Collier responded that the sheets kept heat in the front room during winter and protected his clothes from the red dust.⁴⁰

The way Langston's residents conceived and implemented the curtains suggests a flexible use of materials. The cotton sacks, also called crocka sacks, were reused for economic reasons while the quilt-tops were waiting to be made into finished quilt. In transition from fabric to completed quilt the tops are temporarily

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³⁹ Personal communication, Adam Collier, July 20, 1992.

⁴⁰ Personal communication, Adam Collier, August 14, 1992.
used as a prominent object in the house, both utilitarian and decorative.

During a regular day, beds would be left in their places with bedcovers over them. The daily bedcoverings were either plain muslin purchased from a local dry goods store, like Meek's store on Monument Street, or utilitarian quilts. The muslin sheets were purchased unbleached and then repeatedly bleached to make them as white as possible. Muslin could also be dyed with leaves and hulls from Warner plum trees to produce a light-brown sheet. Amanda Gross said,

...to dye...You see, you would take...the Warner leaves you'd put them in a pot and boil them together and that would die kind of off-color, that would keep them from being white... What it would be, would be some muslin course you'd save your flour sacks...Sometimes if they wanted some streaks in it... they'd tie a string around it.41

According to Amanda Gross, these dyed brown sheets were used daily on the beds. This practice of tie-dyeing sheets does not seem to have any parallels within popular culture of America during the first half of the twentieth century. This practice may well represent a continued

tradition brought over from West Africa where tie-dyeing, with indigo especially, was popular.42

Instead of white or "off-color" muslin sheets, quilts also covered beds daily. Amanda Gross recalled women stitching together pieces of old clothes to make britches quilts. Britches quilts were of heavy denim or wool from "overalls, jeans or shirts... whatever you could get."43 These quilts were two parts and a stuffing. The quilt-top was pieced together from square patches of the old clothes. The top was quilted to the cotton back with some cotton batting in between the two pieces.44

The covering placed on the beds changed significantly for special occasions. Before guests arrived, people decorated beds with the best (in terms of time and material) and most colorful quilts. Mildred Robertson recalled her mother, Peada Haynes, bringing out a double-wedding band quilt that measured ten by eight

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42 More research into this subject is needed to see how widespread tie-dyeing was in rural America, among African Americans and others.


44 While patchwork quilts are frequently discussed, britches quilts have not been addressed in the literature on quilts. Recently, I saw a quilt made from wool suits labeled "Britches quilt from Black culture" in Trinidad, Texas. More research into this topic may prove fruitful.
feet when the Reverend came to call.\textsuperscript{45} This quilt has a pink background framed by a white and pink border (Figure 3.5). The interlocking bands that make up the double wedding band pattern are red, yellow, blue or brown alternating with white pieces. Elaborate quilts like this one or more easily stitched patterns such as the drunkard's path (Figure 3.6), butterflies, ships, Irish chain, and patchwork with tulips (Figure 3.7) were popular for covering the beds. The major difference between "fancy" quilts, as some people referred to them, and britches quilts was the amount of time and labor invested in the quilts. Most of these quilts were reserved for special occasions and stored away until they transformed beds into quilt exhibition areas on special occasions. Mrs. Robertson said that her mother's double-wedding band quilt would never have been used daily on a bed or to keep warm. Instead, the quilt was used sparingly and brought out for display only when guests visited.\textsuperscript{46} This type of use explains why britches quilts do not survive except in people's memories, and "fancy" quilts survive in such excellent condition. Queen Esther Williams Vic also

\textsuperscript{45}Personal communication, Mildred Robertson, August 8, 1992.

\textsuperscript{46}Personal communication, Mildred Robertson, August 6, 1992.
remembered her mother displaying quilts on the family's beds when guests visited.\(^4\)

The use of quilts in so many different ways (curtains, on beds, and display) is not unique to African Americans, but may have taken on a more prominent role within African American households. As Amanda Gross remembered:

I think colored folks piece more quilts than whites did way back then. Because I worked with the white folks and I think colored folks done more quilts than whites, cause I worked in their homes and they didn't have quilts like we did. Cause they could do better...they could buy better.\(^3\)

Mrs. Gross' comment suggests that an economic impetus resulted in the varied and extensive use of quilts in Langston. Quilts enjoyed a prominent role in one-room log houses as architecture, bed coverings, and displays.

Beds, quilts on beds, and quilts as partitions played prominent roles in the ways of daily life within a one-room log house. They were expressions, functional and aesthetic, made to others and for the family. Other settlers arrived in Langston with more economic resources and built more expensive homesteads for their families.

\(^4\)Personal communication, Queen Esther Williams Vic, August 12, 1992.

\(^3\)Taped interview, Amanda Gross, December 12, 1992.
Frame Homesteads

Early residents also built other more costly houses. Three frame homesteads (Amos, Lounds, and Clement) from first settlement survive in the Langston area. The Clement house is located two miles east and one mile south of Langston in what was Iowa Indian lands (Figure 3.8 and 3.9). This area was opened for settlement in 1890, one year after the Unoccupied Lands. The Amos house is located two miles south of Langston in the Unoccupied Lands that were opened in 1889 (Figure 3.10). And the Lounds house is located in Payne County along the Cimarron River. Each of the families were connected socially and economically to Langston, and later moved into Langston proper. Beulahland, Langston's 1889 cemetery, was the eventual resting place for many members of these families.

All of these frame homesteads were constructed with the popular balloon framing on a rock foundation.

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49 I am deeply indebted to Richard Trice for taking me to see the Lounds house and telling me about other early houses in the Langston area.

50 Beulah in the Old Testament describes Israel, the promised land. Beulahland is a common motif in the blues, see Mississippi John Hurt's recording of "Beulah Land" on Today (Santa Monica, CA: Vanguard Records, 1967).

51 See Fred Peterson, Homes in the Heartland, 5-24. Peterson provides a thorough description of balloon framing and its history.
The Clement and Amos homesteads were originally two rooms that were enlarged with frame additions. The dimensions of these two houses are nearly identical rectangles. The Clement homestead is 14'2" by 32'4" and the Amos house measures 14'6" by 30'6" (Figure 3.11). They both have central chimneys which served stoves in the original two rooms. The Lounds house is similar to these two houses in construction, but has four rooms built on a square plan measuring 24' by 24'(Figure 3.12). Even though the Lounds house was erected at the turn of the century and formally is identical to contemporary foursquares, residents call it a homestead and not a bungalow. This designation suggests that Langston residents define housing types more by the role the houses play in people's lives than by the arrangement of the exterior or interior. In this case, the Lounds house is referred to as a homestead because the house was the first residence of the Lounds family in Oklahoma.

Construction time and materials made frame houses much more costly homesteads than dugouts or log houses. People utilized local red sandstone, commonly found throughout the area, for the foundations. The framing, however, had to be transported into the area by railroad or wagon. The exact suppliers of house framing have not been identified; however, a few sources are apparent.
Langston did not have any lumber yards within the city limits. Twenty-two lumber companies are listed in nearby Guthrie's first directory of 1889. The Guthrie companies received wood, plaster, nails, glass and tools by the Santa Fe trains. Most likely, the lumber yards in Guthrie probably sold the materials for a house based on standardized plans.

People purchased the framing for frame houses or kitchen additions to log houses from the lumber yards in Guthrie or from merchants in Coyle who also had access to the Santa Fe railroad. Langston's town meeting book survives and numerous bills from the Arkansas Lumber Company are listed for wood and cement. On March 26th, 1918, the town records read, "...we would pay the Arkansas

52 Lentz, Guthrie, 70. Lentz states that "A steam-powered planing mill was one of boom town Guthrie's first industries."

53 See Peterson, Homes in the Heartland, 196-202. Peterson discusses house plans and materials that were available for construction in the Upper Midwest. He focuses mainly on companies, like Aladdin Homes or Sears, that could undercut lumber company prices and furnish the entire house. Further research into the specifics of the interaction between lumber companies and clients would help illuminate the breadth of possible house plans and costs of materials. Lumber companies in Guthrie may still have older records that were not investigated for this project or house companies, like Aladdin, may have records of orders that would provide a picture of the geographic range of the housing companies.
Lumber Co. $33.00 for cement."\textsuperscript{54} This relationship probably extended to residents of Langston and points to one possible source for framing. Mizura Clement recalled that her father purchased framing from the Arkansas Lumber Company in 1921 for their bungalow.\textsuperscript{55} Whether residents purchased framing from the Arkansas company, a Coyle merchant, or a Guthrie lumber yard, the expense of the materials and the installation time kept additions and frame houses to a minimum for most families. Jim Jones commented that time and money prohibited his father from building a frame kitchen until the early nineteen-forties.\textsuperscript{56} However, when possible the first addition to a log house was a rectangular frame kitchen.

Frame additions on one-room log houses accomplished the same goal of differentiated spaces achieved by two-room frame houses. The most common addition to the one-room log house was a frame kitchen. A small frame lean-to added significant space to the one-room log houses. Amanda Gross remembered a one-room log house that she lived in with her husband in the 1920s. The house had a completely separate frame kitchen.

\textsuperscript{54}Langston Town Meeting Book, Langston City Hall, March 26, 1918.

\textsuperscript{55}Personal communication, Mizura Clement Allen, August, 20, 1992.

\textsuperscript{56}Personal communication, Jim Jones, August 14, 1992.
accessible by a porch. Often people used one exterior wall of the log house and constructed three sides to enclose this new space.

Once built frame kitchens changed the center of a family's activities. Before a kitchen was added every task—eating, sleeping, entertaining and cooking—were accomplished in the one-room space. With a new kitchen people divided functions between the two spaces and a sense of appropriate behavior developed for each space. The kitchen allowed families to accomplish their food preparation and eating primarily in the new space.57

The most necessary equipment in the kitchen was a stove. These were large cast iron stoves with four or six burners and an oven. Amanda Gross recalled that her family had a wood burning stove with four eyes and a steam table.58 Mildred Robertson remembered her family owning a "plain wood cook stove."59 Typical furniture in the kitchen was a table and chairs or benches. For tables a "lot of people got some boards and made their tables,"

57See Michael Ann Williams', Homeplace, 64-67. Williams also found that separate kitchens were commonly the first addition made to one-room houses.

58Personal communication, Amanda Gross, August 10, 1992.

59Interview with Mildred Robertson, August 21, 1992.
Mildred Robertson said. This "homemade" furniture, as Mrs. Robertson referred to it, was pine and often unpainted. A family purchased chairs if they could afford them, but more often seating was built. People frequently made use of wooden crates or kegs from storeowners in town. Benches were constructed with pine boards, like the tables.

Since the women of Langston controlled most of the cooking, the kitchen was understood to be their space. This is vividly illustrated in the ways that individuals remember their houses. For instance, one evening after dinner Jim and Viola Jones described the plan of the log house they lived in when they were first married in the late nineteen-forties. The house still survives and, therefore, provides a physical point of comparison for their memories (Figure 3.4). While recalling their house, Mr. Jones insisted that the kitchen's west end paralleled the log house and did not have a door to the outside. Viola Jones' memories of the kitchen space differed a little from her husband's. She recalled that the kitchen addition projected four feet beyond the log house and had a door on its west wall. After visiting the house, Viola Jones' description proved to be more accurate than Mr.

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
Jones' memory of the space. Later I asked Viola and Jim Jones why their memories of the space differed; Mrs. Jones replied that she ought to know the kitchen better, because she spent most of her time there while Jim worked construction outside the house.62

Men and women inhabit the same space, the same house. Although the kitchen was primarily Mrs. Jones' area, Mr. Jones went into the room, especially for meals. The analysis of a space by gender roles revolves around an individual's experience of a room, the tasks one accomplished there. Space is divided up, physically and temporally, into segments and suggests gender roles that accompanied and defined space. In Langston, gendered space actively changes with the people who are physically in the kitchen or the house. In this example, Viola and Jim Jones' memories suggest the degree to which two individuals in the same house can experience and remember an identical space differently.

Homestead Conclusion

Langston provided an opportunity for a few African Americans to improve their lives by removing themselves from day-to-day interaction with whites.

62Personal communication, Jim and Viola Jones, August 6, 1992.
Homesteads erected in Langston were varied structures. When settlers arrived in the Langston area, settlers constructed three kinds of architecture depending primarily on economic circumstances. The most costly was frame, next was log, and the least expensive was a dugout. All of the houses embodied an expectation of a future life, of a better life. The architecture of expectation, homesteads, were not equivalent structures. This difference in the houses acts as an able metaphor for the diversity of daily experience within the experience of architecture and even between family members. Although this architecture embodied aspirations for the first generation that constructed it, the houses continued to be lived-in, experienced, and imbued with new meanings during subsequent years. While no one lives in a homestead anymore, the experiences of daily life within the various dwellings lives in the memories of people in Langston.
Figure 3.1 Photograph entitled "Mansion in Oklahoma," c.1889, near Guthrie, Oklahoma. From Guthrie: A History of the Capital City 1889-1910, Lloyd C. Lentz, III.
Figure 3.2 Charles and Jessie Jones log house, built in 1890.
Figure 3.3 Plan of Jones house, built in 1890.
Figure 3.4 United African Methodist Episcopal Church of Langston, Oklahoma across from Adam Collier's house, on Washington Street. Photograph by Adam Collier, August, 1992.
Figure 3.5 Double wedding band quilt owned by Mildred Robertson, made by Peada Haynes c. 1920.
Figure 3.6 Drunkard's path quilt owned by Viola Jones, c. 1940.
Figure 3.7 Patchwork tulips quilt owned by Amanda Gross' daughter, Gracie Mae Smith, c. 1920.
Figure 3.8 South elevation of Howard and Ada Clement homestead, c. 1895.
3.9 West elevation of Howard and Ada Clement homestead, c.1910 addition to left.
Figure 3.10 Amos homestead, 1901.
Figure 3.11 Plan of Amos Homestead, 1901 with later additions.
Figure 3.12 Plan of Lounds homestead, c. 1890.
Lounds Homestead, c. 1890
Hansford, SK.
Chapter 4
BUNGALOWS

By 1905 people in Langston, Oklahoma drastically changed their ideas about domestic architecture. People in Langston refer to the kind of house built after this time as a bungalow. By the turn of the century bungalows were becoming ubiquitous on the American landscape. Plans and materials were offered by Sears, lumber companies, and housing companies like Aladdin and Jud Yoho.¹ In Langston, the new bungalow contracted the range of designs used in house construction. Compared to the diversity of the homesteads, the plans and materials became more uniform in the bungalows with four rooms on a cement pier and beam foundation and frame walls standard.

practice. Yet, even with the building of these bungalows, not all other houses were abandoned, demolished, or rendered obsolete. People continued to reside in homesteads, so bungalows actually increased the kinds of houses encountered on the landscape. For instance, Jim and Jessie Jones resided in his parents' log house well into the 1970s. At that time, however, the Jones family had altered their one-room house with four frame lean-to's (kitchen, and bedrooms) that functionally approximated the spatial arrangement of bungalows. At the same time that the Jones remodeled their log cabin, their neighbors built new bungalows.

Within the bungalow group, three subtle differences are seen on Langston's roads and spoken about by the residents. First came the old bungalow or foursquares, around 1900 (Figure 4.1), and then people built two kinds of newer bungalows, around 1914 (Figure 4.2, 4.3).

Only three old bungalows survive in Langston (Jacobs, Jones, and Carters). All of the houses have four square rooms, entered by front and rear doors, with a hipped roof and a central chimney stack that served at least two stoves. Only the Jacobs house has an upstairs that is accessible, but unfinished. The rest are a single story in height. People in Langston designate these
houses, old bungalows. Architectural historians refer to these structures as foursquares because of their room division into four equal square rooms, usually 12 x 12.²

In attempting to understand how these square houses fit into the history of Langston's architecture, I asked Amanda Gross, "Now, what would you call the square ones?" She responded, "You see that one (Jacobs house) (Figure 4.4), that you were talking about, it was the old bungalow. And as the people grew and know better then they went to fixing the bungalows, like this."³ After building the old bungalow people built "a longer house," Mr. Petty said (Figure 4.5).⁴

More of the second type of bungalows or longer houses survive in Langston and this type was probably more frequently built. Over fifty percent (150/231) of the extant houses in Langston are new bungalows. The earliest, Jeff Franklin's House, was built by 1914 (Figure 4.6) and the form continued with few changes until 1969 when Jake Watson erected his house (Figure 4.7). These bungalows are one story and have a rectangular floor plan with four to six rooms (Figure 4.8). The measurements approximate twenty-four feet by forty-five feet and only

²Alan Gowans, The Comfortable House, 90-93.
⁴Taped interview, David Petty, December 12, 1992.
two houses have a second floor. However, one house was sixty-five feet long and another was twenty-eight feet long, so the interior space in these new bungalows varies greatly. Ultimately, the square feet of the bungalow depended on the number of additions. Extensions to the original house are almost always placed onto the rear of the house, so that the houses become "longer" as David Petty said. In one instance (Erma Hinds' house at 317 Turner) two houses were actually brought together to create a longer house.

Mildred Robertson characterized a bungalow as "a house that is made all under one roof...with the top of it in the center." Her description corresponds well with the majority of Langston's bungalows that have a saddle roof and a gable-end entrance. Mrs. Robertson's identification of a unique roof on bungalows parallels the popular conception that over-hanging eaves characterized a bungalow. Queen Esther Williams Vic echoed Mildred Robertson's definition of a bungalow when she pointed to Jeff Franklin's house on the corner of Monument and Meridian Roads and said that the roof defined the house as a bungalow. Jeff Franklin's house manifests other

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5 Taped interview, Mildred Robertson, August 12, 1992.
6 Personal communication, Queen Esther Williams Vic, July 10, 1992.
emphatic and popular bungalow elements such as: squat and square columns, a front porch, double sash windows, and a bay window in the dining room.

However, not everyone defined a bungalow solely by the look of its roof, porch, or columns. When asked what a bungalow was, Jim Jones pointed to a four-square house and said the bungalow was a new house that was built after homesteads. In Mrs. Robertson's and Mrs. Vic's definition, the houses possess a formal quality defined by the roof line. The idea of a bungalow is embodied by its external appearance. In Mr. Jones' definition, the house represents a change in the totality of the architecture. Bungalows presented something new when compared to the design of homesteads. In these two descriptions, bungalows embody and define a significant change in the kind of houses built in Langston, but for different reasons.

A conversation with David Petty, Amanda Gross, and Margaret Norris further suggests the need for a broad definition of bungalows in Langston. In trying to figure out how four-square houses related to rectangular bungalows, I asked Mrs Gross. She told me that:

People build houses like they know to build them at that time. Just like as the years grow, they have changed things from time to time... From time to time when people got where they could do better, cause you see there wasn't anybody rich out here. Just like they doing clothes as they
could do better they changed patterns. But they let it have the same name, but it's a different pattern.\footnote{Taped interview, Amanda Gross, December 12, 1992.}

This description should make us question how we arrive at typologies based solely on characteristics of form. Mrs. Gross clearly says that even though people "changed patterns" or templates for houses, "...they let it have the same name."\footnote{Ibid.} The same name was bungalow, even though the design changed from foursquare to rectangular bungalows. People in Langston do not group houses solely according to floorplan; instead, they are linked by a historical occurrence of change within the building tradition. This grouping is similar to Juan Pablo Bonta's suggestion that divisions within architecture are better referred to as classes than types. As he states:

> The analysis of expressive systems can only be done in terms of classes. Buildings achieve meaning...only through their belonging to certain classes. The notion of class is broader than that of type; classes can be typological (functional or formal), or historical.\footnote{Juan Pablo Bonta, Architecture and Its Interpretation (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 128-129.}

Bonta's notion of class is appealing because of its flexibility. Buildings quite different in formal qualities can be assembled and understood as parts of one group of structures. So, old bungalows or foursquares and
new bungalows can be assembled together to reflect how people in Langston divide the houses. This inclusive aspect allows the grouping of extant houses to emphasize an historical occurrence of change within the architecture of Langston.

The change in name and form from homesteads to bungalows implies a few interpretative directions. Naming a dwelling a homestead signifies a claim upon a parcel of land and, in the case of Langston, a new beginning removed from white subjugation. A homestead was literally the first step towards a future goal, an expectation. By building a homestead, which was the legal definition of improvement and ownership of land, a family chose a new beginning. The realization of these expectations was extremely different for Langston's families and individuals within families, but for all the homestead was the first step.

On the other hand, bungalows were defined by an originality compared with homesteads. Bungalows are conceived of in juxtaposition or even opposition to homesteads. If homesteads signified newness because of their connection with ownership of new land and the beginnings of Langston, then bungalows were modern because they significantly differed from the form of the homesteads. People's recollections and the extant
architecture both serve to make this change from homesteads to bungalows seem revolutionary, when actually the change was gradual; people continued to live in homesteads even while bungalows were being constructed.

The bungalows were modern in Langston only in contrast to the older homesteads. Sometimes, as with Allen and Arvenia Collier, the change to a bungalow represented a difference between generations. Adam Collier had grown up four miles north of Langston in "a log cabin like everyone else's out that way."

Arvenia Trice had grown up three miles to the east in Pleasant Valley in a two-room frame homestead. When they married in 1940, Arvenia had already built their house. The house was six rooms with a front room, dining room, two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a kitchen (Figure 4.9). The house was constructed with salvaged lumber from a larger frame house that had once occupied the site on the main commercial street, Monument Street. By building a

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10 See Michael Ann Williams, *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1991) 90-92. She writes about a similar change in housing in Kentucky. She suggests continuities in use between older "folk" houses and the "non-folk" bungalows. The floorplans of the rural bungalows she describes are similar to Langston's houses. This similarity suggests the need for a broad study of rural bungalows across the south, especially concerned with usage and changes in usage.

11 Taped interview, Adam Collier, August 11, 1992.
bungalow Arvenia Collier was defining her break from her parents' generation and their frame homestead. She was defining herself in contrast to her parents' generation by erecting a house unlike theirs in plan, appearance, and location.

It would be too simple to understand bungalows as always signifying a break between generations. For instance, in Arvenia Collier's circumstance the bungalow did represent a major shift from a rural farm to the environment of Langston, from living in a homestead to living in a bungalow. When Thelma Cumby was nineteen in 1940, she hired Mr. Allen to build her a house. She chose the location and how many rooms (Figure 4.10). Mr. Allen built the four-room bungalow with Thelma Cumby's help diagonally across Turner Street from her parents' house, with two of her sisters located down the street. Ms. Cumby's bungalow differed significantly externally and internally from her parents' homestead, yet the proximity of the new house to the older house continued to link her to her family's circle. The connection established between Ms. Cumby in 1940 and her immediate families' houses continues to this day as she said, "Lot of old memories in the houses, I thought of moving."  

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12Personal communication, Thelma Cumby, August 14, 1992.
Cumby's bungalow sought continuity in the modern form of the bungalow while at the same time connecting her to her family.

In 1905 when Langstonians began choosing new house designs, their visions lay with progressive architecture, with change, and with positivism. For instance, the widely popular style of Colonial Revival architecture was not employed anywhere in Langston. Choosing not to erect buildings with Colonial Revival flourishes implies a strong decision by Langston residents. Perhaps the Colonial Revival style defined and communicated a romanticized past, while bungalows communicated ideas that looked more to the future than the past. A past that Langston's ancestors had experienced in slavery and not freedom. By choosing not to celebrate a glorified version of the past, and building bungalows the people of Langston were enacting another step towards freedom.

The architecture chosen for the President's house on the campus of Langston University in 1920 demonstrates this conscious choice. The large brick edifice sat at the end of a long row of oak trees. The trees graced either side of the original lane into the University from the road to Guthrie. Unlike the red stone gate at the entrance to the University that has a feeling of being
local in material, the house in its size seems almost foreign to the surrounding landscape. At any other university, the President's house might be expected to be a large classically inspired building complete with columns, pediments, and Palladian windows. But in Langston, such a building would have been extremely out of place, so the style chosen is a very modern, boxy Art Deco inspired building (Figure 4.11). Looking more like a new radio than an ancient Greek temple, the house embraces the present and looks towards the future. Lacking any symbols with connotations of the past, the house overtly rejected the oppression connected with those times and consciously spoke of the present and the future. In 1949 the University extensively remodeled the President's house with white stucco on the exterior. This change further separated the building from any allusions to a Colonial Revival or Classical architectural vocabulary. The White House, as the President's house is called, and the other bungalows of Langston are radical statements of progressivism, of hope, and of tangible progress.

Five larger houses emphasize the need for a broad conception of bungalows in Langston. Two of these four houses are the only two-story houses surviving. Materials

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\textsuperscript{13}National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Old President's House, Rose Lynett Wright, July 1982.
and size differentiate these five houses from other bungalows. Today people refer to these houses by the original owner's name and hesitate to group them together. However, Mr. Petty said, "Well, they could be included with bungalows, cause they kind of look like them but they are bigger." This comment suggests the underlying feeling towards these houses. They may be bungalows, but they are more prodigious than the majority of bungalows.

An interesting example is the 1929 Tay-Lo-Rest home (a pun on Take-a-little-rest and the owner's name, Professor Taylor). Located on the corner of Washington or Monument Street and Tolson Boulevard, this house is one of the largest, most imposing houses in Langston (Figure 4.12). Built with locally quarried stone, with a stone fireplace flanked by built-in bookcases (Figure 4.13), an elevated front porch, a stone garage, and a pediment over the front door (Figure 4.14), the house celebrated the status of the original builder and further defined Prof. Taylor's place within the community. While substantial, this house does not

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1Taped interview, David Petty, December 12, 1992.
15Named Tolson Boulevard in the 1970s to commemorate Helvin B. Tolson who lived on the street, taught at Langston University, and was poet laureate of Liberia.
16Even today the owner, Rev. David Hinds, is prominent in Langston. Rev. Hinds is the minister of the largest congregation in town, works at Tinker Air Force
completely separate itself from the community and the other houses around it. In fact, its floorplan (with entrance into the front room, followed by a dining room and kitchen with a parallel row of bedrooms all on the first floor) is nearly identical in arrangement to other bungalows (Figure 4.15), such as Jeff Franklin's (Figure 4.8), Arvenia Collier's, or Thelma Cumby's. The interior plan, thus bridges any disparities created by the size, material, and facade of the exterior.

Two houses built by Howard and Ada Wiggins Clement in 1927 further illustrate the relationship between larger and smaller bungalows. The Clements built a tenant house that was identical to other bungalows being erected in plan and materials (Figure 4.16). It is frame (29'3" x 38'3") on a cement-block pier and beam foundation with a large front room, three bedrooms, a bathroom, and a kitchen (Figure 4.17). The house the Clements built for their own family was unlike other bungalows with its five-foot high foundation, large covered front porch on brick supports, hipped roof, so that it does not have a gable-end entrance, dormer window, and built-in corner cupboard

Base near Oklahoma City, attended Langston University, and once held a position on the police force.

I am indebted to Mizura Clement Allen for providing access to and great historical detail about her family's bungalow.
next to a bay window (Figure 4.18). The floorplan was equally unique because of a first floor sitting room, and study at the rear of the house, and the second story with bedrooms (Figure 4.19).

In 1927 when the Clements hired a builder to construct these houses, they were prosperous. The year before they had struck oil. They moved out of their four-room frame homestead and into Langston, so that the four daughters could attend high school and Langston University.\(^\text{18}\)

The houses testify to the family's prominence within Langston. Ada and Howard Clement proclaimed and defined their place within the community by building a prodigious house and by not constructing their own dwelling, like their tenant house and other bungalows in Langston. The Clement house was an expression of the original dream of Langston come to fruition. However, not everyone enjoyed such good economic fortune. For instance, Jim and Viola Jones moved in with his parents' into their one-room log-house in 1952 upon their marriage. They added a bedroom and a kitchen lean-to and continued

\(^{18}\)Howard Clement continued to farm corn and run cattle on the land. In fact, Mizura Clement Allen, his eldest daughter, still leases the land to people who wish to run cattle on it. Mrs. Allen not only attended Langston University, but went onto Iowa University where she received a Master's in accounting in the 1920s, and eventually became a Professor at Langston University.
to share the house until 1964. At that time they purchased a seventy-year-old, four-square house, and refurbished it (Figure 4.20).

This excursion into a few bungalows has illustrated how people in Langston articulate their architectural history, how a popular form like a bungalow can be appropriated by individuals for unique expressions within their community, and African Americans had extremely varied architectural experiences.
Figure 4.1 Old bungalow owned by Wallace Owens, built c.1910 by Sam Carter.
Figure 4.2 New bungalow owned by King Neal, built in 1932.
Figure 4.3 New bungalow owned by Rev. Scott, built c.1920 for Prof. Jones.
Figure 4.4 Plan of old bungalow owned by Joe Jacobs, built c. 1910.
Jacobs House, 1902
Longton, OK
Figure 4.5 Plan of new bungalow owned by King Neal, built in 1932.
King Neal House, 1932
Wangston, OK.
Figure 4.6 New bungalow owned by Jeff Franklin, built in 1914 by McDaniels family.
Figure 4.7 New bungalow owned by Jake Watson, built 1969.
Figure 4.8 Plan of new bungalow owned by Jeff Franklin, built in 1914 by McDaniels family.
Jeff Franklin House, c. 1914
Langston, OK.
Figure 4.9 Arvenia and Adam Collier's new bungalow on Monument Street, Washington Street, constructed in 1940.
Figure 4.10 Thelma Cumby's new bungalow on Turner Street, built by Mr. Allen in 1941.
Figure 4.11 New bungalow on grounds of Langston University, built 1920 for the President of the University, extensively remodeled 1949.
Figure 4.12 Tay-lo-rest home owned by Rev. David Hinds, built in 1929.
Figure 4.13 Mantel and fireplace in front room of Tay-lo-rest home, built 1929.
Figure 4.14 Pediment of Tay-lo-rest home, built 1929.
Figure 4.15 Plan of Tay-lo-rest home, built 1929.
Figure 4.16 New bungalow built as a tenant house by Howard and Ada Clement in 1927.
Figure 4.17 Plan of tenant house built by Howard and Ada Clement in 1927.
Figure 4.18 New bungalow owned by Mizura Clement Allen, built by Ada and Howard Clement in 1927.
Figure 4.19 Plan of new bungalow owned by Mizura Clement Allen, built by Ada and Howard Clement in 1927.
Clement House, 1927
Langston, OK
Figure 4.20 Old bungalow owned by Viola and Jim Jones, built c.1910 in Coyle, Oklahoma and later moved to Langston, Oklahoma.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

This narrative focused on Langston's architecture. More importantly residents of Langston have told me their history of architecture and Langston. While this is their story of the houses they see and live in daily, I have focused the tale on what I have found intriguing. The complexity within this one African American town should make historians of architecture question what they are describing in their work. Are what scholars consider important the same things people consider important? Or are architectural historians creating concerns about houses that do not relate to the experience of living in the house?

I have asked many people many questions in an attempt to recover and understand how Langston's houses were enacted on a day-to-day basis. During one evening conversation with Mildred Robertson, I commented, "Mildred, you've got a great memory". She laughed and said, "Well when Mrs. Collier was around, I tried to think of some things to ask her, nobody much around to ask no
As Mrs. Robertson suggests, the most important way to begin to understand something is to ask questions. The answers may not be what one expected, but that should only make one continually check their assumptions and even question the relevance of their questions. The results of listening may be more than rewarding in details and new areas of interest.

Earlier in this paper Amanda Gross described the landscape around her hometown and now at the conclusion I return to her words. The physical embodiments of people's lives, dreams, and realities are expressed in Langston's houses. However, there are no monumental expressions of the town's history; no museums, no statues. There is one object, however, that literally pieces together a picture of land, people, and history. It is a quilt-top Amanda Gross made for a recent family reunion (Figure 1). This enormous quilt-top displays her family tree. Her parents, who originally settled the Langston area are the trunk; her brothers and sisters are the limbs; and the four babies that died at birth are the upper branches. Her parents' grandchildren are the leaves on the limbs and Mrs. Gross' own grandchildren are more leaves under the tree. Quilts, as we have seen, were used

\[\text{Taped interview, Mildred Robertson, August 12, 1992.}\]
in the log-houses as architectural partitions and are an expressive tradition within Langston. This quilt-top not only records Amanda Gross' family's history—it celebrates it. As with any house, this fabric has layers of significance embedded in it. For instance, when I asked Mrs. Gross about the vines that compose the border, she responded about how she conceived of them. She said:

I brought leaves from Arizona, and got leaves off the campus, and got leaves from out there in my yard... I don't know which leaves I chose. And my cousin I told her I wanted a vine all the way around it. When I was little Grandma and them used to go fishing on the creek down yonder where we were talking about at. And I would fish and then I would go and sit in with my feets in the water and then I'd bury my feets in the sand and I'd lay back and there was a elm tree and it had vines all up in it. Looked so pretty. And that's the way I wanted it. The vine all the way around the quilt, that's the reason the vines around it. So my cousin take a paper sack and draw the patterns of the vine. And Gracie Mae (her daughter) cut out these leaves for me...

Amanda Gross' description of the vines is a complex manifestation of memory, family, and the ability to express an artistic vision. The untangling of meanings in houses and objects is equally complex. However, this is not meant to suggest that analysis of houses should move to a purely biographical realm. But it should make us question, like the houses of Langston, some ideas that

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2 Taped interview, Amanda Gross, December 12, 1992. I am deeply indebted to Amanda Gross for talking extensively with me about Langston, the architecture, and her own life.
have become standard in vernacular architecture studies. For instance, how can we continue to use synchronic descriptions of houses that have diachronic existences, like the Jones log-house that was lived in well until the nineteen-seventies, but was built in 1892? Houses are not frozen at the moment they are built. Architecture is reinterpreted by every generation and by every person who interacts with the buildings. New people move into the structures, reinterpret the meaning of the houses, or significantly alter the space. Or, how can we continue to use typologies based on formal qualities when that paradigm does not describe the many ways houses are lived and thought by people? Hopefully, this excursion into a few of Langston's houses will provoke us into thinking of African American architecture as imbued with a multiplicity of uses and meanings, and not as a singular monolithic idiom.
5.1 Amanda Gross in the front room of her house with her 1988 quilt depicting her family tree. Photograph, December 1992.
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