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THE COVER

George Catlin's painting of Kennekuk, the Kickapoo prophet, made during the artist's travels among the Indian tribes in the 1830's. It is reproduced from *The North American Indians* (Philadelphia, 1913), in which letters and paintings by Catlin during the travels were published. *See* the article by George A. Schultz on Kennekuk beginning on page 38.

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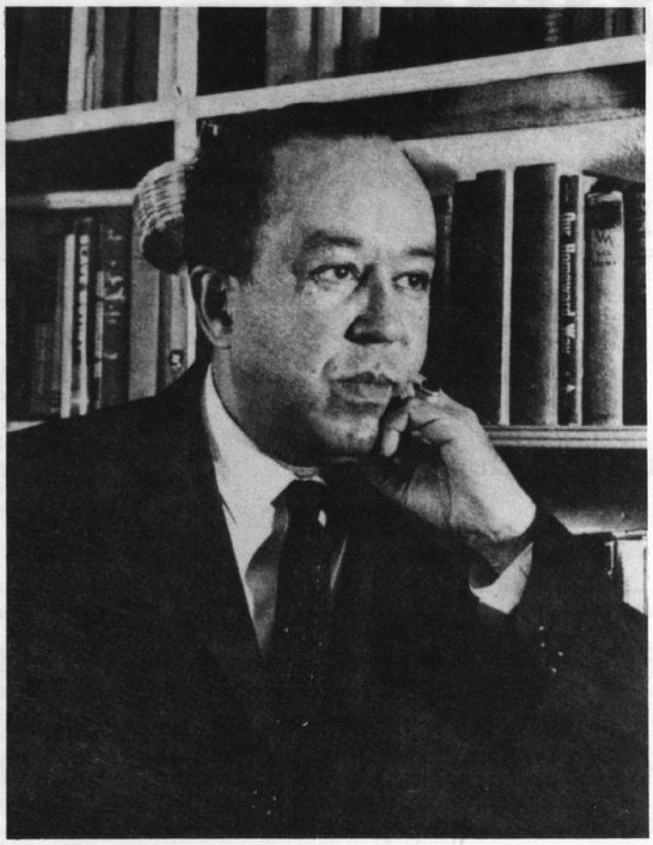


Langston Hughes (1902-1967), called by admirers the "Negro Poet Laureate," was devoted to a dream of racial equality. His poetry reflects much of his own life, and his experiences of racism, poverty, and loneliness were first encountered in Kansas where he spent most of his childhood. Photo reproduced from *A Bio-biography of Langston Hughes, 1902-1967* (Archon Books, 1967), *courtesy* the author, Donald C. Dickinson.

[In Progress] Kansas history: a journal of the central plains

LANGSTON HUGHES OF KANSAS

MARK SCOTT

"What happens to a dream deferred?" Langston Hughes once wrote:

> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?
> Or fester like a sore—
> and then run?
> Does it stink like rotten meat?
> Or crust and sugar over—
> like a syrupy sweet?
>
> Maybe it just sags
> like a heavy load.
>
> *Or does it explode?* [1]

LANGSTON HUGHES devoted most of his life and poetic genius to the realization of that dream deferred, the dream of racial equality. It was a dream that pervades most of his writings—his poetry, plays, short stories, novels, autobiographies, children's books, newspaper columns, Negro histories, edited anthologies, and other works. It was a dream that brought him literary fame. In the later years of his life, he was regarded by various American admirers as the "O. Henry of Harlem," the "Dean of Negro Writers in America," and the "Negro Poet Laureate." His fame abroad was no less remarkable; collections of his poems were translated into such languages as German, French, Japanese, Danish, Gujarati, Czechoslovakian, Spanish, Hindi, Italian, Polish, Swedish, and Portuguese. M. Bekker wrote in the introduction to a Russian edition of Hughes's poetry:

> The poetry of Langston Hughes is simple and beautiful, like life itself. On whatever subject the poet writes—love and tenderness, degradation and violence, joblessness and the lynch law, anger and the struggle for freedom,—his poems are always imbued with the people's sorrows and joys. For this reason his poems go unfailingly to the heart of the common man, be he black or white, American or Russian.[2]

As Hughes stated in 1965, "Many Americans seem to have the idea that art has very little to do with life, you know, and poetry has even less to do with life than other forms of art. Well, I don't think that's true at all." [3] Perhaps the reason his poetry is so moving is that it reflects so much of his own life. It poignantly relates his own personal experiences with racism, poverty, and loneliness. These were experiences which Hughes first encountered not in New York City, where he died in 1967, nor in Cleveland, where he attended high school, but in Kansas, where he spent most of his childhood.

Langston Hughes was born in 1902 in Joplin, Mo., yet from 1903 to 1915 lived primarily in Lawrence. As he told a Lawrence audience several years before his death, "I sort of claim to be a Kansan because my whole childhood was spent here in Lawrence and Topeka, and sometimes in Kansas City." [4] In fact, he said:

> The first place I remember is Lawrence, right here. And the specific street I remember is Alabama Street. And then we moved north, we moved to New York Street shortly thereafter. The first church I remember is the A. M. E. Church on the corner of Ninth, I guess it is, and New York. That is where I went to Sunday School, where I almost became converted, which I tell about in *The Big Sea*, my autobiography, my first autobiography.[5]

Langston Hughes was profoundly affected not only by his childhood memories of Lawrence, but also by the extremely significant influence of his Kansas family. His maternal grandfather, Charles H. Langston, first came to Kansas in 1862, settled in Lawrence in the 1880's, and died there in 1892. Hughes's mother, Carrie Mercer Langston, was born on a farm near Lakeview, Kan., and spent much of her youth in Lawrence. Until he was 12 years old, Langston Hughes lived in Lawrence with his grandmother, Mary Langston. Certainly, the Langstons were a most remarkable black family in American history. All of them ardently believed in the value of education. All

1. "Dream Deferred," in Langston Hughes, *The Panther and the Lash, Poems of Our Times* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1967, p. 14. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

2. Langston Hughes, *Izbrannye stikhi* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 14.

3. From "Life Makes Poetry," a taped recording of the poetry reading which Langston Hughes gave at the University of Kansas on April 28, 1965. The tape is on file in the Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

championed the dream of racial equality. And in their own way, all fought for freedom. This was a rich family tradition not lost on their best known descendant, Langston Hughes.

Yet to fully understand how the Langston heritage influenced Langston Hughes, one must go back to the beginning, as Hughes himself did in his first autobiography, *The Big Sea.* Langston's maternal great-grandfather was Ralph Quarles, the white owner of a large plantation in Louisa county, Virginia. On an unknown date, Quarles accepted a slave, Lucy Langston, as collateral for an unspecified loan. One of Lucy's sons wrote of her background:

> Her surname was of Indian origin, and borne by her mother, as she came out of a tribe of Indians of close relationships in blood to the famous Pocahontas. Of Indian extraction, she was possessed of slight proportion of negro blood; and yet, she and her mother, a full-blooded Indian woman, who was brought upon the plantation and remained there up to her death, were loved and honored by their fellow-slaves of every class.[6]

Since Quarles's creditor never paid the debt, Lucy became the planter's own slave, and sometime thereafter gave birth to his daughter, Maria. In 1806 Quarles emancipated both mother and child. Lucy subsequently bore him three sons: Gideon (1809), Charles (1817), and John (1829). Because of Virginia's antimiscegenation laws, Quarles's children were given their mother's surname. Nonetheless, Ralph Quarles treated Lucy Langston and his mulatto children with much consideration. As we already noted, he emancipated Lucy and their daughter in 1806. Furthermore, it was Quarles who gave the two oldest boys their early schooling. John recounted how his father, a man with "a love of learning and culture," provided brother Charles with a "thorough English education."[7] In view of Quarles's keen interest in his sons' intellectual development, it is not surprising that after his death they continued with their schooling.

In 1834 Quarles and Lucy Langston died and, as he requested, were buried next to each other on his Virginia plantation. In his last will and testament, Ralph Quarles recognized Gideon, Charles, and John Langston as his only heirs. The sons entrusted the sale of the plantation to the executors of their father's will, and left Virginia for the free state of Ohio. The Langston brothers first moved to Chillicothe, and then to Oberlin, Ohio, where Gideon and Charles enrolled at Oberlin College. Unfortunately, little is known of Gideon Langston's life after he left Virginia. John Mercer Langston, however, became one of the most prominent Negroes in America. He was the first black man to enter a theological school in the United States, as well as the first Negro to enter an American law school. John Mercer Langston founded the law school at Howard University in 1868, was appointed American minister to Haiti in 1877, was named president of the Virginia Normal Institute at Petersburg in 1885, and was elected a United States congressman from Virginia's Fourth congressional district in 1888. Appropriately, Congressman Langston served on the house committee on education.[8]

Yet of the three Langston brothers, we are primarily concerned with Charles, Langston Hughes's grandfather. Charles was born on August 31, 1817, in Fredericksburg, Va.[9] Growing up on his father's Louisa county plantation, he received not only a "thorough English education," but also learned farming. Remembering Charles as an intelligent boy with a rebellious temperament, John Mercer Langston recalled:

> He was not large nor apparently firm of body; but well endowed intellectually. His disposition and temper though ordinarily well controlled, were not naturally of the easy and even sort. In his constitution, he was impetuous and aggressive; and under discipline and opposition, he was always restive, yet, he yielded with reasonable docility and obedience to the training to which his father, interested in his education, sought to subject him.[10]

After the move to Oberlin in 1834, the 15-year-old Charles Langston enrolled in the preparatory department of Oberlin College, thereby becoming one of the first Negro men to attend that institution. Charles was a student in the preparatory department from 1834 to 1835 and again in 1841 until 1844.[11] According to his brother John, Charles "knew the value of education and how much depended in life upon

6. John Mercer Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol, or the First and Only Negro Representative in Congress From the Old Dominion* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1894), p. 13.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

8. For a detailed account of John Mercer Langston's life, *see* his above-cited autobiography.

9. A. T. Andreas and W. G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), v. 1, p. 350.

10. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation*, p. 21.

11. Information on Charles Langston's study at Oberlin College included in a letter dated June 9, 1977, to Mark Scott from Gertrude F. Jacob, volunteer in research, Oberlin College archives, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

sustaining and directing rather than opposing and crossing the natural inclination, the moral trend of a young person." [12]

What precisely Charles Langston did the entire time he lived in Ohio is not known. He taught school there for eight years.[13] Perhaps he also farmed. Census data suggest that he was married in Ohio, where his wife gave birth to a son, Desalines W. Langston, in 1857 or 1858.[14] By the time this son was born, Charles had become actively involved in operating the Oberlin station of the underground railway. Indeed, he figured prominently in the Oberlin-Wellington rescue of September 13, 1858. Along with Simeon Bushnell, he was found guilty of inciting an Oberlin mob to rescue fugitive slave John Price from a kidnapping attempt. At his trial, Charles Langston delivered an eloquent speech condemning the fugitive slave law, a speech which influenced the eventual reversal of his conviction.

After the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Charles went to Quincy, Ill., where he recruited Negro soldiers for two Massachusetts regiments (the 54th and 55th).[15] For whatever reason, perhaps age, Langston himself did not enlist. In 1862, he moved to Leavenworth, where he lived until 1868. During his first three years in Leavenworth, he was a schoolteacher. As one history of Kansas reported, "Mr. Langston taught the first colored public school in Kansas, and was Principal of the only colored normal school established in this State." [16] In his remaining two years in the town, he was a grocer.

Charles left Kansas in 1868, returned to Ohio, and on January 18, 1869, married Mary Patterson Leary in Elyria.[17] Mary Langston was Langston Hughes's grandmother, one of the most significant single influences on the poet's life. She was born in 1836 or 1837 in Fayetteville, N. C., where her father, James Patterson, was a stone mason.[18] Langston Hughes noted that before the Civil War Patterson, a free Negro, had encouraged his slave apprentices to buy their way out of slavery. "Once they had worked out their purchase," Hughes stated, "he could see that they reached the North, where there was no slavery." [19] Like her parents, Mary Patterson was also a free Negro. Langston explained:

> On my maternal grandmother's side [of the family], there was French and Indian blood. My grandmother looked like an Indian—with very long black hair. She said she could lay claim to Indian land, but that she never wanted the government (or anybody else) to give her anything. She said there had been a French trader who came down the St. Lawrence, then on foot to the Carolinas, and mated with her grandmother, who was a Cherokee—so all her people were free. During slavery, she [Mary] had free papers in North Carolina, and traveled about free, at will.[20]

In 1857 Mary Patterson enrolled in the preparatory department of Oberlin College. As Charles Langston had been one of the first Negro men to enter Oberlin, Mary was similarly one of the early black women to study there.[21] But her education was temporarily interrupted by her marriage on May 12, 1858, to Lewis Sheridan Leary, a free Negro also from Fayetteville.[22] About six months after the birth of their daughter Loise in the spring of 1859, Leary left Ohio and never returned; on October 16, 1859, Sheridan Leary and four other black men were killed in John Brown's assault on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Va. As Langston Hughes wrote of Leary, "He had been killed that first night in the raid—shot attacking, believing in John Brown. My grandmother said Sheridan Leary always did believe people should be free." [23]

Throughout his life, Langston Hughes was quite conscious of his family's personal involvement with John Brown and his cause. Not only did his grandmother's first husband die fighting with Brown, but also John Brown, Jr., asked John Mercer Langston to recruit men for the raid three days before the ill-fated attack.[24]

12. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation*, p. 89.
13. Andreas-Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, p. 350.
14. According to the census of Wakarusa township, Douglas county, Kansas, March 1, 1875, Desalines [*sic*] Langston was born in Ohio (*see* Schedule 1, p. 7). The Douglas county records of Desalines's marriage in 1885 indicate that he was born in 1858, "Marriage Record," v. 6, p. 15. He could not have been the son of Gideon Langston, who died in 1848. John Mercer Langston's son, Arthur Dessalines [*sic*], was born in August, 1855. A process of elimination therefore indicates that Desalines was Charles Langston's son.
15. Andreas-Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, p. 350.
16. *Ibid.* Andreas-Cutler provides all the information on Charles Langston's brief residence in Leavenworth.
17. *Ibid.*
18. The records of the Oberlin College archives indicate that Mary Langston was born in either 1841 or 1843. However, the Douglas county census of 1885 records that she was born in 1836; the Wakarusa township census of 1875 shows her year of birth as 1837 (*see* 1885 census, Ward 1, Schedule 1, p. 25, and 1875 census, Schedule 1, p. 7).
19. Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1940), p. 17. All passages from *The Big Sea* reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
21. Gertrude Jacob letter.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 12.
24. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation*, p. 191.

We might add that in the years preceding the raid at Harpers Ferry "Osawatomie" John had often visited Lawrence, the abolitionist stronghold of Kansas. Perhaps when he was a child in Lawrence, Hughes imagined those days when Brown walked the city streets exhorting citizens to take up arms against the Proslavery forces in the territory. In any case, Langston Hughes believed that black Americans should never forget John Brown. In "October 16," first published in 1931, he wrote:

Perhaps
you will remember
John Brown.

John Brown
who took his gun,
took twenty-one companions
white and black,
went to shoot your way to freedom
where two rivers meet
and the hills of the
North
and the hills of the
South
look slow at one another—
and died
for your sake.

Now that you are
many years free,
and the echo of the Civil War
has passed away,
and Brown himself
has long been tried at law,
hanged by the neck,
and buried in the ground—
since Harpers Ferry
is alive with ghosts today,
immortal raiders
come again to town.

Perhaps
you will recall
John Brown.[25]

Further evoking the image of John Brown, Hughes scolded black Americans in the poem "Shame on You":

If you're great enough
and clever enough
the government might honor you.
But the people will forget—
except on holidays.

A movie house in Harlem named after Lincoln,
Nothing at all named after John Brown.

Black people don't remember
any better than white.

If you're not alive and kicking,
Shame on you![26]

25. "October 16," in Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1968), p. 10. Poetry from this book reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

In November, 1860, a little more than a year after the raid at Harpers Ferry, the Haitian government invited Sheridan Leary's widow to come live in Haiti as an honored citizen. The Haitians further offered to pay her transportation to the island republic and provide living quarters there.[27] Mary Leary declined the invitation. Instead, she remained in Oberlin, where she resumed her education; in 1864-1865 and 1867-1868 she again studied in the preparatory department of Oberlin College.[28] Mary did not, however, graduate from Oberlin. In January, 1869, she married Charles Langston. The following year she, her husband, and his son Desalines joined the black migration movement to Kansas.

Charles Langston did not settle with his family in Leavenworth, where he had previously lived, but bought a farm not far from Lakeview, a small town located to the northwest of Lawrence. The Langston farm, covering about 122 acres, was situated near the Kansas river. It consisted of 26 acres of pasture and slightly more than 96 acres of farmland, on which Charles cultivated such crops as winter wheat, rye, corn, oats, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes. Describing Langston's farm in 1883, historian A. T. Andreas observed, "He has one of the finest apple orchards in the State, and plenty of small fruit on his farm."[29] But Charles could not devote himself entirely to agriculture; he became a prominent Kansas Republican, selected in 1874 as one of the state's electors for Ulysses S. Grant.[30] Langston Hughes remarked that in taking such an active role in politics, his grandfather was "looking for a bigger freedom than the Emancipation Proclamation had provided."[31] This political concern undoubtedly influenced "Charley" Langston's decision to move to Lawrence in the mid-1880's.

In 1888 he became a business partner of Richard Burns, who operated a grocery store at 820 Massachusetts street.[32] As a farmer/grocer,

26. "Shame on You," in Langston Hughes, *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1951), p. 50. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.

27. From the Oberlin College archives file on Mary Patterson Leary Langston.

28. Gertrude Jacob letter.

29. Andreas-Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, p. 350. The exact location of the Charles Langston farm is shown in the *Edwards Map of Douglas County, Kansas* (Quincy, Ill.: John P. Edwards, 1887). For a statistical description of the farm, *see* census of Wakarusa township, Schedule 2, p. 3.

30. Andreas-Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, p. 350.

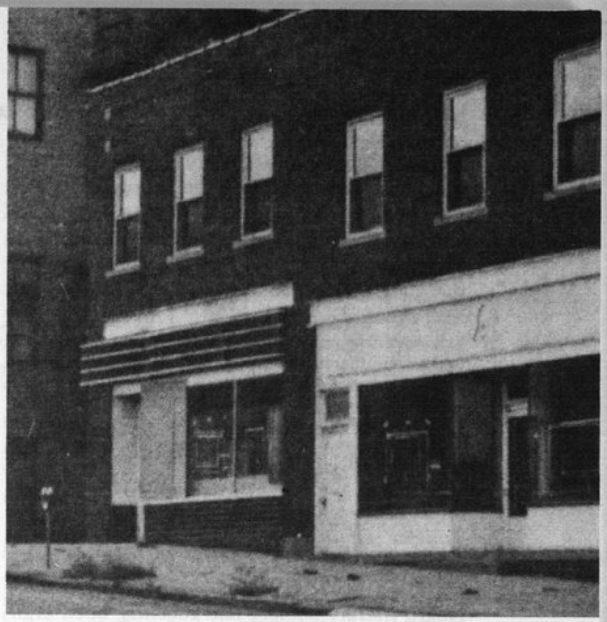
31. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 13.

32. "Death of Charley Langston," *The Weekly Record*, Lawrence, Kansas, November 25, 1892, p. 3.

Charles Langston nevertheless continued his interest in community affairs; he was elected president of Lawrence's Colored Benevolent Society, Grand Master of the Masonic fraternity (colored) of Kansas, and the "Counselor of the Knights of the Wise Men of the World." [33] For a short time, he also served as associate editor of *The Historic Times*, a Lawrence Negro newspaper.[34] The weekly reported national, state, and local news. Its city editor reported all the cultural activities in the black community, and carefully noted the Negro students attending the University of Kansas. In fact, *The Historic Times* repeatedly stressed the importance of education. Perhaps it was Associate Editor Charles Langston who in an October, 1891, issue admonished the town's Negro high school graduates:

> For God's sake grasp this golden opportunity. There is no white nor colored school that can compete with the many advantages which the State University offers. The only charge is your board and books. Let the High School graduates come.[35]

On November 24, 1892, Charles Langston died at the age of 75 at the family home on Alabama street. "He was widely known and liked," the Lawrence *Weekly Record* stated the following day, "and his wife and three children who survive him have the sympathy of many friends." [36] Mary Langston surely needed the continued sympathy of friends, for Charles had left her practically penniless. "He let his farm and his grocery store in Lawrence run along, and didn't much care about making money," Langston Hughes commented. "When he died, none of the family had any money. But he left some fine speeches behind him." [37] In addition to his wife, Charles was survived by two sons and a daughter. Not much is known of the older son, Desalines; he was working on the Langston farm in 1875, was married in Lawrence to one Mary Thompson on January 8, 1885, and by August, 1891, was living in Topeka.[38] Charles's second son, his first child by Mary, was Nathaniel Turner Langston.[39] Langston Hughes's "Uncle Nat" was born in 1870 on the Langston farm. He attended school in Lawrence, and was eventually employed in the town as a "printer." [40] By August, 1891, he was city editor of *The Historic Times*; sometime between September 23 and October 3, 1891, he replaced his father as associate editor. He married Nellie Gregg in Lawrence on February 20, 1893.[41] Four years later Nat Langston died of consumption and was buried in the family plot in Lawrence's Oak Hill Cemetery.[42]



Langston Hughes was raised primarily by his grandmother in Lawrence, but he lived for a time with his mother, Carrie Langston Hughes, in a small second-floor apartment in this building at 115 W. Fifth in Topeka. The apartment was in a predominantly white commercial district near the downtown office of the Negro attorney for whom Carrie worked as a stenographer.

Charles's third child was Carolina Mercer Langston, the mother of Langston Hughes. Carrie was born on her father's farm on January 18, 1873.[43] Like her brother Nat, she also attended school in Lawrence. As a young

33. *Ibid.*, and Andreas-Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, p. 350.

34. *The Historic Times* was published from July 11 to November 14, 1891.

35. "Young Men and Women," *The Historic Times*, October 10, 1891, p. 2.

36. "Death of Charley Langston," p. 3.

37. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 13. Unfortunately, the writer has not found copies of any of these speeches.

38. Census of Wakarusa township, Schedule 1, p. 7; "Marriage Record," p. 15; "Personal," *The Historic Times*, August 15, 1891, p. 3.

39. "Nat Turner" Langston, named after the leader of the 1831 slave revolt in Virginia. In a similar vein, Charles had named his other son after Jean Jacques Dessalines, the Haitian slave who in 1802 led armed resistance against the French attempt to reconquer Haiti.

40. Census of Lawrence, Douglas county, March 1, 1895, Ward 1, Schedule 1, p. 16.

41. "Marriage Record," Douglas county, v. 7, p. 403.

42. Records of Oak Hill Cemetery, Lawrence.

43. Date of birth recorded on Kansas University enrollment card (fall, 1894) for Carrie Mercer Langston, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

woman, Carrie became involved in a variety of black cultural activities; she was a prominent member of the Progressive Club, a Negro literary society. Reporting on a meeting of the Progressive Club held in November, 1891, at the Carrie Langston residence, *The Historic Times* noted:

An excellent program was rendered. Lowell's life and works were thoroughly discussed. Some very lively and spicy papers were read on different subjects. In short a general intellectual feast was had.[44]

Langston Hughes wrote in *The Big Sea* that his grandfather, Charles Langston, was the founder of the "Inter-State Literary Society." According to a November, 1916, issue of the Topeka *Daily Capital*, the Inter-State was founded in 1891. The September 26, 1891, edition of *The Historic Times* reported that a Negro literary society had recently been organized at Lawrence's Second Baptist church.[45] Though Charles Langston was not listed as a charter member of the organization, his daughter Carrie was (she was elected "Critic").[46] As a member of the Inter-State, Carrie Langston not only read papers to society meetings, but occasionally recited poems which she herself had written. Carrie also pursued her intellectual interests by entering the University of Kansas on September 17, 1894. She enrolled in one course, German III. The following year, during the spring term of 1895, she took an English course.[47] Carrie was apparently not a full-time student because she had to work; while enrolled in English at Kansas University, the petite young woman was employed at the courthouse as "Deputy District Clerk." [48]

Sometime after 1895, Carrie Langston left Lawrence and eventually got a job somewhere in Oklahoma. In the late 1890's, she married James Hughes there.[49] Like all the Langstons, James Nathaniel Hughes was a mulatto. Langston Hughes wrote of his father's parentage:

On my father's side [of the family], the white blood . . . came from a Jewish slave trader in Kentucky, Silas Cushenberry, of Clark County, who was his mother's father; and Sam Clay, a distiller of Scotch descent, living in Henry County, who was his father's father. So on my father's side both male great-grandparents were white, and Sam Clay was said to be a relative of the great statesman, Henry Clay, his contemporary.[50]

Langston Hughes therefore inherited his white blood not only from Virginia planter Ralph Quarles and the French trader on Mary Langston's side of the family, but he also traced it to Kentuckians Silas Cushenberry and Sam Clay. This is important to note, as the theme of miscegenation appears in some of Hughes's angriest lines of verse. He wrote in "Mulatto":

The moon over the turpentine woods.
The Southern night
full of stars,
great big yellow stars.
What's a body but a toy?
Juicy bodies
of nigger wenches
blue black
against black fences.
O, you little bastard boy,
What's a body but a toy?
The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air.
What's the body of your mother?
Silver moonlight everywhere.
What's the body of your mother?
Sharp pine scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,
a nigger joy,
a little yellow
bastard boy.

Naw, you ain't my brother.
Niggers ain't my brother.
Not ever.
Niggers ain't my brother.

The Southern night is full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
O, sweet as earth
Dusk dark bodies
Give sweet birth
To little yellow bastard boys.

Git on back there in the night,
You ain't white.

The bright stars scatter everywhere.
Pine wood scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,
A nigger joy.

I am your son, white man!

A little yellow
Bastard boy.[51]

44. "Society Notes," *The Historic Times*, November 7, 1891, p. 3.

45. "A Literary Society," *The Historic Times*, September 26, 1891, p. 3.

46. The Inter-State evolved into an association attracting member chapters from both Kansas and Missouri. In an article on the society's quarter centennial, the Topeka *Daily Capital* noted on November 19, 1916, "Any literary society, debating club or other organization of colored people rendering literary or musical programs, and of a permanent nature, is eligible for membership." Mamie Williams of Topeka, a former secretary of the Inter-State, told this writer in an interview of June 6, 1977, that members of the society frequently read papers and performed plays (especially Shakespeare). Unfortunately, we do not know when the Inter-State Literary Association was finally dissolved.

47. Kansas University enrollment card for Carrie Mercer Langston.

48. Census of Lawrence, Douglas county, March 1, 1895, Ward 1, Schedule 1, p. 16.

49. Hughes, "Life Makes Poetry."

50. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 11.

51. From "Mulatto," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 160. Italian

Some years before Langston Hughes was born, his father worked for a law firm in Wichita. After moving to Oklahoma, James Hughes tried to enter law school, yet because of his race was denied admission. Langston stated that his father consequently studied law "by correspondence courses from Chicago." After successfully completing that work, James applied to take the Oklahoma bar examination. Not surprisingly, the white examining board rejected the Negro's application.[52]

FOLLOWING their marriage, James Hughes and Carrie moved to Joplin, Mo. There, on February 1, 1902, she gave birth to a son, James Langston Hughes. Soon thereafter, for unknown reasons, James Hughes and his wife separated. She and Langston moved to Buffalo, Cleveland, and finally to her mother's home in Lawrence. Her husband left the United States altogether. According to Langston Hughes's biographer James Emanuel:

> The contempt of Langston's father for Negroes and poor people, his bitterness over prejudice that had denied him a chance to take the examination for the bar in Oklahoma, and his disdain for all who tolerated discrimination pushed this little, rapidly striding, mustachioed man away from his Joplin family to Cuba and Mexico.[53]

James Hughes eventually settled permanently in Mexico, where he married the German-born Berta Schultz. He practiced law in Mexico City, collected rents from tenement houses he owned there, and operated his large ranch located about 100 miles outside the Mexican capital. Langston wrote:

> My father had gone to Mexico when I was a baby, to escape the color line in Oklahoma, where he had been refused permission, because of race, to take the law examination for the bar. He practiced in Mexico City instead, and came back only once in thirty years to his native land. When my father wanted a vacation, he went to Europe instead. He hated Jim Crow, and thought I must be crazy to live in the United States.[54]

Although Carrie Hughes returned to Lawrence with her baby son in 1903, she remained in the city only a short time. Leaving him with her aging mother, she sought employment apparently in Kansas City, Mo. Langston remarked that Carrie "always traveled about a great deal, looking for a better job." [55] From time to time, she would visit her son in Lawrence, and he occasionally took the train to see her in Kansas City.[56] Nevertheless, Hughes was raised primarily by his grandmother, Mary Langston. "My grandmother raised me until I was twelve years old," he wrote. "Sometimes I was with my mother but not often." [57]

The poet's earliest memories were of his grandmother's house, the family home at 732 Alabama street. It was the house in which his mother had lived as a young woman and where his grandfather had died. Yet it was a house which he associated not with happiness, but with poverty and insecurity. Because Charles Langston had left his wife with little money when he died, she had subsequently mortgaged her home.[58] By the time Langston Hughes came to live with her, she was struggling to meet the mortgage payments. Mary Langston's financial troubles were compounded by her refusal to do menial work. Hughes remembered that the proud widow of Sheridan Leary and Charles Langston, a woman who "had lived in Oberlin and spoke perfect English, without a trace of dialect," would not accept the usual jobs offered to Negro women.[59] As Hughes recalled:

> Our mortgage never got paid off—for my grandmother was not like the other colored women of Lawrence. She didn't take in washing or go out to cook, for she had never worked for anyone. But she tried to make a living by renting rooms to college students from Kansas University; or by renting out half her house to a family; or sometimes she would move out entirely and go to live with a friend, while she rented the whole little house for ten or twelve dollars a month, to make a payment on the mortgage. But we were never quite sure the white mortgage man was not going to take the house. And sometimes, on that account, we would have very little to eat, saving to pay the interest.[60]

literary critic Stefania Piccinato believed this poem in particular reflected Langston's strained relations with his father. "One of [Hughes's] best poems," Piccinato wrote, "is based on the racial theme, the drama of the mulatto, which he experienced in the conflict with his father. . . . This theme inspired 'Mulatto,' as well as the drama of the same name and the libretto of the opera *The Barrier*." *Langston Hughes, Anch'io sono America*, ed. Stefania Piccinato (Milan: Accademia-Sansoni Editori, 1971), p. 39.

52. Information on James Hughes's legal employment and law school difficulties from Hughes, "Life Makes Poetry."

53. James A. Emanuel, *Langston Hughes* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 18.

54. Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander, an Autobiographical Journey* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1956), p. 294.

55. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 14.

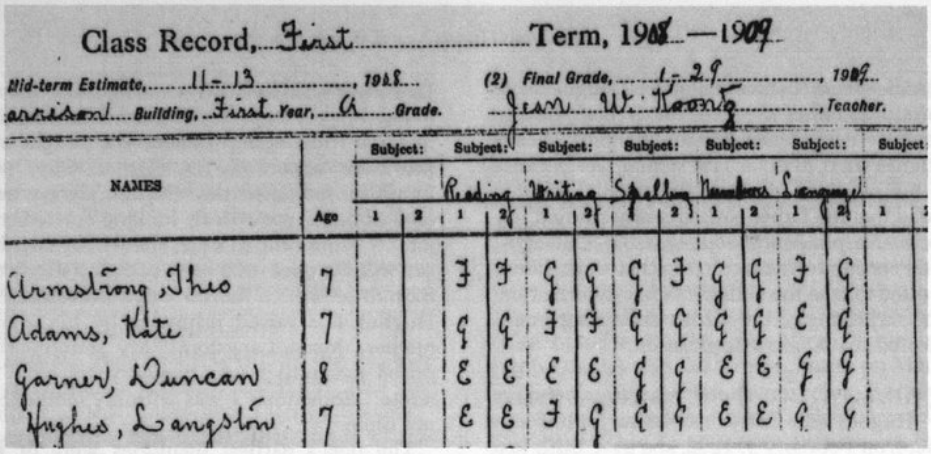
56. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

58. Mary Langston took out that mortgage on February 28, 1895. —"General Index Mortgages," No. 1, Douglas county, 1895.

59. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 303.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 16. We are not exactly sure of the name of that "white mortgage man" who so worried the young Langston Hughes. Yet perhaps Langston gives us a clue in his novel *Not Without Laughter*, which has its setting in the fictional Kansas town of "Stanton." According to the 1907 Lawrence *City Directory*, one Albert L. Stanton was then employed by the Watkins Land Mortgage Company.



Class Record, First Term, 1908—1909

Mid-term Estimate, 11-13, 1908 (2) Final Grade, 1-29, 1909

arrison Building, First Year, A Grade. Jean W. Koontz Teacher.

NAMES	Age	Subject: Reading 1	Reading 2	Subject: Writing 1	Writing 2	Subject: Spelling 1	Spelling 2	Subject: Numbers 1	Numbers 2	Subject: Language 1	Language 2	Subject 1	Subject 2
Armstrong, Theo	7			E	E	G	G	G	E	G	G	E	G		
Adams, Kate	7			G	G	E	E	G	G	G	G	E	G		
Garner, Duncan	8			E	E	E	E	G	G	E	E	G	G		
Hughes, Langston	7			E	E	E	G	G	G	E	E	G	G		

Langston Hughes's mother appealed to the Topeka Board of Education and got her son admitted to the all-white Harrison Street School instead of the black Washington School, which was farther away from her downtown apartment. There, in Jean Koontz's first grade class he got high marks in most of his subjects.

This image of the proud Mary Langston resolutely fighting against poverty appears in the Hughes dialect poem "Mother to Son":

Well, son, I'll tell you:
life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
and splinters,
and boards torn up,
and places with no carpet on the floor—
bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
and reachin' landin's,
and turnin' corners,
and sometimes goin' in the dark
where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
for I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
and life for me ain't been no crystal stair.[61]

Mary Langston inculcated this spirit of perseverance into her grandson when he was a little boy living with her in Lawrence. With Sheridan Leary's shawl across his shoulders, the child would often nestle in her lap as she sat in a rocking chair on her front porch. And Mary would tell Langston not only of her experiences with racial oppression, but also of the American Negro's fight for freedom. He remembered:

She sat, looking very much like an Indian, copper-colored with long black hair, just a little gray in places at seventy, sat in her rocker and read the Bible, or held me on her lap and told me long, beautiful stories about people who wanted to make the Negroes free. . . .[62]

In the poem "Aunt Sue's Stories," Langston Hughes recalled those days:

Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.
Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.
Summer nights on the front porch
Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom
and tells him stories.

Black slaves
working in the hot sun,
and black slaves
walking in the dewy night,
and black slaves
singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river
mingle themselves softly
in the dark shadows that cross and recross
Aunt Sue's stories.

And the dark-faced child, listening,
knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.
He knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories
out of any book at all,
but that they came
right out of her own life.

The dark-faced child is quiet
of a summer night
listening to Aunt Sue's stories.[63]

It was the indomitable Mary Langston who took her three-year-old grandson to see the famous former slave Booker T. Washington. Hughes wrote in his second autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander*, "As a child in Lawrence,

61. "Mother to Son," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 187.

62. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 17.

63. "Aunt Sue's Stories," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 6.

my grandmother had carried me to hear Booker T. Washington speak at the University of Kansas, so I had a vague memory of the great Negro educator and the packed auditorium listening to him." [64] The small Langston Hughes forgot that Washington appeared not at the university, but rather in Topeka's city auditorium, where on the night of January 17, 1905, he addressed an audience of about 3,000 people.[65] Washington had come to the Kansas capital to speak on behalf of Topeka's Industrial Institute, a black vocational school known as "The Western Tuskegee." Although Langston Hughes was too young to understand Washington's speech, he was nevertheless quite impressed. He remembered, "I was very proud that a man of my own color was the center of all this excitement." [66] Throughout his life, Langston Hughes remained an admirer of Booker T. Washington; in 1965, he wrote the introduction to an edition of Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery.*

When Langston was five or six years old, his parents attempted a reconciliation. For a brief time, Carrie, Langston, and Mary lived in Mexico City with James Hughes. We do not know exactly why the attempt to reconcile failed. At least one reason was Carrie Hughes's inability to adjust to the strangeness of her new Mexican surroundings. Her unhappiness with the setting was compounded by an earthquake which occurred in Mexico City soon after they arrived. As Langston told the story:

> . . . no sooner had my mother, my grandmother, and I got to Mexico City than there was a big earthquake, and people ran out from their houses into the Alameda, and the big National Opera House they were building sank down into the ground, and tarantulas came out of the walls—and my mother said she wanted to go back home at once to Kansas, where people spoke English or something she could understand and there were no earthquakes. So we went. And that was the last I saw of my father until I was seventeen.[67]

NOT LONG after they returned to Kansas, Langston went to live with his mother, who had found work in Topeka as a stenographer for Negro attorney James Guy. While living in Topeka, Carrie rented a small second-floor apartment at 115 West Fifth street, located near Guy's downtown office. Although there were a few black businesses in the area, she and her son lived in a predominantly white commercial district. To the west of the building in which they roomed was a pool hall, to the east the *National Watchman*, a Negro newspaper. The Hughes's apartment faced north onto O. S. Perkins's livery stable and the business establishment of E. G. Kinley, a carriage dealer. Their room was over the offices of Taylor and Cunningham, Negro realtors.[68] The only neighbors Langston seemed to remember were two men who rented apartments on the second floor of the same building. Joseph Marshall, a white architect, "was a very old man, and very kind." A. C. Harris, a Negro artist, "was young, and used to paint marvelous lions and tigers and jungle scenes." [69]

While living in Topeka with his mother, Langston Hughes had his earliest memorable encounter with racism. In the fall of 1908, Carrie took her six-year-old son to the Harrison Street School to enroll him in the first grade. When she met with school officials, however, they informed her, "We don't have any Negro children here," and suggested that she take Langston across the railroad tracks to the black school, Washington School.[70] She then went to Harrison principal Eli G. Foster, and pointed out that Washington was considerably farther from her downtown apartment than was Harrison.[71] Nevertheless, Foster rejected her appeal.[72] Yet this did not end the matter. According to Langston:

64. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, p. 60.

65. "3,000 White People Hear Booker Washington Speak," the Topeka *Daily Capital*, January 18, 1905, p. 1.

66. Milton Meltzer, *Langston Hughes, A Biography* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. 12.

67. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, pp. 15-16.

68. All addresses taken from *Radges' Topeka City Directory, 1909* (Topeka: Polk-Radges Directory Company, 1909).

69. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, pp. 14-15. Langston did not remember the names of both neighbors, which are listed in the 1909 Topeka *City Directory*.

70. Hughes, "Life Makes Poetry."

71. Moreover, the Washington School was apparently a physical shambles. The minutes of the Topeka Board of Education for December 2, 1907, recorded:

> "Mr. P. C. Thomas for a committee of Colored men representing the patrons of the Washington school district presented the following resolutions:
>
> 'Whereas, The Honorable Board of Education have built within the last four years the Lafayette school, the Quincy street school in North Topeka, and have made improvements on the Branner School, and nearly completed the Lane School in North Topeka, and
>
> 'Whereas, The Washington School is in no suitable condition for occupancy,
>
> 'Therefore, Be it Resolved that We, the patrons of the Washington School district in mass meeting assembled, do most earnestly petition your Honorable body to erect a modern six room brick building in the Washington School district.
>
> Respectfully Submitted
> J. S. CHILES ch
> P. C. THOMAS sec'y.' "

72. A brief account of this incident appears in Lela Barnes's article "And Right Then Books Began to Happen to Me," *The Bulletin of the Shawnee County Historical Society*, Topeka, November 12, 1970, pp. 88-89.

They wanted to send me to the colored school, blocks away. . . . But my mother, who was always ready to do battle for the rights of a free people, went directly to the school board, and finally got me into the Harrison Street School—where all the teachers were nice to me, except one who sometimes used to make remarks about my being colored.[73]

Langston Hughes was Harrison's only Negro pupil. And although his mother had successfully confronted the opposition of white adults to admitting her son into Harrison, Langston still had to face the racial hatred of young schoolmates. He remembered in 1965:

The first two or three days, on the way home from school, little white kids, kids my own age, six and seven years old, would throw stones at me—some of them. There were other little white kids, six and seven years old, who picked up stones and threw them back at their fellow classmates, and defended me, and saw that I got home safely. So, I learned very early in life that our race problem is not really of black against white, and white against black. It's a problem of people who are not very knowledgeable, or who have small minds, or small spirits. And I'm sure nobody in Topeka throws stones at Negroes anymore, but they still do at Selma, and at the University of Mississippi. They're grown up people too, not kids, who throw stones at the University of Alabama at a lone Negro girl who wants to go to school there.[74]

This racial animosity did not discourage Langston from attending school; during his first term at Harrison, he was absent only five and one-half days. Furthermore, the boy was an exceptional pupil. His teacher, Jean Koontz, gave him high marks in all his subjects—"Reading, Writing, Numbers, Spelling, and Language."[75] Outside of school work, however, he apparently spent most of his time with his mother. Hughes remembered in *The Big Sea* how he often brought firewood for the stove in their tiny apartment:

My mother had a small monkey-stove in our room for both heating and cooking. You could put only one pot on the stove at a time. She used to send me through the downtown alleys every day after the stores closed to pick up discarded boxes to burn in our stove. Sometimes we would make a great racket, cutting kindling with a hatchet in our room at night.[76]

When Langston lived in Topeka, Carrie Hughes frequently took him to such plays as *Faust, Under Two Flags, Buster Brown,* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* "We were very fond of plays and books," he recalled.[77] Indeed, it was Carrie who first introduced him to books. Langston wrote:

In Topeka, as a small child, my mother took me with her to the little vine-covered library on the grounds of the Capitol. There I first fell in love with librarians, and I have been in love with them ever since—those very nice women who help you find wonderful books! The silence inside the library, the big chairs, and long tables, and the fact that the library was always there and didn't seem to have a mortgage on it, or any sort of insecurity about it—all of that made me love it. And right then, even before I was six, books began to happen to me, so that after a while, there came a time when I believed in books more than in people—which, of course, was wrong.[78]

FINDING another job, possibly in Kansas City, Carrie Hughes withdrew her son from Harrison School on April 13, 1909, and sent him back to Lawrence to live with his elderly grandmother.[79] He remembered in *The Big Sea,* "When I was in the second grade, my grandmother took me to Lawrence to raise me. And I was unhappy . . . and very lonesome, living with my grandmother."[80] Apparently, the lonely Mary Langston became extremely possessive of her grandson. John Taylor, one of Hughes's black childhood friends, recalled that she kept Langston "kind of under her thumb."[81] Taylor further noted, "On the weekends his grandmother usually had some sort of work for him to do, and he didn't get to visit with the boys and girls as much as the rest of us did."[82] Mary Langston was not only possessive, but was also quite strict. Perhaps this was a reason why Langston at least once ran away from home. He recounted, "One of the worst whippings I ever got was running away from home at the age of six or seven. . . ." (He hid in the Kansas University morgue, then located on the Lawrence campus.)[83]

Seemingly few playmates visited Langston at his home on Alabama street. John Taylor

73. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* p. 14.
74. Hughes, "Life Makes Poetry."
75. "Examination Record Book," first term, 1907-1908, Topeka Public Schools, p. 836.
76. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* p. 15.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.,* p. 26.
79. Withdrawal date recorded in "Examination Record Book," second term, 1908-1909, Topeka Public Schools, p. 694.
80. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* p. 16.
81. From Paulette Sutton's "Langston in Lawrence," an undergraduate class paper which she presented on April 27, 1972, to Bill Tuttle, associate professor of American history at the University of Kansas. John Taylor's quotation, appearing on page 5 of the paper, came from Sutton's taped interview with him on March 8, 1972. Her interview is extremely valuable, as Taylor died in September, 1976.
82. Sutton, "Langston in Lawrence," p. 6.
83. Hughes, "Life Makes Poetry."

Although his mother had successfully confronted the opposition of white adults and got Langston admitted to Harrison School, the youngster had to face the racial hatred of some of his schoolmates who threw rocks at him. This view of Topeka's Harrison School was taken in 1886. Langston Hughes was a pupil there in 1908-1909.

recollected, "I don't think I had even been to his grandmother's place, where he lived." [84] Langston's poverty was one reason why he did not invite other children home. As he wrote in *The Big Sea:*

> I remember one summer a friend of my mother's in Kansas City sent her son to pass a few weeks with me at my grandmother's home in Lawrence. But the little boy only stayed a few days, then wrote his mother that he wanted to leave, because we had nothing but salt pork and wild dandelions to eat. The boy was right. But being only eight or nine years old, I cried when he showed me the letter he was writing his mother. And I never wanted my mother to invite any more little boys to stay with me at my grandmother's house.[85]

Hughes did not, of course, spend his entire childhood in Mary Langston's house. Shortly after he returned to Lawrence to live with his grandmother, Langston entered the second grade at Pinckney School. At Pinckney, which offered instruction only to children from the first to third grades, all Negro pupils were placed in a separate classroom. Their teacher, Mamie Dillard, was also black.[86] (After passing the third grade, Hughes was admitted to an integrated classroom at New York School.) We do not know precisely how Langston reacted to Pinckney's segregation policy. Yet in view of his mother's heroic fight against segregated schooling in Topeka, the boy's assignment to a separate classroom must have made his life more unhappy than it already was.

Outside of school and away from Mary Langston's house, Hughes apparently played some with both black and white children. His home on Alabama street was in an integrated neighborhood, where he remembered playing with one child in particular.[87] He wrote in *The Big Sea:*

> From the time when, as a small child in rompers in Lawrence, I had played with a little, golden-haired boy whose mother was colored and whose father, the old folks whispered, was white, and when, as this boy grew up, he went over into the white world altogether, I had been intrigued with the problem of those so-called "Negroes" of immediate white-and-black blood, whether they were light enough to pass for white or not.[88]

This little "golden-haired boy" is the subject of the Hughes poem "Cross":

> My old man's a white old man
> and my old mother's black.
> If ever I cursed my white old man
> I take my curses back.
>
> If ever I cursed my black old mother
> and wished she were in hell,
> I'm sorry for that evil wish
> and now I wish her well.
>
> My old man died in a fine big house.
> My ma died in a shack.
> I wonder where I'm gonna die,
> being neither white nor black? [89]

84. Sutton, "Langston in Lawrence," p. 7.
85. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* pp. 16-17.
86. Interview of February 11, 1978, with Elfriede Fischer Rowe, life-long Lawrence resident and author of *Wonderful Old Lawrence.*
87. The racial composition of the 700 block of Alabama street is indicated in *R. L. Polk & Co.'s Lawrence City Directory, 1915* (Lawrence: R. L. Polk & Co., 1915), p. 336.
88. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* pp. 262-263.
89. "Cross," in Hughes, *Selected Poems,* p. 158.

Along with other young people in Lawrence, Langston heard gospel singing at the Negro revivals held in the city's Pinckney Woods.[90] Quite likely, he also went to the weekly meetings of "Sunday's Forum." As John Taylor recalled:

> Our main recreation on Sunday was attending the Forum, and it was held at Warren Street Church (now Ninth Street Baptist Church). That was where we all went on Sunday afternoon for our recreation. It was quite educational. It versed itself upon all the current events. They would read papers, compositions, or recite poetry, or give musical readings, play the piano, or the violin, or whatever instrument you could play. It was run by the University of Kansas students with the local students here in Lawrence.[91]

Yet although he had several childhood friends, Langston apparently spent much of his time alone. "He didn't play too many games with other people," Luella Patterson remembered of her fellow schoolmate. "Unless he just took a liking to you, he wouldn't bother with you. . . . He didn't socialize a lot."[92] Hughes often went alone to the Kansas University morgue to watch students dissect cadavers.[93] He also recollected:

> On Saturdays I went to football games at the University of Kansas and heard the students yelling:
>
> WALK-CHALK!
> JAY HAWK! K. U.!
>
> And I felt bad if Nebraska or Missouri beat Kansas, as they usually did.[94]

Langston especially loved riding the city streetcar. As he reminisced before a Lawrence audience in 1965:

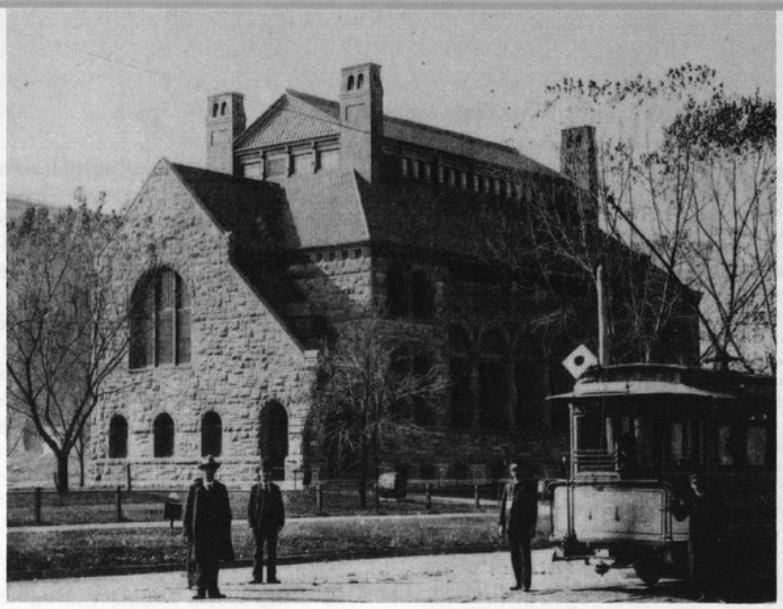
> I didn't think about being a writer ever. I thought I might like to be a doctor, you know, or else a streetcar conductor, is what I most wanted to be, because at that time you had a belt line, I think, that went all around town. . . . That was a sort of a major pleasure ride for me for a nickel in those days. You know, I thought I'd like to drive a streetcar or be a conductor on a streetcar the rest of my life.[95]

Not only did that streetcar go "all around town," but it also went out to Woodland Park, an amusement park situated on the eastern edge of Lawrence. Hughes never mentioned going there. Yet it was apparently at Woodland Park that a racial incident occurred which he never forgot. We have only hints of what really happened. The clues appear primarily in Langston's novel *Not Without Laughter* which, he admitted, "uses Lawrence as its background."[96]

The setting of the novel is the fictional Kansas town of "Stanton." In the chapter entitled "Children's Day," Langston described the summer opening of Stanton's amusement park, "the first of its kind in the city, with a merry-go-round, a shoot-the-shoots, a Ferris wheel, and dance hall, and a bandstand for weekend concerts."[97] In order to promote the opening of the park, the *Daily Leader*, Stanton's newspaper, announced that a "Free Children's Day Party" would be held at the park in late July; any child who collected the coupons appearing in daily issues of the *Leader* would be able to get into the amusement park free of charge, get free popcorn, lemonade, and "one ride on each of the amusement attractions—the merry-go-round, the shoot-the-shoots, and the Ferris wheel."[98] For days on end, the children of Stanton excitedly clipped the newspaper coupons. Two Negro children, Sandy Rogers and his playmate Willie-Mae Johnson, especially looked forward to the event. The day of the party finally arrived, Sandy and Willie-Mae took their coupons with them to the park, and immediately decided to ride the Ferris wheel. Hughes wrote:

> "I'm gonna ride on that first," said Sandy.
>
> There were crowds of children under the bright red and white wooden shelter at the park entrance. They were lining up at the gate—laughing, merry, clean little white children, pushing and yelling and giggling amiably. Sandy let Willie-Mae go first and he got in behind her. The band was playing gaily inside. . . . They were almost to the entrance now. . . . There were just two boys in front of them. . . . Willie-Mae held out her black little hand clutching the coupons. They moved forward. The man looked down.
>
> "Sorry," he said. "This party's for white kids."
>
> Willie-Mae did not understand. She stood holding out the coupons, waiting for the tall white man to take them.
>
> "Stand back, you two," he said, looking at Sandy as well. "I told you little darkies this wasn't your party. . . . Come on—next little girl." And the line of white children pushed past Willie-Mae and Sandy, going into the park. Stunned, the two dark ones drew aside. Then they noticed a group of a dozen or more other colored youngsters standing apart in the sun, just without the bright

90. Emanuel, *Langston Hughes*, p. 97.
91. Sutton, "Langston in Lawrence," p. 14.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 4. From Paulette Sutton's taped interview of March 9, 1972, with Luella Patterson, one of Hughes's Negro schoolmates.
93. Hughes, "Life Makes Poetry."
94. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 22.
95. Hughes, "Life Makes Poetry."
96. Harry Elliott, "Poet Hughes Says He Dates Back Further Than Beatniks," Lawrence *Daily Journal-World*, October 7, 1958, p. 2.
97. Langston Hughes, *Not Without Laughter* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963), p. 207.
98. *Ibid.*



When Langston lived in Topeka, his mother took him to plays and to the public library on the capitol grounds. Later, he recalled that it was there he fell in love with librarians and "books began to happen" for him, "so that after a while, there came a time when I believed in books more than in people—which, of course, was wrong." This photo of the library was made in 1889.

entrance pavilion, and among them was Sadie Butler, Sandy's class-mate. Three or four of the colored children were crying, but most of them looked sullen and angry, and some of them had turned to go home.[99]

On August 19, 1910, the Lawrence *Daily Journal* held its first "Children's Day Party" at Woodland Park.[100] The event celebrated not the opening of the park, but rather the birthday of the newspaper's editor, J. Leeford Brady.[101] No coupons were printed in the *Daily Journal.* Instead, the paper promised "all children in the city" that it would pay their admission into the park, treat them to a vaudeville show and band concert, and provide free refreshments.[102] "All children" did not, however, include Negro children. The *Daily Journal* stated two days before the party:

> The Journal has been asked if the colored children will be in attendance. The Journal knows the colored children have no desire to attend a social event of this kind and that they will not want to go. This is purely a social affair and of course everyone in town knows what that means.[103]

Perhaps the young Langston Hughes, unaware of the newspaper's discrimination policy, mistakenly went to a children's day party at Woodland Park. Certainly, newspaper notices of the event seemingly encouraged all children to attend. The Lawrence *Daily Journal-World* announced to its readers on June 7, 1911:

> CHILDREN'S FREE PICNIC
> TOMORROW
> AT WOODLAND PARK
>
> All Children 14 Years Old and under will be carried to and from the Park FREE—at any time during the day. FREE ENTERTAINMENT including Refreshments will be provided and the Children will be looked after by Responsible Attendant. Simply take the car to the Park and receive Ticket at the Gate.[104]

There were a variety of attractions at Woodland Park, including the "Daisy Dozer, Dancing, Box Ball, and a Shooting Gallery." [105] And there was a merry-go-round. Perhaps Langston Hughes watched as its white attendant told some black child that Negroes were not allowed to ride. If so, then maybe this was the inspiration for the Hughes poem "Merry-Go-Round":

99. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
100. "Great Time," Lawrence *Daily Journal,* August 20, 1910, p. 1.
101. "Journal Party," *ibid.*, August 11, 1910, p. 1.
102. "Our Party," *ibid.*, August 18, 1910, p. 1.
103. "About the Party," *ibid.*, August 17, 1910, p. 1.
104. Lawrence *Daily Journal-World,* June 7, 1911, p. 8.
105. *Ibid.*, May 29, 1913, p. 6.

Colored child at carnival:

Where is the Jim Crow section
On this merry-go-round,
Mister, cause I want to ride?
Down South where I come from
White and colored
Can't sit side by side.
Down South on the train
There's a Jim Crow car.
On the bus we're put in the back—
But there ain't no back
To a merry-go-round!
Where's the horse
For a kid that's black? [106]

THE DISCRIMINATION which denied Negro children admission to a children day's party was just one manifestation of the widespread racial segregation existing in Lawrence when Langston Hughes lived there. We noted, for instance, that after the seven-year-old Hughes returned to Lawrence in 1909, he was placed in a segregated classroom at Pinckney School. He did play with both black and white children, although Robert B. Jones, Jr., a black Lawrence resident, remembered that at that time many of the town's white adults objected to other forms of racial integration.[107] For example, white churches excluded Negroes from membership. White hotels refused Negro customers; the Savoy, a black hotel at 846 Vermont, was owned and operated by Negroes for Negroes.[108]

More obvious were the discrimination policies which so characterized the town's restaurants and cafes. Most of these were segregated like the hotels; white people ate at white restaurants, while black people ate at such Negro restaurants as those of Curtis Stone, Henry Scott, and Mrs. L. T. Woody. Several white eating places did accept black customers. The Santa Fe Lunch Room at 411 East Seventh street served whites at the west counter, blacks at the east counter, and the Weyermuller Cafe at 720 Massachusetts served Negroes at the back end of the counter.[109] By and large, though, the white restaurants on Massachusetts, Lawrence's main street, would not serve Negroes at all. One black resident remembered that at the time Langston Hughes was living in Lawrence the white eating places on Massachusetts refused Negroes "even a cold drink." [110] Hughes was no doubt deeply angered by the racial prejudice which excluded him from white classrooms, white cafes, and white entertainment, whether it be at Woodland Park or at what would later become exclusively white theaters. It may have been this kind of racial discrimination that made Langston recall the words of that blues verse which he had first heard sung in Lawrence:

I got de weary blues
And I can't be satisfied.
Got de weary blues
And can't be satisfied.
I ain't happy no mo'
And I wish that I had died.[111]

In many ways, Langston Hughes was extremely lonely while living in Lawrence. When he was about six years old, he had been separated from his father in Mexico. Not long thereafter, he was separated from his mother, who sent him to Lawrence to live with his impoverished grandmother. At Pinckney School, he had been separated from white children. And in the city's public accommodations, he was separated from white adults. Reflecting on those years in Lawrence, Langston wrote, "Then it was that books began to happen to me, and I began to believe in nothing but books and the wonderful world in books—where if people suffered, they suffered in beautiful language, not in monosyllables, as we did in Kansas." [112] The writers Langston particularly liked as a child included Edna Ferber, Harold Bell Wright, and Zane Grey. Although he enjoyed Longfellow, he was especially fond of the Negro dialect poetry of the famous American Negro poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Hughes biographer Milton Meltzer also noted that the boy's grandmother, Mary Langston, "shared with him a magazine called *The Crisis*." [113] Perhaps it was Mary who first introduced Hughes to the political works of W. E. B. DuBois. Like her husbands Sheridan Leary and Charles Langston, she was greatly interested in political issues concerning black people. In 1905, we observed, Mary took Langston to Topeka to hear Booker T. Wash-

106. "Merry-Go-Round," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 194.
107. Interview of February 23, 1978, with Robert B. Jones, Jr.
108. *Ibid.*
109. *Ibid.*
110. *Ibid.*
111. From "The Weary Blues," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 33.
112. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 16.
113. Meltzer, *Langston Hughes*, p. 13.

ington speak. Moreover, in August, 1910, they went to Osawatomie for the dedication of the John Brown Memorial Park. There, as Langston recalled, "she was honored by President Roosevelt—Teddy—and sat on the platform with him while he made a speech; for she was then the last surviving widow of John Brown's raid." [114]

Mary Langston gave no speech. Yet many who listened to the President's address no doubt saw her as a living symbol of that struggle which years earlier had emancipated American slaves. While his grandmother sat mutely on the Presidential platform, Langston may well have imagined her telling all the black children in the audience:

> All you dark children in the world out there,
> remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.
> Remember my years, heavy with sorrow—
> and make of those years a torch for tomorrow.
> Make of my past a road to the light
> out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.
> Lift high my banner out of the dust.
> Stand like free men supporting my trust.
> Believe in the right, let none push you back.
> Remember the whip and the slaver's track.
> Remember how the strong in struggle and strife
> still bar you the way, and deny you life—
> but march ever forward, breaking down bars.
> Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.
> Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
> impel you forever up the great stairs—
> for I will be with you till no white brother
> dares keep down the children of the Negro mother.[115]

Meltzer remarked that when Hughes was living with his grandmother, the book he treasured most was DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. Curiously, Langston did not mention this fact in either of his autobiographies. Yet Meltzer wrote that Mary Langston frequently read to her grandson the first lines from chapter 2 of that book: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colorline,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." Meltzer further stated, "Again and again Mary Langston read those words. . . ." [116] And then—to the boy who was separated from both parents, who was living in bitter poverty, who feared that the "white mortgage man" might take away his only home, who at least once ran away from his strict grandmother, and who was regarded by white school systems and society alike as a social liability—then Mary Langston would ask him, "How does it feel to be a problem?" [117] Years later, Hughes would reply:

> I am the American heartbreak—
> Rock on which Freedom
> Stumps its toe—
> The great mistake
> That Jamestown
> Made long ago.[118]

IN 1914 the elderly Mary Langston died, and Hughes went to stay with one of her friends, Mary Reed.[119] "Auntie" Reed lived with her husband, James, at 731 New York street. The Negro couple's house was near the Santa Fe railroad station, not far from the Kansas river. Langston was impressed that the Reeds "owned their own home without a mortgage on it." [120] They kept both chickens and cows. "Auntie Reed let me set the hens," Hughes recalled, "and Uncle Reed let me drive the cows to pasture." [121] Mary Reed earned money by selling most of their eggs and milk to people living in her predominantly white neighborhood.[122] Her husband, employed by the Kennedy Plumbing Company, "dug ditches and laid sewer pipes." [123] Robert B. Jones, Jr., remembered "Mama" Reed as a small woman, weighing "but ninety pounds." [124] She was an active member of the St. Luke A. M. E. church, where she served for many years as superintendent of the Sunday school. Indeed, Jones recollected, Mama Reed took particular interest in the welfare of children.[125] Yet in spite of her own involvement in the church, she could not persuade her own husband to attend services. "Uncle Reed was a sinner and never went to church as long as he lived, nor cared anything about it," Hughes wrote.[126] Nevertheless, Langston remembered both Auntie and Uncle Reed "were very good and kind—the

114. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 17.
115. From "The Negro Mother," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 288.
116. Meltzer, *Langston Hughes*, p. 16.
117. *Ibid.*
118. "American Heartbreak," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 9.
119. It is perhaps significant to note that in *The Big Sea* Hughes wrote nothing of his reaction to his grandmother's death.
120. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 21.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
122. The racial composition of the 700 block of New York street is indicated in the 1915 Lawrence *City Directory*, p. 364.
123. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 18.
124. Interview with Robert B. Jones, Jr.
125. *Ibid.*
126. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 18.

As a child Langston Hughes lived in Lawrence about 11 years with his impoverished grandmother, Mary Langston. They were mostly unhappy years marked with poverty, loneliness, and racial discrimination. But there were some happy memories. He once recalled how he loved to ride the Lawrence streetcar "a major pleasure ride . . . for a nickel in those days," and he thought for a time he would like to be a streetcar conductor when he grew up. This view of Massachusetts street in Lawrence is reproduced from *Lawrence, Today and Yesterday* (Lawrence, *Daily Journal-World,* 1913).

one who went to church and the one who didn't." He added, "For me, there have never been any better people in the world. I loved them very much." [127]

It was while living with the Reeds that Langston entered the seventh grade at Central School.[128] There, in Ida Lyons's English class, Hughes was involved in a bitter racial incident which he mentioned only briefly in later years. One day, Miss Lyons decided to move all the Negro children in her class to a separate row. Langston vehemently protested her decision. She summoned Principal Charles Merwin to discipline Hughes, who then got into a fist fight with the man. As John Taylor recounted the story:

> We got in a little jam at school in the seventh grade. Our teacher of English, she moved all the colored boys and girls in one row—not alphabetically, but just moved us all over in one row of seats. My seat was right behind Langston and we both felt it very keenly, about what was being done. So he printed an awful lot of cards, "Jim Crow Row." He passed them out and we put 'em on our desks. Never said anything to her, just put 'em on our desks, kind of like a little calendar. She walked down the line, and she looked, and she looked, and she looked. She didn't know who did it.
>
> He gave me a handful of 'em and I threw 'em out the window so that they would blow all over the schoolyard advertising what was being done, and let people know what we were undergoing. She said to him . . ., "Well, it may be true, but I wouldn't advertise it." He said, "I'll advertise it all I please. I *know* it's true."
>
> It caused quite a bit of commotion. She sent for the principal. And course, they pointed Langston out. The principal came up and they really got into a fight. Just a fist *fight,* right there in the classroom. We were sent home to our parents.[129]

Ida Lyons recalled that Hughes went out onto the school playground yelling, "Miss Lyons's got a Jim Crow Row." She remarked, "Of course, that stirred all the nigger pupils up and they went home and told their mothers about it." [130] Yet as a result of Langston's adamant protest, the "Jim Crow Row" was soon abolished and the black children were allowed to return to their original seats. Reflecting on the episode, John Taylor stated:

> One thing Langston Hughes fought. He fought segregation, and he could really get rough. But he was quiet, very quiet, and very unassuming. He always had a pleasant smile. He could resent things and then still smile over it. I couldn't keep it in, but he did. He did his job, but he did it

127. *Ibid.*

128. Then located at 905 Kentucky street.

129. Sutton, "Langston in Lawrence," p. 9. This was not the first time Langston had been disciplined by a Lawrence school official. Mrs. Alice McClanahan remembered that when she and Hughes were in the same fourth grade class at New York School, the superintendent of schools came to their class one day to give a short talk on the proper use of the comma. In order to stress his lesson, the man exaggerated the intonation of different words preceding commas. To his surprise, most of the children broke into laughter, but Hughes apparently laughed louder than the others. The angered superintendent consequently grabbed Langston and removed him from the classroom. We do not know what, if any, punishment the boy received.—Interview of March 31, 1978, with Alice McClanahan.

130. *Ibid.* From Paulette Sutton's taped interview of March 10, 1972, with Ida Lyons, Langston Hughes's seventh-grade English teacher.

in a non-violent way, but very stern. He wouldn't budge a inch until he got what he wanted.[131]

But a much more important event took place in Ida Lyons's English class than her attempt to place Langston Hughes in a segregated row. It was in her classroom that Hughes apparently first read his own poetry. This extraordinary fact contradicts his steadfast claim that he first wrote poetry after he moved from Lawrence to Lincoln, Ill. Milton Meltzer wrote:

To hear him tell it, it was not his decision but his classmates' that started Langston Hughes writing poems. He was about to graduate from grammar school in Lincoln, Illinois. The students had elected all their officers except the class poet. It stumped them because none of them had ever written a poem. One thing they had learned, however: a good poem has rhythm. And like most white Americans, they believed all Negroes have rhythm, too. So when someone yelled out his name, the vote went unanimously to Langston.[132]

Describing his election as class poet, Hughes himself affirmed, "It had never occurred to me to be a poet before, or indeed a writer of any kind."[133] Nevertheless, some of Langston's black Lawrence schoolmates well remembered that he wrote poetry. Luella Patterson recalled:

Sometimes at recess we'd ask him to play, but he wouldn't. And then we'd go around again to where he was and he'd say, "Here," and he'd give us this piece of paper. I don't know, we were in school and didn't think much about it, but we'd say, "Oh, Langston's writin' another poem." And we'd say, "Well, just let him write 'em. Someday, maybe we'll be proud of him." He would smile, you know, boyishly and shy. "Someday he might be good for something after all." He would look at us—and smile—and he wouldn't make any comment.[134]

John Taylor similarly recollected:

Ever idle moment he had, he would write poetry. That was his hobby. Instead of gettin' out and playing football, baseball, and all the other kinds of balls the rest of us played, he chose to isolate himself and work on his poems. And then he would bring his poems to school. And he would read 'em to the English class. That's where he first started out as being a poet.[135]

Why did Langston Hughes never admit to writing his early poetry in Lawrence? Perhaps he thought his first poems lacked merit. Perhaps he wanted to forget the apparently unenthusiastic response of some schoolmates to those poems. And then maybe he wanted to give no credit for his literary fame to Ida Lyons, the woman who had placed him in the segregated row. Although John Taylor clearly remembered Hughes reading original poetry in Miss Lyons's class, she had no recollection of it. In fact, she stated:

The black childhood friends of Langston Hughes remembered he always had a pleasant smile. Even when he resented segregation and fought it, he could smile over it. Photo copied from *Topeka Public Library (Shawnee County Historical Society Bulletin 47)*.

I don't remember that Langston had any talent. I don't remember anything he wrote. I don't remember any poetry. I didn't find anything particularly outstanding about his work at all. He didn't show it in class. But then I taught grammar, not story-writing or anything like that.[136]

Even though Ida Lyons did not recall that "Langston had any talent," schoolmates remembered him as an exceptional student. Luella Patterson noted that Hughes was "an 'A' student."[137] John Taylor added:

131. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
132. Meltzer, *Langston Hughes*, p. 1.
133. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 24.
134. Sutton, "Langston in Lawrence," p. 23.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
136. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
137. *Ibid.* The Lawrence Board of Education has no records on Langston Hughes, although it does have them on other black students attending Lawrence schools at the time Hughes lived in the town. There may be several reasons why there is no information on him. According to the Board of Education, school records were not required by law when Langston was a student in Lawrence. Consequently, they were irregularly kept. Some records were lost. And it is possible that when Langston moved from Lawrence in 1915, his records were forwarded to his new school in Lincoln, Ill. (The Lawrence Board did not retain copies of such transcripts.)

He was a very hard-working boy, and he was tops in the class. He was a brilliant boy when it come to school-learning. He very seldom had to do much studying on the outside to come up to his grades in the school. He was very studious and very smart.[138]

Although he was frequently alone, Langston was still apparently well-liked by fellow classmates at Central School. Luella described him as a "quiet, calm and collected person, and very courteous." [139] According to John:

He was quite friendly and he always carried a smile. I don't think I *ever* saw him frown, except that one incident with the junior high school principal. Other than that, he had smiles and just everybody loved him; in the school, everybody loved him. He had a wonderful personality.[140]

It was this Negro boy who "always carried a smile" who would later write in "Minstrel Man":

Because my mouth
is wide with laughter
and my throat
is deep with song,
you do not think
I suffer after
I have held my
pain so long?

Because my mouth
is wide with laughter,
you do not hear
my inner cry?
Because my feet
are gay with dancing,
you do not know
I die? [141]

In addition to his school work at Central, Langston had a number of odd jobs. John Taylor stated that because Hughes's mother was the boy's only means of support, Langston needed "to take on some job to help himself out." [142] Hughes wrote in *The Big Sea* that for a while he collected maple seeds and sold them to "the seed store," possibly the Barteldes Seed Company on Massachusetts street. He sold the *Saturday Evening Post* and for a short time delivered the *Appeal to Reason,* the noted socialist newspaper published in Girard. As Hughes recalled:

For a few weeks I . . . sold the *Appeal to Reason* for an old gentleman with a white beard, who said his paper was trying to make a better world. But the editor of the local daily [J. Leeford Brady] told me to stop selling the *Appeal to Reason,* because it was a radical sheet and would get colored folks in trouble. Besides, he said I couldn't carry his papers and that one, too. So I gave up the *Appeal to Reason.*[143]

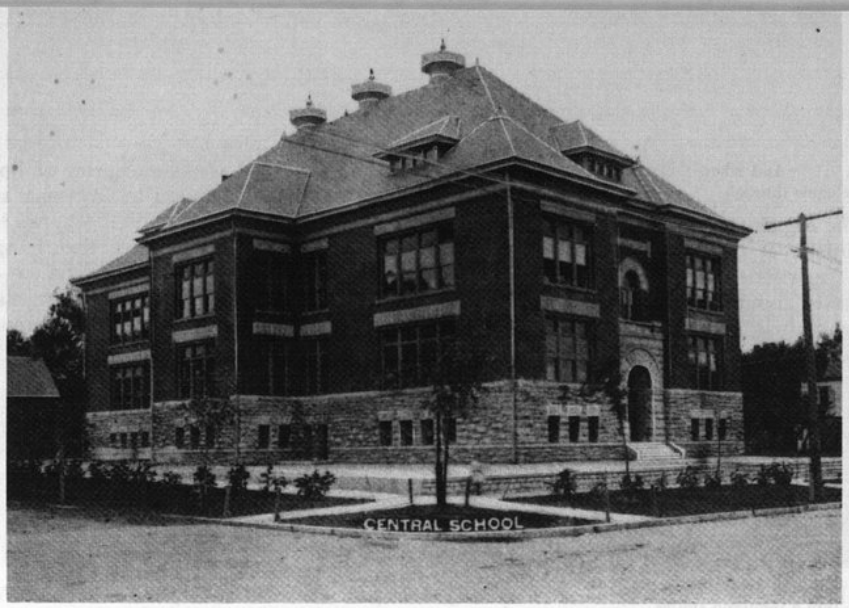
While he was in the seventh grade, Langston worked in a hotel located near Central School. His duties included cleaning the toilets and the lobby. He also remembered, "I kept the mirrors and spittoons shined and the halls scrubbed." [144] In the poem "Brass Spittoons," Hughes wrote:

Clean the spittoons, boy,
Detroit,
Chicago,
Atlantic City,
Palm Beach.
Clean the spittoons.
The steam in hotel kitchens,
and the smoke in hotel lobbies,
and the slime in hotel spittoons:
part of my life.[145]

Earning 50 cents a week at the hotel, Langston could afford to go regularly to see motion pictures playing at the Patee, a theater located at 828 Massachusetts. The Patee charged patrons five cents to see features such as Pearl White in *Leopard Lady,* Mabel Norman and Charlie Chaplin in *Mabel at the Wheel,* and King Baggot and Mary Pickford in *In the Sultan's Garden.* Langston was especially fond of the movies starring Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, Pearl White, and Theda Bara. He went often to the Patee, until its owner, Mrs. Vivian Patee, put up a sign reading NO COLORED ADMITTED. After that, Hughes could see motion pictures only at the Bowersock Opera House, where he recalled "sitting up in the gallery . . . all by myself, thrilled at the world across the footlights." [146] Describing the segregation policies of the Lawrence theaters, John Taylor remembered:

When Langston was here, and a long time after Langston was gone, there was only one theater we could go to. That was the Bowersock. We had one section, the southwest section [in the balcony], for colored people and you couldn't sit in any other place unless you was fair enough that you could pass or if they thought you was a Mexican you could pass. Sometimes, there'd be on a good show. There'd be so many in there, you would have to stand up in the segregated aisles to see the picture.[147]

138. *Ibid.*
139. *Ibid.*
140. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
141. "Minstrel Man," in Langston Hughes, *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954), p. 38. Poetry quoted from *Dream Keeper* is reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
142. Sutton, "Langston in Lawrence," p. 6.
143. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* pp. 21-22.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
145. From "Brass Spittoons," in Langston Hughes, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1927), p. 28. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.
146. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* p. 22.
147. Sutton, "Langston in Lawrence," p. 15.



After his grandmother died, Hughes went to stay with one of her friends, Mary Reed. While living with the Reeds he entered the seventh grade at Central School in Lawrence. There, in Ida Lyons's English class, the boy was involved in a bitter racial dispute. It was during that year, also, that Hughes apparently first read his own poetry. His black classmates later recalled him writing poems in his free time instead of playing games.

Besides watching motion pictures, Hughes himself entertained audiences at Auntie Reed's church by reading poetry, although it is not known if he read any of his own poems. When Langston's mother visited Lawrence, she too occasionally performed at the A. M. E. church. In *The Big Sea,* he described the time she came in from Kansas City and delivered "The Mother of the Gracchi" there. To make that presentation even more dramatic, Carrie Hughes dressed Langston and another little boy in half-sheets; they were to play the role of her sons, "jewels about to be torn away from her by a cruel Spartan fate." [148] As Langston told the story:

> My mother was the star of the program and the church in Lawrence was crowded. The audience hung on her words; but I did not like the poem at all, so in the very middle of it I began to roll my eyes from side to side, round and round in my head, as though in great distress. The audience tittered. My mother intensified her efforts, I, my mock agony. Wilder and wilder I mugged, as the poem mounted, batted and rolled my eyes, until the entire assemblage burst into uncontrollable laughter.
>
> My mother, poor soul, couldn't imagine what was wrong. More fervently than ever, she poured forth her lines, grasped us to her breast, and begged heaven for mercy. But the audience by then couldn't stop giggling, and with the applause at the end, she was greeted by a mighty roar of laughter. When the program was over and my mother found out what had happened, I got the worst whipping I ever had in my life. Then and there I learned to respect other people's art.[149]

148. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* p. 25.

Langston not only performed before black audiences at the A. M. E. church, but while living with the Reeds he also attended services there. "Auntie Reed was a Christian," Hughes wrote, "and made me go to church and Sunday school every Sunday." [150] In later years, Langston would vividly remember the "pictures on my Sunday-school cards," which he got in Mama Reed's Sunday school classes. Yet Hughes apparently took little interest in his Bible lessons. Robert B. Jones, Jr., stated, "I remember [my sisters] talking about how he used to always try to write things. Always writing things in Sunday School and get his hands slapped for not studying his lesson." [151] Nonetheless, the church made quite an impression on Langston Hughes. As he told a New York radio interviewer in December, 1960:

> I grew up in a not very religious family, but I had a foster aunt who saw that I went to church and Sunday school . . . and I was very much moved, always, by the, shall I say, rhythms of the Negro church, . . . of the spirituals, . . . of those wonderful old-time ser-

149. *Ibid.*

150. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

151. Transcription of Curtis Nethers's taped interview of June 7, 1977, with Robert B. Jones, Jr. Quotation appears on page 38 of the transcription, which is filed in the archives of the Douglas County Historical Society, Lawrence.

mons. . . . And when I began to write poetry, that influence came through. . . .[152]

In *The Big Sea,* Langston remembered how the minister at the A. M. E. church could preach "a wonderful rhythmical sermon, all moans and shouts and lonely cries and dire pictures of hell. . . ." [153] Such images appear in the Hughes poem "Sunday Morning Prophecy":

An old Negro minister concludes his sermon in his loudest voice, having previously pointed out the sins of this world:

. . . and now
when the rumble of death
rushes down the drain
pipe of eternity,
and hell breaks out
into a thousand smiles,
and the devil licks his chops
preparing for the feast on life,
and all the little devils
get out their bibs
to devour the corrupt bones
of this world—
oh-ooo-oo-o!
Then my friends!
Oh, then! Oh, then!
What will you do?

You will turn back
and look toward the mountains.
You will turn back
and grasp for a straw.
You will holler,
Lord-d-d-d-d-ah!
Save me, Lord!
Save me!
And the Lord will say,
In the days of your greatness
I did not hear your voice!
The Lord will say,
In the days of your richness
I did not see your face!
The Lord will say,
No-oooo-ooo-oo-o!
I will not save you now!
And your soul
will be lost!

Come into the church this morning,
Brothers and Sisters,
and be saved—
and give freely
in the collection basket
that I who am thy shepherd
might live.

Amen! [154]

152. Emanuel, *Langston Hughes,* p. 90.
153. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* p. 19.
154. "Sunday Morning Prophecy," in Hughes, *Selected Poems,* p. 21.

Langston had vivid memories of both the Negro sermons he heard in Lawrence and the church members themselves. Hughes biographer James Emanuel wrote that Langston's dialect poem "Ma Lord" is based on "a quaintly dressed old lady whom the author saw in church when he was a boy in Lawrence" [155]:

Ma Lord ain't no stuck up man.
Ma Lord, he ain't proud.
When he goes a walkin'
He gives me his hand.
"You ma friend," he 'lowed.

Ma Lord knowed what it was to work.
He knowed how to pray.
Ma Lord's life was trouble, too.
Trouble ever day.

Ma Lord ain't no stuck up man.
He's a friend o' mine.
When he went to heaben,
His soul like fire,
He tole me I was gwine.
He said, "Sho you'll come wid Me
An' be ma friend through eternity." [156]

Hughes wrote in *The Big Sea* that when he was going on 13 he was almost "saved from sin" at his aunt's church. For nights on end, he recalled, there had been revival meetings there, and "some very hardened sinners had been brought to Christ." [157] Hoping that Langston too could be saved, Auntie Reed took him to church one night and placed him on the mourners' bench alongside other children. The minister then preached an emotion-filled sermon and "sang a song about the ninety and nine safe in the fold, but one little lamb was left out in the cold." [158] Hughes remembered:

Then he said: "Won't you come? Won't you come to Jesus? Young lambs, won't you come?" And he held out his arms to all us young sinners there on the mourners' bench. And the little girls cried. And some of them jumped up and went to Jesus right away. But most of us just sat there.

A great many old people came and knelt around us and prayed, old women with jet-black faces and braided hair, old men with work-gnarled hands. And the church sang a song about the lower lights are burning, some poor sinners to be saved. And the whole building rocked with prayer and song.

Still, I kept waiting to *see* Jesus.

Finally all the young people had gone to the altar and were saved, but one boy and me. He was a rounder's son named Westley. Westley and I were surrounded by sisters and deacons praying. It was very hot in the church, and

155. Emanuel, *Langston Hughes,* p. 92.
156. "Ma Lord," in Hughes, *The Dream Keeper,* p. 55.
157. Hughes, *The Big Sea,* p. 18.
158. *Ibid.,* p. 19.

While in the seventh grade in Lawrence, Langston Hughes earned some spending money working at odd jobs after school. Earning 50 cents a week doing janitorial work at a hotel, he could afford to go to movies regularly, first at the Patee Theater and later at the Bowersock Opera House. When the Patee owner put up a sign, "No Colored Admitted," the Bowersock was the only theater in Lawrence that had a section where blacks were permitted to sit. This photograph of the Bowersock is reproduced from *Lawrence, Today and Yesterday* (Lawrence, *Daily Journal-World,* 1913).

getting late now. Finally Westley said to me in a whisper: "God damn! I'm tired o' sitting here. Let's get up and be saved." So he got up and was saved.[159]

Langston was then the only child remaining on the mourners' bench.

I heard the songs and the minister saying: "Why don't you come? My dear child, why don't you come to Jesus? Jesus is waiting for you. He wants you. Why don't you come? Sister Reed, what is this child's name?"

"Langston," my aunt sobbed.

"Langston, why don't you come? Why don't you come and be saved? Oh, lamb of God! Why don't you come?" [160]

The boy was ashamed for "holding everything up so long." Besides, he observed, God had not struck Westley dead for "lying in the temple." And so Langston finally stood up.

Suddenly the whole room broke into a sea of shouting, as they saw me rise. Waves of rejoicing swept the place. Women leapt in the air. My aunt threw her arms around me. The minister took me by the hand and led me to the platform.

When things quieted down, in a hushed silence, punctuated by a few ecstatic "Amens," all the new young lambs were blessed in the name of God. Then joyous singing filled the room.[161]

At home that night, Langston Hughes cried for one of the last times in his life. As he remembered it:

I cried, in bed alone, and couldn't stop. I buried my head under the quilts, but my aunt heard me. She woke up and told my uncle I was crying because the Holy Ghost had come into my life, and because I had seen Jesus. But I was really crying because I couldn't bear to tell her that I had lied, that I had deceived everybody in the church, that I hadn't seen Jesus, and that now I didn't believe there was a Jesus any more, since he didn't come to help me.[162]

When Langston lived with the Reeds, he often walked to the Santa Fe railroad station and stared at the tracks, which he knew went to Chicago. "Chicago was the biggest town in the world to me," he wrote, "much talked of by the people in Kansas." [163] Wondering about Chicago and listening to the far-off whistle of passing trains, he may well have thought to himself:

De railroad bridge's
a sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge's
a sad song in de air.
Ever time de trains pass
I wants to go somewhere.[164]

Langston Hughes surely wandered just beyond that station and gazed at the Kansas river, whose waters went all the way to New Orleans. It is fascinating to imagine what ef-

159. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
160. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
161. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
162. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
163. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
164. From "Homesick Blues," in Hughes, *The Dream Keeper*, p. 36.

fect that river may have had on him. His grandfather, Charles Langston, had once owned a farm near the Kansas river; Carrie Hughes was born on that farm and spent most of her childhood there. When the six-year-old Langston Hughes lived in Topeka with his mother, their one-room apartment was only five blocks from the Kansas river. And when he came to stay with the Reeds, he was again near it. In a very personal sense, then, Langston Hughes may have "known rivers," the subject of one of his best-known poems, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers":

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older
than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to
sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids
above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe
Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've
seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the
sunset.

I've known rivers.
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.[165]

IN 1915 Langston Hughes left Lawrence. He finally took a train to Chicago, where he joined his mother. Shortly thereafter, they moved to Lincoln, Ill., and eventually to Cleveland. Hughes himself later traveled even farther from Kansas; he attended Columbia University in 1921-1922, then worked aboard steamships bound for Africa and Europe, washed dishes for a brief time at the famous Grand Duc nightclub in Paris, graduated from Lincoln University in 1929, was employed three years later by the Soviet government as a motion picture writer in Moscow, and not long afterwards was a news correspondent in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. He became poet-in-residence at Atlanta University in 1947, and later that year established his permanent residence in Harlem. The bachelor poet died in New York City on May 22, 1967.[166]

Yet although Langston Hughes left Kansas, Kansas really never left Langston Hughes. Thinking back to the time he was robbed on a train crossing Italy, he remembered that he had nevertheless guarded against theft by carefully pinning his money and passport to the inside pocket of his coat, just as his grandmother had instructed him to do when, as a child in Lawrence, he had taken the train to Topeka or Kansas City to see his mother.[167] On his visit to Soviet Uzbekistan in 1932, Langston thought the climate of the Central Asian republic to be "much like that of the wind-swept plains of the Kansas of my youth."[168] And recalling the snowy Christmas he spent there, Hughes recollected:

I never left the house the whole holiday, but when I looked out the windows Christmas morning I saw padding around the stables in the snow some tall brown Uzbeks who looked like the pictures on my Sunday-school cards in Kansas when I was a child.[169]

While living in Paris, Langston did not forget those years in Lawrence. He recounted in *I Wonder as I Wander:*

Sitting one night in the Bar Boudon on rue Douai, where the Negro musicians gathered, I remembered once during my childhood in Kansas my grandmother had given me an apple that had been bruised and so had a brown spot on it. I didn't want to eat the apple.

My grandmother said, "What's the matter with you, boy? You can't expect every apple to be a perfect apple. Just because it's got a speck on it, you want to throw it away. Bite that speck out and eat that apple, son. It's still a good apple."

That's the way the world is, I thought, if you bite the specks out, it's still a good apple.[170]

Langston Hughes left Kansas with many bittersweet memories, but he also left with dreams, dreams which he kept throughout his life. He wrote in one poem:

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
in front of me,
bright like a sun—
my dream.[171]

Racial equality was Langston Hughes's dream. It was his dream that one day all human beings would be able to share equally in freedom. It was his dream that children would no

165. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 4.
166. For a detailed account of his later life, *see* both of Hughes's autobiographies, as well as the biographies by James Emanuel and Milton Meltzer.
167. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 190.
168. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, p. 149.
169. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
170. *Ibid.*, p. 402.
171. From "As I Grew Older," in Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p. 11.

longer be humiliated because of the color of their skin, that prejudice would no longer deny any child the right to see a movie, or drink a soda at the corner drugstore, or even ride a merry-go-round. It was his dream that the day would come when no child would ever again be persecuted for simply trying to get an education.

But it was not Langston's dream alone. It was the dream of a white Virginia planter named Ralph Quarles, buried beside Lucy Langston, the woman he loved. It was the dream of Virginia Congressman John Mercer Langston. Negro educator Charles Langston had that dream when he entered Kansas politics "looking for a bigger freedom than the Emancipation Proclamation had provided." Throughout her life, Mary Langston cherished that dream; her first husband, Sheridan Leary, died at Harpers Ferry for it. The young Nat Turner Langston had that dream when, as city editor of *The Historic Times,* he reported on black political and cultural activities in Lawrence. Carrie Langston Hughes kept that dream when she attended the University of Kansas, helped start the remarkable Inter-State Literary Association, and resolutely fought to get her son into Topeka's Harrison Street School. And it was that dream which drove James Hughes permanently from the United States to seek freedom in Mexico.

Langston Hughes kept the dream for them all. Years after their deaths, years after Hughes himself left Lawrence, he could still say of those hopes he first had in Kansas:

I dream
A world where man
No other man will scorn;
Where love will bless the earth
And Peace its path adorn.
I dream a world where all
Will know sweet Freedom's way;
Where greed no longer saps the soul,
Nor avarice blights our day—
A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free;
Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy, like a pearl,
Attend the needs of all mankind—
Of such I dream, my world! [172]

172. "I Dream a World," in *American Negro Poetry,* ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Hill & Wang, 1963), p. 71. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.

COAL FEVER: FUEL SCARCITY IN EARLY SOUTHWESTERN KANSAS

C. ROBERT HAYWOOD

"250 feet to water,
50 miles to fuel . . .
6 inches to h—l
God Bless Our Home"
—Sign on a deserted dug-out in Mead county.[1]

CIVILIZATION east of the Mississippi river, according to Walter Prescott Webb, stood on three legs—land, water, and wood. When it reached the Great Plains, "not one but two of these legs were withdrawn,—water and timber—and civilization was left on one leg—land." [2] Certainly the course of settlement in Kansas reaffirms that thesis with dramatic precision. To the new homesteader, the prairie of western Kansas seemed to stretch as far as the eye could see—"to the very horizon and beyond"—with scarcely a ripple and with only an occasional interruption by a fringe of trees marking a run-off creek. Although it was obviously not the Great American Desert of earlier accounts, the land remained overpowering in its expanse. Still, the lure of such unbroken vastness was to prove irresistible to an agrarian society that traditionally counted land as the true measure of wealth.

As the pressure of population came to bear on the East, the prospects of wealth where "a straight furrow can be plowed a hundred miles long," offset whatever shortcomings might also be found to exist there. For the land-hungry Hoosier or New Englander, who described his farms in rods, the prospective discomforts caused by a paucity of wood and water seemed a small sacrifice to make in order to measure land holdings in quarter sections.

Not that the necessity for wood and water had escaped even the most tender of greenhorns. The diaries and journals of the earliest traders and travelers devote much of their space to recounting the trouble they had in meeting these demands.[3] The homesteaders

Although water and timber were scarce on the Kansas plains, the settlers came, lured by the prospect of cheap land and optimistic that prairie scarcities would be offset by hard work and Yankee ingenuity. The dugout and sod house were temporary solutions to the lack of wood for building material, and windmills provided the homesteader with another scarce necessity, water. But a supply of cheap coal for fuel was needed and the slightest hint of its discovery could cause "coal fever" in the vicinity.

1. The Coldwater *Republican*, September 17, 1885.
2. Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston, 1936), p. 9.
3. However, George Stauth told of one Ohio settler who found room in his crowded wagon for a stump puller to help clear the timber claim he had been sold.—George J. Stauth, "Reminiscences of a Ford County Pioneer," typewritten ms., Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

were, however, "long on optimism," and reasoned that Yankee ingenuity and hard work would overcome these prairie hardships just as surely as they had those in the East. It was a conviction born of a strong Protestant ethic and long experience.

There was also an emotional rationalization, encouraged by the land agents and boomers, which held that the Creator operated under a "law of compensation." Having failed to provide trees for the use of the prairie settlers, these perpetual optimists believed God must have provided some other fuel supply, for instance, coal, and some source of water other than running streams.[4]

In addition, the prospective Kansan found great difficulty in discerning the truth in the conflicting stories regarding the scarcities of the prairie. Land agents and townsite boosters fabricated glowing accounts of gushing springs, running rivers, and ample rain. It was not poetic fancy but crass commercial propaganda that dotted the early maps of southwestern Kansas with such town names as Spring Lake, Greensward, Shallow Water, Sharon Springs, and Rainbelt.[5]

IT WAS true that the presence or absence of underground water appeared to be an unpredictable, even capricious thing. When the Pearlette colony from Zanesville, Ohio, settled in Meade county, some chose to stay near Crooked creek because of an apparent abundant supply of water there. Addison Bennett, on the other hand, decided to immediately face up to what appeared to be a monumental task, of hand digging a well. He moved to his claim some distance away from the rest of the colony and settled down to the task. To his amazement, water in abundance was reached at eight feet. Unfortunately, the others who had pitched tents and made other make-shift quarters near the stream, found that "during the summer Crooked Creek went dry . . .; all the deep holes along the head of the creek cracking open like frozen ground in winter."[6]

Locating an adequate supply of water determined the immediate survival and ultimate success of the homesteader; and, before the railroads came, it also determined whether a townsite would flourish. When settlers a few miles from Spring Lake, also in Meade county, discovered artesian springs, even the town hall was "snaked across the prairie," to the new site which was renamed Artois and later Artesian City in order to make clear to prospective settlers its invaluable asset.[7]

For most of the homesteaders, however, an adequate supply of water was achieved only with considerable sacrifice. Their recorded memories tell of the painful drudgery of digging to great depths or hauling for great distances. One pioneer daughter recalls the experience:

> The cedar trees at the farm are the ones mother's father sent to them from Missouri while they were still hauling water and was kept alive by water from the springs four miles away. A neighbor, . . . 1½ miles northwest of the folks, had the only deep well in the community at this time. So many neighbors hauled water from there, it was difficult to get a turn without waiting for hours.
>
> They hauled water seven years. Since they did not have the money to drill a well dad decided to dig one. It was a big job to dig a hole 36″ × 36″, 150 feet deep. Besides the dangers of cave ins, damp gas would sometimes accumulate, a signal system for alarm was a string attached to a bell at the top. At the ring of the bell the worker would be pulled up. After [an] almost fatal experience, when Newt Novinger was almost unconscious before they got him to the top in the bucket, they would lower a lantern into the hole and if it went out, [they knew] deadly gas was present, [and] then fresh air was pumped down with bellows. It took a month to dig the well. In time pipe was purchased and then a windmill. What a glorious feeling that must have been to have water close by instead of the chore of hauling it four miles.[8]

The windmill and later the drilling rigs with their small-bore drills, eventually brought an acceptable solution. But even with these sophisticated advances, maintaining an adequate water supply was a chancy business. The drills sometimes failed to tap underground sources or brought brackish, unpotable water to the surface. Just over the line in Ford county,

4. F. V. Hayden, *Preliminary Report of the United States Geological Survey of Wyoming and Portions of Contiguous Territories* (Washington, 1872), pp. 101-102.

5. Some names followed honest assessments. The story of one such literal adaptation is told by the granddaughter of one of the founders:
"My grandfather's claim was south of the present State Lake. . . . Here on the claim or near it was Sand Creek where the water was better than usual and if there was no water in the creek there was always water a few inches below the surface. After grandmother arrived, looking over the claim and noting the good water she remarked, 'This is a good place to be, at water.' So here they stayed and called it Atwater."—"The Bonham Story—Written by Patty Brown Haskings," County Council of Women's Clubs Meade county, comp., *Pioneer Stories of Meade County* (Hutchinson, 1965), p. 20. Hereinafter cited, *Pioneer Stories of Meade.*

6. William Jobling, "Early History of Meade County," Meade *Globe,* July 4, 1891.

7. "The Dead Town List," Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; Spring Lake *Homet,* later the Artesian City *Homet,* June, 1885-August, 1889.

8. "A Pioneer Family—Mr. and Mrs. R. R. Singley—Written by Flossie M. (Singley) Bolan," *Pioneer Stories of Meade,* pp. 216-217.

within 10 miles of Artesian City, the springs were heavily laced with sulfur and gave off the aroma of rotten eggs. Then, too, the windmill was dependent upon an unpredictable nature. It may have seemed to the Easterner that the winds of the plains never ceased, but there were calm days in the summer and frozen pipes in the winter which plagued the farmer until electrical power made possible a self-contained, enclosed well. It was an early folk axiom: "No woman could live in this county who cannot climb a windmill tower or shoot a gun." [9]

IF MAINTAINING sufficient water for the household and the stock was a burdensome chore, there was, at least, a local and permanent solution. For the other leg of civilization there was neither. For all his labor and ingenuity, the western Kansan never found an adequate, near-at-hand substitute for wood. The homesteader's adaptive powers were indeed remarkable. He did "make do" with materials he found on the prairies but in every instance the substitute for timber remained temporary and insufficient. Long-range, adequate supplies were found only after the railroads made it possible to bring them in from some outside source.

Nevertheless, the story of the homesteader's imaginative use of what he did find on the prairie is a remarkable one. But from the beginning an improvisation was recognized to be just that. Sod houses and dugouts were never intended to be more than temporary shelters. The use of limestone in parts of northwestern Kansas for fence posts and houses was an exception limited to that area and was not available to the settlers of southwestern Kansas. It is also true that the many brickyards which appeared throughout Kansas might have furnished much of the material for exterior construction but could not solve the total building and fencing needs of Kansas. While shelters could be improvised, it was the scarcity of fuel that caused the greatest hardships.

Cow and buffalo chips formed the principal fuel for many settlers during the first two or three years on a Kansas claim. If they provided a fast, smoky fire and were not very durable, they were, at least, free for the taking. The homesteaders found them to be as strange and unlikely a substitute for wood as any contemporary housewife might and laughed about their own adjustment to what nature had provided. One of the more succinct descriptions of their utility came from the editor of the Pearlette *Call*:

> You know wood is scarce in Meade county, and coal expensive, hence you will doubtless wonder what we do for fuel.
>
> Those who can afford it buy coal in Dodge . . . while others, having teams, get some wood in the canyons east of us.
>
> But most of us burn chips—buffalo chips we call them, but the majority of those we find were doubtless dropped by Texas cattle, when passing north.
>
> These chips make a tolerable fair fire, but of course burn out very rapidly; consequently to keep up a good fire you must be continually poking the chips in and taking the ashes out. Still we feel very thankful for even this fuel. . . . [10]

As the gathering expedition swept farther out from the dugout, it was clear that the supply was limited. Restocking "prairie coal" did not come easy, although there were the rare and fortuitous instances of homesteaders persuading a trail herd boss to stop over night on his claim in order to provide fuel for the cook stove.

Numerous other wood substitutes were used—sunflower stalks, corn cobs, corn stocks, and even the grain itself.[11] Once wheat became a dominant crop, the abundance of straw led to the development of "hayburner" stoves. In spite of an intricate arrangement of coils, springs, and drums to control the fire, the "hayburners" required the almost constant attention of one person to keep them burning. One verse of the "prairie anthem," "The Little Old Sod Shanty on My Claim," reveals the homesteaders' judgment of hay as a fuel substitute:

> And when I left my eastern home
> So happy and so gay
> To try to win my wealth and fame
> I little thought that I'd come down
> To burning twisted hay
> In my little old sod shanty on my claim.[12]

9. Webb, *The Great Plains*, p. 320.
10. Pearlette *Call*, April 15, 1879.

11. When coal reached $16 a ton and corn was selling for 32 cents a bushel, the Department of Agriculture urged the farmers to burn corn to save money.—*The Annals of Kansas*, ed. Kirke Mechem (Topeka, 1956), v. 2, p. 306.

12. Edward Everett Dale, "Wood and Water: Twin Problems of the Prairie Plains," *Nebraska History*, Lincoln, v. 29 (June, 1948), p. 96. At least one ingenious contraption reportedly had better results: "A containe[r] fashioned like a wash boiler was made of sheet iron, this was filled with fine hay from the mangers, packed tightly, then inverted over the top of a cook stove after the lids had been removed. This would keep fire for several hours, usually sufficient for one evening's fuel."—Vallie McKee, "Passing of the West," typewritten ms., Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

Since it was abundant, it was expected that straw could meet other needs as well. The Larned *Chronoscope* urged local citizens to support a project to establish a paper mill which would utilize straw as the major ingredient.[13] The town boosters of Kinsley saw in their "straw stock" an ideal substitute for lumber. An article in the October 22, 1887, issue of the Kinsley *Daily Mercury* told of a new manufacturing concern which had chosen the town for its new plant to manufacture "straw-board," an artificial lumber, that was "waterproof, fireproof, lighter, and ridiculously inexpensive. . . ." The editor continued:

> One of the greatest hindrances to the settler on the prairies of Kansas has been the excessive cost of lumber, necessitating the unhealthful sod-house and dug-out which in some localities obtain to the almost utter exclusion of anything else, but the successful manufacture of straw lumber on the plains, will soon relegate this primitive architecture to oblivion, or at least make it as great a curiosity as the buffalo.

The straw-board factory, it was predicted, coupled with a packing house which was also negotiating for a construction site, would make Kinsley "second to no other city in Kansas, save the possible exception of Wichita." "Business Barometer Booming—Buildings Being Builded. Fair Fame Forging Forward Finely."[14] Unfortunately, the depression of 1887 swept the straw-board factory and most of the rest of Edwards county prosperity from the scene.[15] Straw was not to be the salvation of Kansas.

What the western Kansas homesteads seriously missed was the Easterners' old enemy—the forest. The few cottonwood, hackberry, and willow along the creeks were poor substitutes for the "lofty pine" and "towering oaks" of the eastern "forest primeval." Settlers in Kansas would travel miles to bring back a wagon load of wood. Kansans hauling wood across the border had largely denuded the Cherokee Outlet of timber long before it was opened for settlement in 1893.[16] "The Old Timer," writing in the Coldwater *Western Star*, explained that an important income supplement in the early days had come from hauling cedar post and fire wood out of the "Strip." As a result, he complained, "only an occasional scrawny evergreen scarcely large enough to make a Christmas tree" remained in the canyons south of Barber and Comanche counties.[17]

Naturally, the homesteader tried to correct nature's error. Where the Eastern pioneer carved a farm, tree by tree, out of the timber, the western Kansas settler planted a grove as a shelter, tree by tree, around his house. The federal government joined in the effort by offering "Timber Claims" as an inducement to bring trees to the prairie. The Timber Culture act called for cultivation of 10 acres for at least 10 years and the planting of a specific number of trees on each acre. Over nine million acres in Kansas were entered under this act.[18] Eventually, these groves scattered about the region might have partially alleviated the shortage of wood, but it is doubtful they would have been a final solution.

Without native timber, fuel remained hard to come by and no substitute was ignored. Even small unlikely sources were exploited. For instance, a constant annoyance to the early railroads was the pilfering of railroad ties by the homesteaders, who used them to warm the sod houses along the right of way.

IN THE END, however, it was these same railroads that brought the first substantial solution to the fuel shortage. It was not until the tracks crossed the prairie that it was possible to transport cheap coal in quantity to the plains. Only then was the fuel scarcity permanently relieved. It can be argued that cheap coal in abundance was as important in the settlement of western Kansas as barbed wire fences, dryland farming, the windmill, and the Colt revolver. Even when the homesteader could not afford to burn coal exclusively, it was essential to have a small stockpile to see him through the crisis of a blizzard. After three severe winters culminating with the blizzard of 1886, the slightest interruption of the coal supply or even the rumor of its interruption was enough to bring panic to an isolated farm family. Two specific instances, some 15 years apart, illustrate the extent to which Kansans would go to prevent this from happening.

13. Larned *Chronoscope*, April 16, 1880.
14. Kinsley *Banner-Graphic*, December 16, 1887.
15. James C. Malin, "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, v. 4 (February, 1935), pp. 43-49.
16. Dale, "Wood and Water," p. 93; Nellie Snyder Yost, *Medicine Lodge; The Story of a Kansas Frontier Town* (Chicago, 1970), p. 51.
17. "Comanche Co., Thirty Years Ago and Now—Written for the *Star* by 'Old Timer.'"—Coldwater *Western Star*, April 6, 1917.
18. William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1957), p. 172.