

FROM CREEK FREEDMEN TO OKLAHOMA OIL MEN:  
THE BLACK HERITAGE AND ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF OKMULGEE  
(1878-1929)



Prepared for the City of Okmulgee  
Historic Preservation Commission  
by  
Terri Myers, preservation historian  
Austin, Texas  
December, 1991

**FROM CREEK FREEDMEN TO OKLAHOMA OIL MEN:  
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LEGACY (1878-1929)**

**Research Report and Black Heritage Theme Historic Context**

**Prepared for:** Okmulgee Historic Preservation Commission  
Okmulgee, Oklahoma

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**December, 1991**

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cover photo: Charles and Alberta Evans House, 820 N. Porter, ca. 1920  
courtesy of Mrs. Sara Bullock

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## ABSTRACT

This report of the Black Heritage Theme Historic Context and related properties project for the city of Okmulgee includes the project objectives, a summary of the research design and methodology used to determine significant events and themes that influenced the development of Okmulgee's black communities, a discussion of expected property types, and a list of noteworthy properties. The report includes the document, "From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy (1878-1929)", the historic context within which Okmulgee's early black communities developed. The context document is followed by an annotated bibliography of major sources and a summary of the nature and extent of contributions made by Okmulgee's black communities to the city's built environment. The summary also contains recommendations for the preservation of significant historic buildings and neighborhoods and for further research to augment the current body of documentation on Okmulgee's historic black communities.

The principal components of the project consisted of three activities: an analysis of secondary and primary sources relevant to Okmulgee's black communities, the identification and photography of buildings with historic or architectural significance for these communities, and the creation of a historic context within which these buildings were constructed and used. The controlling research objective was to determine the nature and extent of black contributions to Okmulgee's growth and development through an assessment of its historic built environment.

Oral histories conducted with six residents of Okmulgee's black communities provided a base for further research, and ultimately proved to be the most valuable sources of information. Through these interviews, principal black residential neighborhoods, institutional buildings such as churches and schools, individual houses and commercial buildings were identified. Informants offered valuable insight concerning

individuals and events that shaped the development of the black community. This information was used to sketch the history of black settlement in Okmulgee and was augmented through local and state archival research.

A windshield survey of Okmulgee's of the historic neighborhoods and buildings identified through research and interviews revealed several possibilities for future surveys and study. The group of commercial buildings in the 400-600 blocks of E. Fifth Street, along with neighborhoods in North Okmulgee, around the First Baptist Church (Central), and on E. Second and E. Third streets in East Okmulgee, should be surveyed for possible nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Individual buildings such as the 1902 and 1919 Key Blocks and the C. E. House house may also be eligible for the National Register. A preliminary assessment of National Register eligibility is included after the discussion of Property Types. Photographs and maps are included to illustrate and support the recommendations.

## INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the format established by the State Historic Preservation Office in the statewide historic preservation plan, a research project was undertaken to determine the nature and extent of the contributions made by Okmulgee's black citizens to the city's growth and development. The results of the research are recorded in the Black Heritage Theme historic context included in this report. The context highlights the unique history of Okmulgee's black citizens from the Creek Freedmen and the pioneer immigrants of the post-Civil War South, to the oil men, entrepreneurs and professionals who were principally responsible for the development of the separate black institutions, residential neighborhoods and commercial district from Statehood through the 1920s. A list of significant extant properties, identified either for their associations with the early black community or for their architectural merits, was compiled and is included in this report. It is accompanied by a set of screened photographs and a discussion of expected historic property types.

Earlier architectural surveys conducted under the auspices of the State Historic Preservation Office and the city of Okmulgee Historic Preservation Commission, revealed a collection of brick commercial buildings in the 400-600 blocks of E. Fifth Street which was reported to have been a black business district in the second and third decades of the 20th century. In addition to the commercial buildings, two of the city's significant black Baptist churches and a black hospital had already been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The nature and vintage of these commercial and institutional buildings were indicative of a substantial and thriving black community in Okmulgee during the 1910s and 1920s. The State Historic Preservation Office considered the evidence sufficient to warrant further investigation. The current project was undertaken in conjunction with the city of Okmulgee to develop a list of noteworthy properties associated with the black community and a historic framework within which the significance of the properties could be assessed.

As research progressed, it became apparent that Okmulgee's early black residents played not merely a significant role, but a primary and pivotal role, in the early development of the city from the end of Creek national hegemony to Oklahoma statehood in 1907. That Okmulgee had a substantial black citizenry prior to

statehood, comprised in large part of Creek Freedmen and their descendants, was obscured by the onslaught of white settlers in the area following the arrival of the railroad and the oil discoveries in the region during the boom years of the 1910s and 1920s. The tremendous influx of white entrepreneurs to Okmulgee, and the construction surge that followed, overshadowed the initial accomplishments of Okmulgee's original black settlers. White immigrants also brought the patterns of racial segregation that were being instituted throughout the South at that time, as Jim Crow legislation supplanted Reconstruction-era gains made by blacks in those states. Although they were systematically pushed to the periphery of the city, blacks prospered and continued to make significant contributions to the physical and social patterns of Okmulgee through the 1920s, but it was in the context of separatism that this was accomplished.

The period covered in the historic context extends to the earliest known structure in Okmulgee, the 1878 Creek National Capitol (N.R. 1966, NHL), Okmulgee's oldest extant building, because of the Creek tribal status of some of the town's earliest black settlers. The 19th century history of blacks in Okmulgee would be incomplete without a discussion of their Creek beginnings, not only because Creek Freedmen were among its earliest residents and their presence may have encouraged subsequent black settlement in the town, but because several of the first black residential additions were carved from their allotments and many of the extant historic buildings associated with Okmulgee's black residents were built by Freedmen or their descendants. Although the earliest known extant building associated with black development is the 1902 Key Block, most of the noteworthy properties associated with the town's black heritage were constructed between 1913 and 1925, during the oil-boom. Today, the extant residential neighborhoods, institutional monuments, and numerous commercial buildings are legacies of the significant impact of Okmulgee's early black citizens on the architectural fabric of the city.



### Objectives of the Project

The accompanying Black Heritage Theme (Historic Context) does not purport to be the definitive history of Okmulgee's substantial black community but merely a context within which its associated buildings can be evaluated for integration into the city's preservation plan. The author hopes that it can also serve as a source for continued research and documentation of the many contributions that community has made to the state of Oklahoma and city of Okmulgee.

The primary purpose of the Black Heritage Theme historic context project is to ascertain the nature and extent of the contributions made by Okmulgee's black citizens to the development and evolution of the city. By the criteria established for the National Register of Historic Places, the researcher interpreted this charge to include the earliest known extant structures associated with Okmulgee's black citizens, to the end of the historic period which has been set at 50 years from the present, i.e. 1941. The ending date was further defined to 1929, to correspond with a halt in building activity initiated by a glut in the oil industry, a primary contributor to Okmulgee's prosperity in the early 20th century, followed by the onset of the Great Depression, during which little building activity occurred in either black or white communities across the state. Further, no significant, extant historic buildings associated with Okmulgee's black community were identified beyond the 1929 terminal date. The findings of the project are compiled in the accompanying historic context document, "From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy (1878-1929)".

A second objective is the identification and listing of existing historic buildings associated with the black heritage theme and the assessment of their potential for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The list included in this report is by no means exhaustive and is intended as a guide to the types and variety of historic architecture relevant to the black heritage context.

Secondary goals of the investigator include the collection of a body of research materials to assist students and researchers in future projects involving Okmulgee's historic black communities. Finally, recommendations for the preservation of significant buildings and districts, and for the documentation of local black history are included in the summary.

This report also contains an annotated bibliography, selected screened photographs and documentation to facilitate future associated research. The ultimate purpose of this project - the documentation of a black heritage historic context and the compilation of related resources - is to assist the city of Okmulgee in its preservation planning goals through the identification of significant historic properties and sites associated with the black community within the city's domain. It is expected that these activities will lead to the furtherance of historic preservation efforts within Okmulgee's historic black communities and to the understanding and interpretation of black contributions to the city's history and development.

### Summary of the Research Design and Methodology

In preparation for on-site research in Okmulgee, the principal investigator conducted a literature search with the assistance of the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office. Recommended sources focused on black history in Oklahoma, the association of black slaves with the Creek Tribe in Indian Territory, the emergence of all-black towns in Oklahoma and the analysis of race relations in the years preceding and following statehood. Substantial bibliographies found in preliminary sources led to other relevant materials which were also reviewed. While such secondary sources offered some good general background on pioneer blacks in Oklahoma and defined unique patterns of black settlement such as the all-black towns, there was little specific information on Okmulgee or its black citizenry. One of the most intriguing aspects of the project was the possibility that the ex-slaves of Creek Indians, known as Creek Freedmen, or their descendants may have contributed to the early settlement of Okmulgee since it was the capital of the Creek Nation. Virtually nothing in the preliminary literature search shed any light on this topic.

Recognizing that much of black history is inaccessible through traditional research means, the investigator scheduled a series of interviews with long-time residents of Okmulgee's black communities through the assistance of Mr. J.D. Wesley, a member of the Okmulgee Historic Preservation Commission. Several of those interviewed were descendants of Creek Freedmen who confirmed the early involvement of the Freedmen in Okmulgee's development. In addition to the oral histories conducted by the investigator, family histories recorded in the Okmulgee County History (n.d.) and oral histories recorded under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and included in the Grant Foreman collection at the Oklahoma State Historical Society provided a wealth of information about black domestic patterns and provided the basis for most of the subsequent research. The identification of prominent families, social patterns, religious and fraternal organizations, and the employment, educational and recreational opportunities of early black families that might not otherwise be recorded, were revealed in these collections. These sources were augmented by a study and comparison of Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps and the corresponding city directories during the period of significance (1878-1929).

In Okmulgee, meetings with city staff and the Historic Preservation Commission helped define the goals and direction of the project. Intensive research was conducted in the county clerk's office, deed records, city plat maps, Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps, county histories and newspapers. A series of taped interviews was undertaken with members of old Okmulgee families. The interviews yielded information about residential, commercial and institutional buildings, both extant and demolished, that were identified as having noteworthy historic significance for the community. A "windshield survey" was conducted in Okmulgee to identify specific extant residences, commercial buildings, parks, cemeteries, churches and schools reported in interviews or noted on Sanborn maps. A list was compiled of properties that are potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. These properties should be included in future historic surveys of Okmulgee.

Additional research was conducted at the Oklahoma State Historical Society, including its library and archives, and at the State Historic Preservation Office. Sanborn maps were copied from the complete map collection at the Western History Collection of the University of Oklahoma. A comparison of the maps over time shows how the black community evolved from areas scattered throughout the city to specific "colored" areas noted on the maps, as more whites moved into the town following statehood and the solidification of segregation. The Okmulgee Public Library houses important resources including Sanborn maps on microfilm and city directories. The collected source materials were used to identify properties, individuals, patterns, and historic events important to Okmulgee's black heritage. City plat maps were used to identify areas shown as Creek Freedman allotments in the Hastain Township maps.

## PROPERTIES

The following properties have been identified as significant either for their architectural merit or historic association with Okmulgee's black heritage. This list is not intended to be comprehensive, only illustrative. Properties are listed by type.

### DOMESTIC

- W. F. Haygood House, ca. 1923 (Figure 3)  
1014 E. Third Street
- Mack Brown House, ca. 1922 (Figure 3)  
908 E. Third Street
- Spencer Adams House ca. 1914 (Figure 8)  
801 N. Muskogee Street (should be 601)
- Robert Gamble House ca. 1910 (Figure 8)  
523 N. Muskogee Street
- Wallace House ca. 1918 (Figure 9)  
519 N. Porter Street
- Evans House ca. 1914 (Figure 9)  
820 N. Porter Street
- C. E. and Ruth Ella King House, 1916 (Figure 11)  
500 N. Central (or 121 E. Second Street)
- Dr. James White House, ca. 1918 (Figure 12)  
503 N. Central Avenue
- Victor Brown House, ca. 1918 (Figure 12)  
510 N. Central Avenue
- Melvina Roper Simpkins House, ca. 1910 (Figure 19)  
1101 E. Third Street
- William Shealey House, ca. 1915 (Figure 19)  
1022 E. Second Street
- George and I. E. Carroll House, ca. 1907 (Figure 20)  
600 E. Fifth Street (or 117 N. Severs)
- Kenedy House, ca. 1925 (Figure 23)  
406 Delaware Street

### COMMERCIAL

- Key Block, 1902 (Figure 1)  
200 N. Morton Street
- W. S. Sneed buildings, 1914 (Figure 13)  
619 E. Sixth Street
- R. B. Taylor Building, ca. 1913 (Figure 14)  
423 E. Fifth Street
- Glass Building, ca. 1913 (Figure 14)  
417-19-21 E. Fifth Street
- Masonic Hall, current appearance ca. 1928 (Figure 15)  
503 E. Fifth Street
- H. & H. Cab Co., ca. 1920 (Figure 15)  
501 E. Fifth Street

## COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TYPES continued

- Harrison Block, 1915 (Figure 16)  
515-17-19 E. Fifth Street
- Robert B. Copeland Building, 1920 (Figure 17)  
600 block E. Fifth Street
- James White Building, 1920 (figure 17)  
509 E. Fifth Street
- Key Block, 1919 (Figure 18)  
309-317 W. Seventh Street

## INSTITUTIONAL

- Franklin United Methodist Church, ca. 1909 (Figure 2)  
1001 E. Third Street
- Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church, ca. 1927 (Figure 4)  
800 block E. Third Street
- Uganda Martyrs Catholic School, ca. 1927 (Figure 5)  
southwest corner Choctaw and E. Third streets
- Site of original Dunbar School and Banneker School (Figure 6)  
northwest corner Second and Delaware streets
- First Baptist Church (Central), 1915 (Figure 10)  
521 N. Central Avenue
- Church of the Living God, ca. 1920 (Figure 21)  
corner of Smith and Woods streets
- Eastside Baptist Church, 1921  
Osage and Third streets
- Black Hospital, 1922  
Third Street and Woods Drive
- Shorter Chapel A.M.E., ca. 1916, rebuilt 1977 (Figure 22)  
201 E. Third Street

## LANDSCAPE

- Simons Park (also known as Bullock's Park), (Figure 7)  
southwest corner First and Muskogee streets

## PROPERTY TYPES

### Introduction

Buildings and sites identified with Okmulgee's black heritage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reflect the enormous contributions made by the city's black citizens to the growth and development of Okmulgee, first as a commercial and transportation hub for surrounding farms and villages in the period following the arrival of the railroad in 1901, and then as the nucleus of financial and entrepreneurial empires founded on the discovery and exploitation of oil fields in the region. The development of a separate and nearly autonomous black community between 1901 and 1925, the result of widespread segregationist policies throughout the South, contributed substantially to Okmulgee's built environment. The extant residential, commercial and institutional buildings and sites that relate to black development are reminders of the aspirations and achievements of Okmulgee's black citizenry.

Properties identified with Okmulgee's historic black community are located in the north-central and northeastern parts of the original townsite, its expanded boundaries to the east, and in early suburban additions for blacks which were platted to the north and northeast, and in a small enclave centered around S. Florida and Fifteenth streets, on the south side of town. Early Sanborn maps (1892-1901) show that black churches, schools, residences and commercial buildings were scattered throughout the town, without any apparent racial consideration. With the influx of white immigrants to Indian Territory, many of whom brought then-current Jim Crow philosophies of racial segregation with them from their former homes in the deep South, black properties began to disappear from the center of town in the first decade of this century. As early as 1904, residential additions to the city were being platted exclusively for blacks at the northern, northeastern and southern peripheries of the original townsite. Shortly afterward, a separate black commercial district began to emerge on E. Fifth Street, parallel to, and immediately north of Sixth Street, the main arterial of Okmulgee which defines the northern border of the town square. In addition to residential and commercial properties, separate institutional properties inherent to urban life were constructed to serve the black communities.

The predominant property types identified in Okmulgee's black communities include residential, commercial, and institutional buildings. Significant properties that were originally built, developed or occupied

by blacks, but were later appropriated by whites by virtue of their location in the increasingly segregated city, are included among those associated with black development. Infrastructural properties such as transportation routes, streetcar barns, utility facilities and bridges were not expected to be exclusively associated with the black community. Likewise, government buildings were not expected within the context of Black Heritage. A Reconstruction-era Freedman's Bureau would have been an exception but because Okmulgee's population did not exceed 150 until after 1890, such a property was not expected. An argument could be made that the Creek National Capitol is a property associated with Okmulgee's black heritage because of the large percentage of Creek Freedmen within the tribe, but again, it did not exclusively serve black tribal members and was therefore excluded from consideration. Some residual properties associated with agriculture may still exist within the residential districts but research was unable to conclusively identify them as such.

Within the Black Heritage context, the identified properties were further differentiated by historic influences defined by period: early settlement under the administration of the Creek Nation (1868-1900), railroad-led urban development (1901-1907), oil and gas discoveries and the related population and construction boom (1907-1918), and the maturation of the city to the Great Depression (1919-1929) when much of Okmulgee's development, in both black and white communities, came to a standstill.

#### PROPERTY TYPE: DOMESTIC BUILDINGS

Domestic building types found in Okmulgee are categorized by original or intended use, broad architectural movements, form and stylistic influences. Two primary domestic uses found in Okmulgee include single-family dwellings and their auxiliary buildings. Multiple-unit dwellings, a common Domestic use of the early 20th century, were not found among pre-1941 buildings associated with Okmulgee's Black Heritage, although there were a number of boarding houses and residential hotels depicted on early 20th century Sanborn maps in the black commercial district. Okmulgee's domestic buildings are further defined by the vernacular forms common to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the modern American movement (Popular plan) bungalows and Four Square houses and Revival Style buildings of this century. Within these subgroups, Domestic buildings are discussed by stylistic influences such as Victorian or Craftsman. Finally, plan or form



typologies such as center-passage, L-plan, shotgun, etc., may more accurately define the vernacular Domestic architecture consistently found in Okmulgee, particularly for those buildings which do not fall into distinguishable categories by style. To be eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places, residences must possess integrity of design, materials, and location. Residential historic districts must maintain integrity throughout the district and contributing structures must retain architectural integrity.

Since the majority of houses associated with Okmulgee's black citizens in the late-19th and early 20th century are considered vernacular structures, a discussion of vernacular architecture follows.

### Vernacular Forms

The majority of Okmulgee's domestic structures identified in the city's traditionally black neighborhoods were not architect-designed and, as such, are classified as vernacular dwellings. Vernacular dwellings are often grouped geographically or ethnically because they are associated with a particular culture or are indicative of a regional pattern. Such houses frequently were built with traditional materials and building techniques. They are usually simple in design, with few pretensions, and were owned and occupied by people of moderate means. As such, they are considered "common" or "folk" houses and their role in local history is often overlooked when compared to contemporaneous High Style residences. Nevertheless, vernacular structures constitute a large portion of early American domestic buildings and reflect the builder's ability to adapt to conditions and materials of a new environment. The log cabins, brush arbors, and rock houses of the native American and pioneer black settlers in Indian Territory should be counted among the earliest vernacular structures in the area. In time, with increased immigration to Indian Territory, houses were built that more approximated the American standard of the period, but the vernacular traditions remained the dominant force in the domestic architecture of turn-of-the-century Okmulgee.

Vernacular dwellings are perhaps better understood by an analysis of their plans rather than their stylistic influences. Usually, vernacular dwellings were much smaller than contemporaneous high-style houses and the use of space and arrangement of rooms was of greater concern to the builder than superfluous stylistic detail. Simple one-story Center-passage, L-plan, modified L-plan, and T-plan dwellings are among the most

common vernacular forms and a number from the early 20th century survive in Okmulgee. In addition, numerous Shotgun houses, often associated with urban black communities, are found in Okmulgee. Although plan type may be of primary consideration in the categorization of vernacular dwellings, stylistic influences also found their way to the common house. Among the most apparent of these, in Okmulgee's early vernacular dwellings, are the Victorian or Folk Victorian influences, often found in L-plan dwellings of the late 19th- and early 20th-century.

#### a. Early Vernacular Dwellings

Okmulgee's early built environment included a handful of dwellings belonging to black pioneers and black citizens of the Creek Nation. Although little has been written about their physical composition, they were most likely log cabins or small single story frame houses as depicted in early Sanborn maps of 1894-1901 and described by early citizens in pioneer narratives. While Okmulgee was designated the capital of the Creek Nation in 1868, few Creeks chose to live in the town itself, preferring instead to live on individual farm plots. By 1890, Okmulgee's population consisted of only 136 people, most of whom, according to pioneer narratives, were Indians and blacks who lived in log cabins and small frame houses. Promotional literature at the turn of the century referred to "Indian cabins and Negro shanties" as the predominate residences of the preceding decades. The notable exception was the hotel and residence of Silas Smith, Okmulgee's first citizen (spring, 1868). Smith built his hotel by 1869 and he and his first wife resided in a separate frame dwelling on the adjacent lot by 1870 (Nicholson, 1870). It is not known if these were the same buildings owned by the Smiths and shown in the 1892-1901 Sanborn maps. The hotel, which was gone from the site by 1907, served whites, blacks and Indians alike and was used primarily during the Creek tribal meetings and visitations by members of Indian commissions.

To be eligible for the National Register, buildings from this period must retain integrity of design and materials. None of the Domestic buildings depicted on pre-1901 Sanborn maps of the original townsite are known to survive today. However, some farm houses in older, adjacent additions may date from this period, particularly in South and East Okmulgee. Their agricultural associations have been obscured by subsequent

residential development that surrounded them in the building boom that followed the arrival of the railroad in 1900, but early city directories indicate that a number of residents in those areas were farmers. Further investigation may reveal the existence of domestic buildings associated with Okmulgee's black heritage that pre-date the post-1900 urbanization of the town.

#### b. National Folk and Folk Victorian Domestic Architecture

Early urban development in the black community was inspired by an influx of energetic new settlers, some of whom arrived in the Unassigned Lands as early as the land rush of 1889. From there, Blacks dispersed throughout the region and many found their way to Indian Territory. Among them were a significant number of professional, skilled tradesmen and businessmen. They may have been drawn to Okmulgee's established base community of pioneer and Creek Freedmen but certainly to the possibilities inherent in a burgeoning frontier town. Black and white pioneers alike observed that Okmulgee's pre-railroad population consisted largely of blacks and Indians. That so many blacks lived in the original townsite of Okmulgee prompted newly-arrived Southern whites to form a separate community, known as the White Settlement, to the east of the railroad depot. However, continued white immigration to Okmulgee swelled and soon outstripped that of blacks in the first decade of this century, allowing whites to assume control of the central business district surrounding the town square. Segregationist policies prevailed from that time forward although some areas in the original townsite, particularly around Central and Second streets, remained racially mixed to the present. The increased numbers of blacks, though, necessitated new and separate housing. From 1904 forward, residential additions were developed exclusively for blacks. Scores of vernacular domestic houses were built during this period

A relatively large number of late Victorian-era domestic buildings were constructed near black churches built in the northern and northeastern sections and additions of the city in the early years of this century. Houses that survive from this period include a number of modest L-plan or Modified L-plan Queen Anne-influenced designs of the folk-Victorian variety that display decorative elements such as fishscale shingles in the gables, jig-sawn balustrades and turned porch posts. Examples within Okmulgee's black neighborhoods include the Gamble House (ca. 1910) at 523 N. Muskogee, the Spencer Adams House (AKA Presbyterian Manse) (ca.

1910) at 801 N. Muskogee, and the Melvina Roper Simpkins House (ca. 1903) at 1101 E. Third St., which appears to have been moved to its present site about 1925. Vernacular houses predominate from this period and include 1- and 2-bay and double-pen (side-gabled, two-room) shotgun houses. The Carroll House (ca. 1910) at the southeast corner of E. Fifth and Severs streets, in a predominantly commercial district, is a good example of the vernacular domestic architecture typical of black residential neighborhoods of the period. Many small houses, originally constructed on residential streets in East Okmulgee in the 1900s were later replaced by larger, more substantial houses as their owners' financial status improved. Because vernacular houses span all phases of Okmulgee's development, they are difficult to categorize by period. There may be a good number of small, wood-frame houses that survive from the Victorian era in the city's historic black neighborhoods.

Virtually all dwellings related to Okmulgee's black communities during this period are of wood-framed construction with weatherboard siding and pier and beam foundations. The addition of asphalt or asbestos shingles, vinyl or aluminum siding is common and in some cases, brick or stone veneers have covered or replaced the original siding. Simple gable or hipped roofs predominate among project-related houses in Okmulgee. Modified L-plan houses possess more complex roof forms, some with central hipped roofs intersected by gable extensions or dormers. Roofing materials consist principally of composition shingles. Porches, particularly on the principal facade, are an integral design feature for houses of this period. Many, however, have had their original decorative wooden porch posts replaced with 4" x 4" square beams, wrought iron or aluminum post supports. Typical fenestration patterns include single 1/1 double hung windows, although widened or aluminum replacement windows are commonly found in addition to the remaining originals. No High Style, Victorian-era houses associated with Okmulgee's black heritage are known to exist in the city.

#### c. Subtype: Shotgun Houses (pre-1900 - 1929)

Shotgun houses are among the most pervasive dwelling types associated with urban blacks in the South, dating from antebellum times, through the Reconstruction era and continuing throughout the first half of this century. They are one of the most easily identified of all vernacular housing forms, distinguished by their

elongated plan: one room wide and two to four rooms deep. The name is derived from the adage that if a shotgun were fired facing the front room, it would pass through all the rooms of the house before exiting. There are a number of theories regarding the evolution of the shotgun house including John Michael Vlach's contention that they have roots in native African and West Indies housing types. Others assert that shotgun houses took their form merely because a builder could squeeze more of the narrow dwellings on a blockface. Shotgun houses were typically rental properties and builders and landlords alike could realize a larger return on their investment with this housing type due to the greater number of rental properties on a parcel of land. Shotgun houses were also built by Quaker societies and other benevolent organizations in the postbellum period to provide low-cost housing for the thousands of freed blacks left homeless after their emancipation. Regardless of motive, the small houses certainly filled the shelter needs for people of very limited means in the post-bellum era.

Shotgun houses served early black communities in Okmulgee much as log cabins served pioneer whites and, in the case of the Creeks, native Americans. Early Sanborn maps show scores of these small, narrow houses scattered throughout Okmulgee in the last decade of the 19th century and in what became exclusively black neighborhoods during the first decades of the 20th century. The "Negro shanties" of which early Okmulgee writers spoke, were, most likely, shotgun derivatives. In many cases, the first houses occupied by blacks upon moving to Okmulgee were of the shotgun variety. Sanborn maps drawn in 1911 show scores of shotgun houses in black neighborhoods and in the 600 block of E. Fifth Street. As black families prospered in the Okmulgee of the 1910s and 1920s, it was not unusual for them to demolish the shotgun house and replace it with a larger, more substantial house on the site, just as early white pioneer families quit their cabins when they had the means to build a "real" house.

Shotgun houses are typically one- or two-bay, front-gabled dwellings with an attached porch, supported by wooden posts, spanning the width of the house. Virtually all are of wood-frame construction with clapboard siding and pier and beam foundations. Although their low cost and utilitarian function precluded elaborate ornamentation, shotgun houses are occasionally found with turned porch posts with decorative braces and balustrades. Some early shotgun houses may display embellishments common to Folk Victorian houses or have

classically-inspired columns. Most of the extant shotgun houses in Okmulgee, however, are modestly detailed with little or no stylistic ornamentation. Some have had their original porch posts replaced with wrought iron or wooden four-by-four supports. Other alterations include the application of asphalt or other synthetic siding.

While a number of shotgun houses survive in Okmulgee's historically black neighborhoods, many are vacant, boarded up or slated for demolition. Few civic leaders recognize the merits of their preservation. In fact, black civic leaders are often among the first to suggest their demolition, recalling them as "Neo-slave cabins", vestiges of an impoverished past. Nevertheless, shotgun houses served a vital need for inexpensive mass housing during a challenging period of American history.

#### Popular American Movements in Domestic Buildings (1910-1930)

Domestic architecture within Okmulgee's historic black neighborhoods changed significantly during the period of oil discoveries and the local prosperity they engendered, in the second and third decades of the 20th century. As land adjacent to the original townsite was platted for suburban expansion from 1904 forward, hundreds of Popular-type houses were constructed in the many new additions developed exclusively for black families. In addition, many of these types of dwellings replaced smaller frame houses, such as shotgun houses, in the older sections of the original townsite as black families began to share in the prosperity of the region. The result was that Popular plan houses proliferated in the many new residential additions and as infill housing in the original townsite. Today they constitute the bulk of domestic architectural styles associated with Okmulgee's black communities.

Single-story Bungalows and box-like Four-Square houses and their variants, are the predominant manifestations of the Popular plan throughout Okmulgee's black neighborhoods during the 1910s and 1920s and they are discussed separately. The Arts and Crafts movement in popular architecture found expression in these Okmulgee houses and several extant bungalows, particularly in East Okmulgee, display Craftsman features in their exterior woodwork.

#### **a. Bungalows and Craftsman Influences**

The Bungalows of the 1910s and 1920s represented the ideal American lifestyle as promoted by real estate developers, civic boosters, politicians and the popular press: modern, efficient, and practical. The popularity of the bungalow was nearly universal for families of moderate means throughout the country and its appeal crossed social and racial boundaries. It had no class associations such as those attributed to the grandiose styles of the Victorian era or the shotgun houses of the urban South and perhaps it was this egalitarian appeal that made the bungalow the house of choice for millions of immigrant and ethnic minority families across the country. It provided a means to join the larger American society. Bungalows came into vogue during the peak years of Okmulgee's black community and commercial development, between about 1913 and 1930, and as result, they are the most prevalent housing type found in the town's black neighborhoods.

Because bungalows are the most common subtype of 20th century Domestic Buildings, it may be useful to further define subgroups of this house form. A classification system devised by McAlester and McAlester (1986) categorizes the ubiquitous bungalow house form by roof type: side-gabled, cross-gabled, front-gabled and hip-roofed bungalows. Bungalows are typically one-story houses with low-pitched roofs and wide overhanging eaves. Craftsman features are often found in the interior treatment of bungalows but exterior details include decorative woodwork, particularly in the porch elements and exposed rafter beams. Auto garages at the rear of suburban lots reflected the new mobility and independence of the American middle- and working-class families.

#### **b. Four-Square Dwellings**

Four-Square dwellings share some of the basic design elements of bungalows such as the use of materials, spatial economy, and simple detailing. Examples of the Four-Square plan type, also known as the American Four Square, are found in Okmulgee's black communities but to a lesser degree than the pervasive bungalow and vernacular houses. One of the few examples of Four Square houses associated with the city's

black heritage is the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church parish house, at 806 E. Third Street in East Okmulgee. Resident priests also served St. Anthony's Catholic Church, a white Catholic congregation in Okmulgee. Therefore, the connection with the black community is rather tangential. The house is now a private residence within the predominantly black neighborhood. The traditional Four-Square is nearly always two stories in height and gives a cube-like appearance. The Four-Square usually features wood-frame construction with weatherboard siding but occasionally it appears clad with brick. Typically the roof is a medium-pitched hip roof, often punctuated with a central, "dog house" dormer, with wide overhangs and boxed eaves. Most local examples have modest, classically-inspired detailing, particularly evident in the 1-story porches which usually feature Doric or Tuscan columns. The off-center front entrance may have a multi-paned transom and sidelights and 1/1 double hung windows with wood sash.

Typical alterations include the application of synthetic siding and aluminum-framed windows or the replacement of original windows with those of a different size. Porches commonly suffer from alterations through the replacement of wooden columns with wrought iron porch supports and wood floors with cement and, in some cases, the removal or replacement of the entire porch itself with small entry stoops. The house at 1022 E. Second Street, in East Okmulgee is an example of a Four Square variant that has been altered in nearly all these ways: its original porch has been replaced with a shorter, off-center stoop and a cement floor, its porch columns have been replaced by wrought iron supports, and one of its windows has been enlarged while a second has been replaced with a smaller window. The house does retain its original siding. The Uganda Martyrs parish house, on the other hand, is a good example of a relatively intact Four Square, as it retains its original materials and design to a remarkable degree.

### Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

#### a. Classical and Neo-Classical Revival

Classical inspiration in housing styles gained popularity in Okmulgee during the prosperity-driven construction boom of the 1910s and continued to influence styles through 1920s. Such inspiration found expression in the many outstanding Classical Revival, Georgian Revival, Colonial Revival and Renaissance



Revival houses of the period located throughout the city. Revival styles identified in Okmulgee's black community are limited to Classical or Neoclassical interpretations. Classical Revival dwellings incorporate such elements as symmetrical facades, temple fronts and pediments, and classical order colonnades. Although most Classical Revival dwellings in Okmulgee's black communities are simple, single story houses with hip roofs and full-width porches supported by square columns, a few more elaborate examples are substantial two story houses with imposing porticos and detailing. these latter were usually built by prominent citizens as symbols of their stature in the community.

The C. E. House at the northwest corner of Second and Central streets is one of the most noteworthy examples of Classical Revival domestic architecture in Okmulgee. The house, with dual 2-story pedimented porticos, is grandly sited on its corner lot which is well-suited to display the two entries. The porticos were originally supported by two sets of Doric columns and connected by a 1-story wrap-around porch that followed the curvature of the corner bay, but part of the porch was removed and the remainder modified sometime in the past. The columns on the first story were truncated and placed on limestone piers. It is possible that this change occurred in the 1920s or 1930s as it lends a bungalowsque aspect to the house.

A more modest version of a classically inspired dwelling is the Evans House at 820 N. Porter. the dominant feature of the house is the oversized pedimented central dormer that extends from the sloping front facade of the side-gabled roof. The dormer lends a stately air to an otherwise simply detailed dwelling. The Doric porch columns further enhance the classical features of the house while the bay on the north side is an eclectic touch.

High Style revivals such as Mission Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival and Renaissance Revival exist in Okmulgee but they are more commonly found in the white subdivisions to the northwest and south of the original townsite that were developed after the discovery of nearby oil fields brought prosperity to the region. Substantial bungalows and their variants were more common among the prosperous black middle- and professional class families during that time and today they comprise the bulk of the domestic architecture associated with that community.

## PROPERTY TYPE: COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Following residential properties, commercial buildings comprise the second largest category of properties associated with Okmulgee's historic black community. A separate and distinct black commercial district emerged along E. Fifth Street, parallel to and immediately north of the main commercial street of the city, during the halcyon years of the oil boom. The collection of extant, 2-story brick commercial buildings constitutes a significant architectural reminder of Okmulgee's black heritage.

Immediately upon its selection as the Creek National capital, Okmulgee was recognized as a likely location for commercial enterprise and businessmen erected several general mercantile stores in the fledgling town within months of its establishment in 1868. Due to the nature of Creek settlement patterns, however, full-fledged commercial and residential development did not occur in Okmulgee until sufficient numbers of white and black settlers, encouraged by land promoters and booster organizations, flocked to the Nation in the late 19th and early 20th century. It is known that Okmulgee's early black citizens, some of whom were Creek Freedmen or married to Freedmen, engaged in commercial activities prior to the turn of the century as evidenced by Silas Smith's hotel and Charley Sneed's gambling parlor, but no properties associated with blacks are known to exist from that period.

It was after the arrival of the railroad in 1901, following increased immigration to Okmulgee, that blacks began to build significant numbers of commercial buildings. One of the earliest commercial buildings to survive from the post-railroad era boom is the Romanesque Revival 1902 Key Building, at 200 N. Morton Street. Sixth Street, fronting the town square, became the principal commercial artery in the first decade following the railroad and among the many frame and masonry commercial buildings erected along the street were a number that were built or owned by blacks. Today, only two, the 1914 W.S. Sneed buildings at 617 and 619 E. Sixth Street, are extant. As Okmulgee's role in regional trade increased with the important oil discoveries of the late 1900s and 1910s, whites took over the prime commercial locations along Sixth Street.

Most black retail and service-related businesses disappeared from important Sixth Street locations by 1910, but they quickly reappeared in the 300-700 blocks of E. Fifth Street. The commercial district that emerged was something of an exception to the trend away from central-city black development. By 1911, Okmulgee had a thriving, full-service black commercial district on E. Fifth Street, comprised primarily of 1- and 2-story wood-framed buildings. Beginning in 1913, most of these early frame buildings were replaced and upgraded with substantial brick buildings in keeping with the influx of oil-related capital to the city.

The second wave of commercial development associated with the black community resulted in an impressive collection of 2-story, brick commercial buildings, dating from 1913 through 1925. Because of its strategic location in the heart of a regional commercial hub, Okmulgee's Fifth Street businesses drew its customers not only from the black citizens townspeople of Okmulgee, but from the surrounding farms and smaller towns in Okmulgee County, as well. Today, this collection of relatively intact commercial buildings constitutes one of the most significant groupings of historic buildings associated with Okmulgee's black community.

The commercial building types associated with Okmulgee's historic black community are identified by function, form, and stylistic features. They include grocery stores and other small retail enterprises situated in residential areas and professional office buildings in the central business district, including those on E. Fifth Street. No warehouses or industrial buildings identified solely with Okmulgee's black community were identified. Historic commercial building forms consisted of three types: small, 1-story frame structures containing only one or two rooms; 2-story brick row buildings with storefronts on the street level and offices or residences upstairs; and substantial, medium-rise, full-block brick office buildings. The E. Fifth Street commercial buildings constitute the largest number of commercial buildings associated with Okmulgee's black heritage. They were built primarily by professional men who maintained their own offices in the buildings and rented the remaining space to other professionals and retailers. Often the second story was rented for residential use and this mixed office/retail and residential use affected the form of the buildings. For example, inset window walls were common design features that brought light into what would otherwise be dark apartments on the upper floors.

By the mid-1900s, E. Fifth Street emerged as the principal commercial district serving blacks in the city. The initial frame storefronts offered a full range of shopping and service options to Okmulgee's large black community. Retail buildings contained shoe and clothing stores, general merchandise and grocery stores and a tire shop. Professional space included offices for doctors, dentists, pharmacists, undertakers and realtors, and personal services such as barber shops. They also served as entertainment centers, housing restaurants, a dance hall and at least one movie theater. Retail shops, restaurants and other businesses that encouraged walk-in traffic usually operated from the first floor while offices and residences typically occupied the upper floors.

The earliest commercial buildings were relatively simple in design and construction. According to pioneer accounts, some of the first commercial enterprises operated from tents or lean-to shacks and it is likely that some of these belonged to blacks. By 1911, while Sixth Street was the acknowledged commercial center for Okmulgee as a whole and included black-operated businesses such as the Owl Drug Store, half a dozen black businesses had opened on E. Fifth Street. The 1911 Sanborn map shows a grocery, meat market, barber shop and three restaurants in the 600 block of E. Fifth Street alone. As early as 1913, brick commercial buildings began to be constructed on E. Fifth Street, a development that indicated increased prosperity within the black community.

Nearly all the surviving historic commercial architecture in Okmulgee's central business district dating from the first quarter of the 20th century is of masonry construction with red or yellow brick predominating. Often the principal facade was faced with a better quality brick than the less visible side and rear facades. The face brick was most commonly laid in a running bond but some buildings had groupings of six rows of running bond separated by a single header course. Several buildings utilized sandstone or limestone in their construction. Limestone and cast-stone detailing as well as decorative brick parapets often highlight the window and door frames. Glass display windows typically dominate the storefronts although many have been boarded up or filled in with brick. Decorative embellishments were confined to the street facades and include simplified geometric patterns created with bricks or tiles. Cast-cement coping along parapet walls were also common. Several one-story, wood-frame buildings from the historic period remain on E. Fifth Street in the shadows of the larger brick buildings. The surviving examples of frame commercial buildings more resemble residences

than typical commercial buildings of the period between 1910 and 1925, when the bulk of development occurred. Some, like the H and H Cab. Company building, at 501 E. Fifth Street, have braces under the eaves similar to bungalows of the period.

The majority of historic commercial buildings associated with Okmulgee's black heritage do not embody a distinct architectural style and might best be defined as "Early commercial", as Meachem and Associates have categorized other, similar commercial buildings in the area. The 1902 Key Block, however, incorporates Romanesque features displayed in its round arched windows that blends in with other buildings in its immediate vicinity including the old City Hall. The Sneed buildings on E. Sixth Street and the E. Fifth Street buildings, comprise the greatest number of commercial buildings associated with black heritage in the city, are primarily simple vernacular commercial buildings, most often embellished with paired rectangular windows and patterned brickwork, but otherwise relatively plain. The 1919 Key Block, one of the later commercial buildings and the only one constructed for white occupation, displayed a more sophisticated design than those built on E. Fifth Street. The 1919 Key Block is a three-story, red-brick commercial building that employs Classical Revival details to include wooden pilasters framing window surrounds, and brackets under false eaves.

To be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as contributing structures in residential districts, commercial buildings must retain integrity of design, materials, location, and association.

## PROPERTY TYPE: INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS

### Educational buildings

According to the county history, the first Dunbar Public School was established in 1901. A frame building is depicted on the 1911 Sanborn map, as Dunbar Negro School. The frame building became Banneker School, an elementary school, when a brick high school named Dunbar High School was built across the street from the original frame building. Local sources claim that part of the old Attucks School, built in 1922, is

incorporated within the current Head Start building. With this possible exception, no examples of public schools for blacks survive in Okmulgee. However, a black church school associated with the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church in East Okmulgee is extant. The 2-story brick Uganda Martyrs School, erected in 1927 in the same block as the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church, was originally constructed as a 3-story brick structure but fire destroyed the top floor. The windows have been altered by replacing the original lights with smaller ones and bricking in the remaining space.

As the new citizens of Oklahoma and Indian territories approached the possibility of statehood, ultimately granted to the combined territories as the State of Oklahoma in 1907, the segregationist policies of the post-Reconstruction era South became more firmly entrenched with every wave of white immigration that settled in the territory. Even prior to statehood, the many Southern whites who moved to the region determined that Okmulgee would have separate institutions for its white and black citizens in those instances that necessitated prolonged or intimate contact among people. In addition to churches, schools, and fraternal lodges, Okmulgee's large black population warranted the construction of a separate hospital, library, and park to serve its black citizens. All such buildings were constructed within the established black sections of Okmulgee. Those services generally provided by municipal or state government remained segregated until they were declared unconstitutional by Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s. The schools, parks and other separate facilities that served the black community so well throughout the period of segregation became casualties of integration. One by one the separate schools and libraries were closed and then demolished. Today, few remnants of the separate system survive except in those cases where segregation was not mandated by law, such as churches. One notable exception is the old black hospital (N.R. 1984) and another is Uganda Martyrs School, a parochial school associated with Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church. Neither retain their original functions, however, although the hospital serves as offices for social service organizations. The remainder of the extant institutional buildings associated with Okmulgee's black communities include the many neighborhood churches.

### Religious buildings

Churches were among the first public buildings erected by the black citizens Okmulgee. The earliest Sanborn maps of the town, drawn in 1894, 1896 and 1898, depict two churches, a Colored Baptist and an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.), designated for blacks. Significantly, there were no buildings designated for whites at that time. This is another indication of the relative size of Okmulgee's black population prior to the turn of the century. The churches also did double duty as schools for black children at different times. Both churches were small, single story, frame structures consisting of only one or two rooms. After the arrival of the railroad and the influx of white immigrants to Okmulgee, both of these black congregations, whose churches were originally located near the town square, sold their properties to whites and established new sanctuaries further removed from the central business district.

As Okmulgee's black communities spread to the fledgling additions and black residential sections to the north, northeast and south of town, scores of neighborhood churches were built to serve the spiritual needs of these new residents. Most of these original church buildings were simple, one story, frame sanctuaries similar to those depicted in the earliest Sanborn maps of the area. Such churches were usually built in or near existing black communities from which they drew their members but the establishment of churches also served to draw subsequent residential development to the surrounding areas. Several early frame churches survive in Okmulgee. Noteworthy among them are the Franklin United Methodist Church, built about 1905, at 1001 E. Third Street, and the Church of the Living God, built about 1915, at the corner of Smith and Woods Avenue. Both are simple frame churches with weatherboard or drop siding and short, wood-sided steeples set on steeply pitched roofs, and exposed rafter beams. They are typical of the vernacular churches that sprang up in semi-rural neighborhoods of the early 20th century throughout the country.

As black congregations expanded in the decade following the discovery of oil, several of Okmulgee's largest replaced their frame churches with monuments of brick or stone that symbolized the importance of the churches to their congregations as well as the prosperity of their members. Both the First Baptist Church (Central) (NR 1984) and the Eastside Baptist Church (NR 1984), reflect these patterns. First Baptist Central, built in 1915 at the corner of First and Central streets, grew from the small frame church that served the first

black Baptists in Okmulgee since 1892. The Eastside Baptist Church, built in 1921 at the corner of Second and Osage streets, sprang from the Zion Bethel Baptist group that gathered in a private residence on the site as early as 1903, when blacks were expanding their residential neighborhoods to the east of the town. Both of the current buildings were constructed during the peak of Okmulgee's black community and commercial development and reflect the relative prosperity of their communities at that time. Both churches are 2-story, red brick structures with multiple windows and decorative elements reminiscent of the Gothic Revival style.

Churches in Okmulgee's historic black communities are consistently found on corner sites, as are First Baptist Central, Eastside Baptist, Franklin United Methodist, Shorter Chapel A.M.E., Cleaves Memorial and the Church of the Living God. Traditionally, churches are built in a rectangular, basilica configuration. Most employ some elements of the Gothic Revival style with flanking, center or side tower steeples and Tudor or lancet arches.

The National Register of Historic Places allows listing of churches only if they are outstanding examples of an architectural style or significantly associated with the work of an important architect, incorporate significant art work, have special historical significance beyond their function as houses of worship, or associated with the history of ethnic groups and reflect important historical trends such as segregation. Churches can be contributing structures in historic districts as long as they retain integrity of design, materials, and location.

#### PROPERTY TYPE: SOCIAL

Only one social hall, the Masonic Lodge at 503 E. Fifth Street (ca. 1920), has been identified in conjunction with Okmulgee's historic black community although a number of other social and fraternal organizations enjoyed substantial support in the community as early as the mid-1910s. James Roper, Okmulgee's black postmaster (1898-1901), was described as a Mason in a 1901 account, lending credence to the organization's early roots in the community. Although city directories did not always list black social organizations and fraternal groups, a 1916 edition of the black newspaper, the Okmulgee Light, recorded the activities of the following black lodges: Mt. Hope Lodge, Western Empire Lodge, Zenith Lodge, Friendship



Lodge, Reynolds Delight Temple, and Acme Lodge. The number of different organizations indicates a substantial membership in such societies at that time. According to local accounts, many black social and fraternal groups met in private residences and at churches.

The side and rear facades of Okmulgee's 2-story, black Masonic Lodge was constructed of concrete block while the primary facade, fronting E. Fifth Street, was faced with red brick. It appears that the building was originally constructed as a 1-story brick-and-concrete block building and the second story was added later. The paired upper windows retain their wood-framed double hung windows while the windows and doors on the ground floor have been altered. The masonic symbol is prominently displayed in the center of the building just below the parapet wall. To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, social halls must retain integrity of design, materials, and location.

#### PROPERTY TYPE: LANDSCAPE

Okmulgee has one park, designated as Simon Park on old city maps but also known as Bullock's Park, that is primarily associated with its black community. Located at the southwest corner of Muskogee and First streets, across from Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church (razed), the park served the adjacent black communities in the north-central section of the city and the newer black additions further north and east. The park was built and operated by James and Lillie Bullock and contained a full-sized swimming pool, a miniature golf course, a recreation hall and a concessions building. Today, the park retains some playground equipment but the swimming pool has been filled in. The miniature golf course, recreation hall and concessions building are no longer extant.

Landscape features expected in association with Okmulgee's historic black community include city parks and their "furniture". To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as contributing elements in historic districts or as individual properties, landscape elements must possess integrity of location, setting, and association. Objects such as gateway arches, statuary and fountains must also possess integrity of design and materials.

## PROPERTY TYPE: AGRICULTURAL

Although much of the area surrounding the original townsite of Okmulgee was under cultivation well into the 20th century, no known agricultural buildings associated with Okmulgee's black populace were identified in the project area. Exceptions may include some residences in East and South Okmulgee whose early occupants were listed as "farmers" in city directories as late as 1920. It is probable that farm houses were simply incorporated in the suburban development that spread from the center of town in the 1900s and 1910s. One such house is the Artra and Roxanna Sneed House at 1102 E. Second Street, which has been positively dated to 1909 (city directory), and is possibly earlier than that. Through the 1918 city directories, the Sneeds, who were both Creek Freedmen with allotments north of the townsite, were listed as farmers. The extant Sneed House is a small, one-story frame house whose details and grounds are obscured by extensive foliage and undergrowth.

Another extant building known to be agriculture-related is the warehouse building in the 800 block of E. Second Street between Comanche and Choctaw streets. The building appeared on the 1911 Sanborn maps as a one story "Baled Hay Barn and Warehouse" of masonry construction. Part of the building is in ruins but appears to remain in use today. Whether it has historic associations with Okmulgee's black community is not known. Although it is located in a section now considered to be within the historic black neighborhood as late as 1911, the occupants of the immediate area were white. Further investigation is needed before any conclusions can be made with regard to this building's significance.

Agricultural properties that might be expected in association with Okmulgee's black community could include farm houses, barns, chicken coops, smoke houses or other farm-related outbuildings, and buildings associated with cotton production and processing such as gins, warehouses, and cottonseed mills. To be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, agricultural properties must possess integrity of design, materials and setting.

## HISTORIC CONTEXT: BLACK HERITAGE THEME

"From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men:

Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy (1878-1929)"

### Introduction

Okmulgee, Oklahoma has a unique and fascinating black heritage due, in large part, to its early settlement by freed slaves of the Creek Indians. Approximately 1,000 slaves and an unknown number of blacks of African descent accompanied the Creek Indians when they were forced to leave their traditional homes in Alabama and Georgia for Indian Territory, in the present state of Oklahoma, in the mid-1830s. After the Civil War, former slaves of Creek Indians were adopted into the tribe and became known as Creek Freedmen. Freedmen were among the first citizens of Okmulgee, which was founded in 1868 as the Creek capital and subsequently became a regional center of trade. The Creek Freedmen were joined by other blacks who migrated from their homes in the South to search for better opportunities in the West, during the 1880s and 1890s.

Although Okmulgee had a population of less than 400 people in 1894, the black community was large enough to support two churches and a church-school. Within the decade, the opening of Indian lands, coupled with the arrival of the railroad and discovery of oil, brought thousands of people - black and white - to Okmulgee County to take advantage of the economic opportunities of its development. Almost overnight the town was transformed from a bucolic trading center to a bustling boom town.

Evidence of black contributions to the development of the early city is compelling and deserving of recognition. Many of the earliest additions to the city were developed for black families and were carved from the allotments of land given to Creek Freedmen when the tribal lands were divided. In addition to the collection of commercial buildings that comprised the black business district on E. Fifth Street, black developers and entrepreneurs built a number of early commercial structures that were subsequently appropriated by whites and their origins forgotten. Several such buildings have been identified in this context but others may exist.

While many of the earliest dwellings, churches, and schools associated with Okmulgee's black community have been demolished, altered or incorporated into newer buildings, enough survives of the historic built environment to illustrate the extraordinary development of a vital and vigorous community dedicated to the betterment of its people. Significant examples of commercial structures along E. Fifth Street are among the most obvious of the community's early historic buildings, followed by individual houses of early black citizens. Good examples of early 20th century residential buildings are found along N. Central, N. Muskogee, and N. Porter streets, in North Okmulgee, and on E. First, E. Second and E. Third streets in East Okmulgee. Outstanding ecclesiastical structures, such as the First Baptist Church (Central) (NR 1984), East Side Baptist Church (NR 1984), and the ca. 1927 Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church (figure 4), attest to the importance of religious life within the black community. The Okmulgee Black Hospital (NR 1984), a relic of racial segregation, is one of the few surviving historic institutional buildings associated with Okmulgee's black community. A single parochial school affiliated with Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church survives, though altered, and part of Attucks School has been incorporated into the current Head Start facility.

The earliest known dwellings associated with the black community can only be tentatively dated to 1907. They are two frame houses located at 600 and 604 E. Fifth Street (figure 20), in the midst of what became the most important black commercial district in the city. Few residences are believed to pre-date 1901, but other early dwellings are located on or around N. Central, N. Muskogee, and N. Porter, in the blocks north of Second Street, and on E. Second and E. Third streets in East Okmulgee. Most of these early dwellings date from the 1910s and 1920s when oil discoveries fueled the rapid development of both white and black residential and commercial properties in Okmulgee. Some of the earliest dwellings, particularly those found in East Okmulgee, may be associated with agricultural endeavors that pre-date the period of rapid urbanization that enveloped the area in the 1910s.

Although Okmulgee's black residents accounted for more than a third of Okmulgee's total population in 1910, white immigration outstripped that of blacks in the following decade. Following the oil, gas and mineral discoveries of the late 1900s and through the 1910s, Okmulgee's black population was reduced to about 19% of the town's total by 1920 (OHS, Black Baptist Churches TR, 1984). There was a corresponding reduction in

black influence in city affairs as well as the entrenchment of racial segregation in both the residential and commercial sectors of the town. Blacks retreated from Sixth Street, in the central business district, and established a new, separate commercial district on E. Fifth Street during the mid-1910s. In addition, the re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was particularly evident in Oklahoma and Okmulgee County reported a number of violent incidents attributed to the Klan. Growing racial intolerance, coupled with the 1921 burning of Tulsa's black neighborhoods, cast a pall on the aspirations of blacks in nearby Okmulgee. The town's black citizens focused their attention inward to their separate institutions, commercial enterprises and community life.

The period of significance for Okmulgee's historic black communities extends from the construction of the Creek Council House (NR 1966, NHL) in 1878, to the end of the town's oil-related prosperity, about 1929. The period encompasses the known buildings and sites associated with Okmulgee's black citizenry during the historic period. It begins with the earliest extant building associated with the Creek Nation and concludes at a time when a glut in the oil market and the approach of the Great Depression brought a halt to construction in the city for both blacks and whites.

The context examines the association of blacks with the Creek Nation and their removal with the tribe to Indian Territory, the first black citizens of Okmulgee and the impact Creek Freedmen had on the town's early development, the influx of black pioneers to Indian Territory and the initial development of black residential additions, and the establishment of a thriving but separate black society during the oil-boom years of the 1910s and 1920s.

#### Indian Territory: 1832-1860

Okmulgee's early African American heritage is virtually inseparable from that of the Creek Indians, one of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes of native Americans who were forced to leave their traditional homes in Alabama and Georgia in the mid-1830s. After a torturous overland journey that became known as the "Trail of Tears", the southeastern natives were left to establish new homes in Indian Territory, a portion of present eastern Oklahoma. Indian Territory was divided into separate nations to accommodate the different tribes - the

Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees and Seminoles - who were relocated. Among the 22,694 Creeks who were counted in a pre-removal census taken in 1833, there were 902 slaves and an unknown number of free blacks of African descent (Green, 1973:58). Although some Creeks left for Indian Territory as early as 1832, most traveled the infamous "Trail of Tears" during the winter of 1836-37. When the Creeks arrived at Fort Gibson in the spring of 1837, more than 3,500 of their people had perished during the arduous cross-country trek. It is not known how many blacks were among the dead but it must be assumed that they suffered similarly.

Although slavery existed in each of the Five Civilized Tribes, both prior to their removal and upon resettlement in Indian Territory, the treatment and condition of Indian slaves varied from one tribe to another. According to most sources, the Creeks and their Seminole cousins practiced a "milder" form of slavery than the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws. Angie Debo described early Creek/slave relations in her book The Road To Disappearance:

Except on the plantations of a few mixed bloods, slavery rested very lightly upon the Creek negroes. The easy-going Indians found the possession of slaves a great convenience, but they saw no reason to adopt the white man's ruthless system of exploiting and degrading them. The slave was usually expected to perform a certain amount of work for his master and to support his own family by the labors of his free time. Many employed their own time so well that they were able to accumulate property and purchase their freedom (Debo, 1961:115).

One Creek descendant, Martin Smith, recalled family stories about the Creek way of life in Georgia prior to removal. His account appears to corroborate Debo's interpretation of Creek/slave relationships. He recalled:

Our people lived in log houses not unlike those lived in by white families. We grew corn, squash, peas, pumpkins and other vegetables. We raised hay for our livestock, cut it and stored it in barns. Often runaway slaves came to the Creeks knowing we would protect them. Our tribe was open to almost anyone of a peaceful nature. We did keep slaves and many slaves came with our people on the Trail of Tears (Doan, n.d.:31).

According to Donald Green, when the Creeks arrived in the newly-created Indian Territory they first set up temporary lodges covered with bark or skins. Later they began to build houses and clear fields. The Creeks separated into two groups, and those known as the Lower Creeks settled in the northern part of the Creek Nation along the Arkansas and Verdigris Rivers, while those known as the Upper Creeks established towns along the Deep Fork, North Canadian and Canadian Rivers. They named their new settlements after their old

towns in an effort to preserve their culture. With the passage of time, however, individual families tended to settle on farming plots away from the towns. The towns became centers for ceremonies and tribal meetings (Green 1973:50).

Some of the Creeks prospered upon their arrival and established cotton plantations worked by their slaves, especially those associated with the mixed-blood McIntosh group who came to the territory a few years prior to the mass removal in 1836. Most, however, engaged in subsistence farming as they had in their homelands. There are few references to living conditions or circumstances of the slaves during this time but interviews with former Freedmen tend to verify the relatively mild treatment of the slaves by their Creek owners and shed some light on the living conditions of both Indians and their slaves. Ned Thompson, a black man whose grandfather came to Indian Territory with his Creek master in 1832, described the early relationship of Creeks to their slaves:

When the Indians emigrated they brought their negroes with them as they did their property or stock . . . . The only negroes who had to work hard were the ones who belonged to half-breeds. Since the Indian didn't do much work, he didn't expect his slaves to do much. Two acres was a big farm and the Indians would have from 8 to 10 negroes to attend, which was plentiful. The negroes had little log huts with dirt floors around their owner's house. Most of the Indians wouldn't sell their negroes so they had a great many as the negroes usually had big families (Foreman collection, Vol. 112, 1937:179).

Thompson's description of the Creek/slave lifestyle concurs with accepted scholarship and other first-hand observations that most Creeks, particularly full-bloods, lived simply and engaged in subsistence farming. Those Creeks who raised cotton tended to be "mixed-bloods", of mixed Indian and white heritage, and they identified to a greater extent with Southern whites who required slave labor on their plantations.

In addition to creating new housing in Indian Territory, the Creeks quickly set up a code of laws for the new Creek Nation. One law mandated that all non-citizens, i.e. people who were not members of the tribe, were required to obtain Creek consent to live in the territory. Whites had to have special licenses in order to legally conduct business in the Creek Nation but some found it simpler to marry Indian women and be adopted into the tribe. As early as 1841, white missionaries were setting up churches and schools within the nation, despite some objections by tribal leaders.

By 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, a U.S. census was conducted which accidentally included Indian Territory. The census found 8,376 slaves, comprising 14% of the total Indian population, living in the territory at that time (Purdue, 1980:13). Among Creeks, however, blacks probably constituted a much greater percentage of the tribal population than the other tribes because of the higher degree of intermarriage within the tribe (1). There was some ambivalence within the tribe concerning inter-racial marriage, however. Although the Creeks enacted several laws against the practice, inter-racial marriage was quite common and apparently more widely tolerated than among the other four tribes.

### The Civil War and its Aftermath

The Civil War was particularly devastating to the Creek Nation because most of the battles in Indian Territory were fought on their land. The war left the tribe as deeply divided as the United States and the ill-feelings haunted the tribe for many years. After the war, federal officials and representatives of the Five Civilized tribes met at Fort Smith, Arkansas, to work out a peace treaty and deal with the newly emancipated slaves of the tribes. The government argued that since the Indians had sided with the Confederacy (although in fact, they were split in their allegiances -- some 6,000 Creeks attempted to side with the Union or else remained neutral during the hostilities), they had violated the terms of their original treaties. On this basis, all the tribes were forced to accept new treaties that were harsher than the first (Doan, n.d.:42): They were required to relinquish a large part of their western territory for the possible settlement of other Indians, to grant railroad rights-of-way through their nation, and to grant tribal citizenship and allotments of land to their former slaves. This last provision proved unsatisfactory to all five tribes in varying degrees. The Chickasaws and Choctaws preferred to remove blacks from their midst and the Chickasaws ultimately refused to accept blacks as members of their tribe. The government plan, however distasteful to the Indians, provided the newly-freed blacks in Indian Territory with a means of earning a living that helped them avoid the dire poverty suffered by most former slaves in the South (Franklin, 1980:4).

Deeply divided at the end of the war, the Creek Nation settled into two factions, the Confederate sympathizers led by Samuel Checote, and the Union sympathizers led by Oktarsars Harjo (Sands). At that time



there were 47 towns in the Creek Nation, including three settled almost entirely by black freedmen (Doan, n.d.:45). The two factions met in 1867 to reestablish the nation, draw up a new constitution and select a capital at a place they named Okmulgee, after the traditional Creek capital in Georgia.

According to Samuel J. Haynes, a Creek who served as the presiding judge of the Creek national court system (1896-98), the site had several advantages: Much of the Creek population had settled along Okmulgee Creek and it was centrally located in the Creek Nation. It was also closer to supplies than other possible sites (Foreman collection, Vol. 92, 1938:334-341). A Council House, a two-story hewn-log building with a breezeway separating the two legislative chambers, was constructed in Okmulgee in 1868. In 1878, the permanent Council House (NR 1966, NHL), constructed of native stone, replaced the 1868 building on its site (Green, 1973:70).

Once the Council House and National capital was established, however, few Creeks settled in the town itself. In the new Creek tradition the town served more of a ceremonial than residential function. Like other Creek towns in Oklahoma, Okmulgee was little more than a hamlet with a town square. Creek families from the surrounding farms gathered in their towns during traditional festivals and made temporary camp around the square (Green, 1973:78). Okmulgee was little different. In the quarter-century after its founding in 1868, Okmulgee attracted only 136 inhabitants, one hotel, and a handful of stores. Several early white settlers recalled that there were no dwellings in Okmulgee when they arrived (ca. 1890) but they may have simply discounted the several "Indian cabins" with their attendant outbuildings, scattered about the area south of the Council House (Sanborn maps, 1894).

Little is known about the lives of blacks in the Creek Nation during the years between the Civil War and the dissolution of the tribal system in the 1890s. Creek Freedmen and Indians alike lived and farmed in the lands surrounding their towns and life was probably similar for both groups. Among the Creeks were wealthy cattlemen, like Pleasant Porter, who used vast portions of the Creek Nation to graze their herds of cattle, but most Creeks lived on small individual farming plots by the 1880s. Clustered about their log cabins were numerous outbuildings including chicken houses, barns, sheds and corrals (Green, 1973:78).

While Okmulgee served the tribe as its capital and it became a trading center of sorts, few people actually lived in the town (2). It is known, however, that blacks were among the first residents of the town. According to the county history, one of the few houses in the vicinity of the new capital in 1868 was that of a black man named "Uncle Muchie" (Doan, n.d.:48), about whom little is known. Most sources agree that Okmulgee's first resident was a blacksmith named Silas Smith who was sent by the United States government in the spring of 1868 to provide and repair agricultural implements given to the Creeks. Smith is also credited with building the town's first hotel in 1868 (Gideon, 1901:149), alternately known as the Capitol Hotel, Smith Hotel or simply the Okmulgee Hotel, in 1868. Silas Smith is a noteworthy figure in the context of Okmulgee's early black heritage primarily because he was a white man married to a black woman (3). In fact, Smith was married twice, both times to women who were Creek Freedmen. Smith's first wife, Minnie, lived in Okmulgee by 1870 and may have been its first black resident. She and her children were certainly among the earliest inhabitants of Okmulgee, black or white (Creek Freedman rolls, var.).

While the Smiths' inter-racial marriage was noteworthy to white settlers who later recalled them in pioneer histories, it probably was not a detriment to the Smiths while living among Creeks, who had few official sanctions against intermarriage and virtually no social prohibitions against it. Only with statehood, in 1907, was there an attempt to enforce miscegenation laws. Smith lived in Okmulgee for more than four decades and is reputed to have been elected Alderman in the city's first municipal election held in 1901 (Doan, n.d.:741). In one of the first official reports on Okmulgee, written in 1870, William Nicholson, an official with the U.S. Indian Agency, commented on Silas Smith, his wife, and their hotel:

We have boarded since being here with Silas Smith who is a white man but his wife is a colored woman -- Their dwelling and cook house are in the yard and the dining room in under the same roof as our room. Five of us have slept in this one room and sometimes eight during the past fortnight. In the day time and evening our room has frequently been thronged and as the floor is very limber it has been difficult to write much, for both the above reasons . . . (Nicholson, 1870, Sec. X:376).

Nicholson also made the following observation about the instance of intermarriage between the Creeks and Freedmen, during the same trip:

Amongst the Creeks there are many instances of intermixture between the Indian and African races -- Four or five of the delegates are at least half African -- With the other tribes, there is much more of an aversion to a social equality with the colored race -- Indeed with many, there is much the same feeling as exists in our Southern States (Nicholson, 1870, Sec. X:376) (4).

The Creek's tolerance for intermarriage partially explains how the Freedmen came to comprise 33% of the Creek population in 1898 when slaves accounted for less than 5% of their number in 1833 (Washington, 1948:33; comparison of enrollment figures for Creeks and Creek Freedmen).

### Steps to Dissolution

In 1889 the United States government opened the "Unassigned lands" of present-day central Oklahoma to non-Indian settlement. These lands had been part of Indian Territory until 1866 when the government rescinded its previous treaties and took the land back, ostensibly for the relocation of Plains Indians. But after the Plains Indians were settled, nearly two million acres remained. Under pressure from settlers and speculators, this land was opened to non-Indians in the great land rush of April 22, 1889. Within the next decade, one after another of the lands reserved for the Indians were broken up and their members required to take individual allotments of land under the provisions of the Dawes Act of 1887. Former reservations were made part of the Oklahoma Territory. Next, the government put pressure on the Five Civilized Tribes to dissolve their tribal governments and parcel their tribal lands into individual allotments. The first official step in dissolving the Creek Nation began with a survey of the land in 1894 (Green, 1973:82) (5).

By the time Creek lands were being surveyed for allotments and whites began to enter the area in substantial numbers, blacks constituted a significant proportion of the population of Okmulgee and its vicinity. Many were Creek Freedmen who settled in Okmulgee during the 1870s and 1880s. They were joined in the late 1880s and early 1890s by Southern blacks who had begun to migrate to the region once it was opened to non-Indian settlement. These pioneer black settlers sought relief from the drudgery of Southern cotton fields and the abuses of the tenant and sharecrop system. They hoped to find opportunities for economic and social advancement in the West. There was a prevalent belief among Southern blacks at that time that land was free and livestock was plentiful on the open range. These stories, encouraged by real estate promoters and

hucksters, fired the imaginations of young blacks to try their luck on the frontier. Another reason so many blacks fled the South in the post-Reconstruction era was the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the reinstatement of the Democratic Party and repressive racial laws (Washington, 1948:35). When the government opened the "Unassigned Lands" to settlement in 1889, hundreds of blacks took part in the land rush alongside whites. It was during this time, too, that several of the all-black towns such as Boley and Langston were established, and some blacks leaders pursued the possibility of allocating former Indian lands exclusively for settlement by displaced former slaves.

By 1892, there were enough black residents in Okmulgee to establish the first black Baptist Church, the forerunner of the First Baptist Church (Central), in the block immediately northwest of the Council House. A second black church, which also contained a school for black children, was built by 1894 in the block west of the Smith's hotel. The establishment of these early black institutions is significant in light of the fact that Okmulgee was a town of only 200-400 people and there were no white churches or schools depicted on Sanborn maps of Okmulgee until 1901, when a white Methodist church was built (6). In that same year, a third black church was established at the northeast corner of Morton and Second streets (7). By 1900, the combined total of blacks living in Indian and Oklahoma territories exceeded 55,000 (Franklin, 1980:5).

### White Settlement in the Territories

With settlement open to non-citizens in Oklahoma and Indian territories at the close of the 19th century, increasing numbers of white settlers brought their values and social traditions to bear on the inhabitants of Okmulgee. Formerly, the fairly relaxed racial relationships shared by Creek Indians and Freedmen was extended to the early white merchants, many of whom married Creek women to meet the citizenship requirements for operating businesses in the Creek Nation. One pioneer recalled that when she came to Indian Territory with her folks about 1885, whites, Indians and blacks all ate together at Silas Smith's hotel:

When we first came to Okmulgee it had only three stores. Trent and Severs owned a store together; Parkinson had his own store; Captain Belcher operated a post office and Silas Smith was owner of a hotel. Indians, Whites and Colored all ate together in the hotel (Foreman collection, 1938, Vol. 95:27).

Another man found the eating arrangements in Okmulgee worthy of comment:

When they came here [the Dawes Commission] they were in a surrey with spotted horses. There were James Bixby, Senator Kidd, Henry L. Dawes. I was on my way to the school at Okmulgee and stopped to eat at the Smith Hotel (Silas Smith was a white man who had a negro wife). I ate dinner with them at their invitation. Mary McIntosh, who is Mary Childers now, also ate dinner at their table." (Foreman collection, 1937, Vol. 26:353).

Interracial relationships were engendered and maintained in Okmulgee by the town's isolation, but the land rush and approaching railroads made the town accessible to the outside world and particularly to white settlers.

Several early white pioneers recall that Okmulgee had very few residences of any kind at the turn of the century but it is known that a large number of blacks were already living in the community. Again, it could be that white immigrants to Okmulgee did not consider log houses as "residences" by their standards. The earliest Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of the town (1894, 1896, and 1898) noted the racial association of certain buildings including a handful of log "Indian Cabins" scattered in the blocks immediately south of the Council House. Apparently some blacks also lived in log cabins in the early years. The number of churches and schools designated as "Negro" or "Colored" outnumbered those of whites until 1903. From these sources, it appears that more blacks and Creek Indians lived in the town than whites through the 1890s.

Most white observers concur that Okmulgee was largely populated by Creek Indians and blacks before the turn of the century. A narrative by early resident, Charles Brent, described the town as it appeared when he arrived about 1892:

There was a general merchandise store owned by Cap. Severs where the Citizens National Bank is now. One block North was a two story box house or hotel having about six rooms. It was owned by a white man who was also the owner of the blacksmith shop and was the blacksmith. His wife, some called a negro, was a motherly sort of person who really ran the hotel. There was a two room building where the Central National Bank is now that was used for the Post Office. C.C. Belcher was the Postmaster at that time. There were about the same number of Indians and negroes, with a few whites, (Foreman collection, 1937, Vol. 16:180-181).

The narrative of Joe M. Grayson, a Creek Indian, adds to the perception that Okmulgee had a large number of black residents.

I've been to Okmulgee when the Council House was practically all that was there. Negroes had log cabins on Main Street. they almost owned the town at one time, and even had a negro postmaster (8) - that was before allotment but I don't just remember the year. Cap. Severs was there and was supposed to be an Indian but he looked more like a white man (Foreman collection, 1937, Vol. 26:384).

The postmaster mentioned by Grayson was James A. Roper, one of the most significant of Okmulgee's early black pioneers. Roper arrived in Okmulgee from Tennessee on August 20, 1892, but he soon left to teach in the Indian and "colored schools" and was made principal of the Tallahassee Mission after his first year. He returned to Okmulgee when he was appointed postmaster on March 1, 1898 [a post he held through 1901, at the least]. More is known about Roper than many other early black citizens of Okmulgee probably because he served as a public official whose activities were recorded in an early history of the town. However, he was representative of a generation of black professionals and entrepreneurs who made their way to the town in the 1890s and early 1900s. Roper was educated at Meharry Medical College, had previously served as postmaster and Justice of the Peace in Arkansas, and was an accomplished teacher (Gideon, 1901:448). He settled in Okmulgee, married, raised a family, was a founding member of Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church and was active in community affairs until his death in 1936. While his career may appear exceptional for the day, Roper was only one of many bright and ambitious pioneers in Okmulgee's black community. In many respects their accomplishments were overshadowed by the overwhelming numbers of whites who began to move into Indian Territory at the same time.

The ultimate break-up of the Creek tribal lands and the allotment of land parcels to individuals coincided with the arrival of the railroad to Okmulgee in 1901. Both events attracted white inhabitants who did not continue the racial toleration that characterized the early social and physical development of Okmulgee. It is precisely because of its rarity in the white-dominated period after 1900, that interracial marriage and socialization in early Okmulgee was memorable for early white settlers. Unfortunately, part of the baggage that many white immigrants brought to the territories included racial intolerance.

### The Dissolution of the Indian Nations

Under pressure from whites to settle in the Indian lands, the United States government systematically revoked its treaties with the Indians and ultimately undermined the system of sovereign Indian nations and tribal lands for a policy of assimilation and individual land ownership. The Curtis Act of 1898 abolished the tribal court system and required the Indians to accept a plan to divide tribal lands among individual members, known

as allotment. An agreement was reached with the Dawes Commission in 1900 to the effect that, beginning in 1901, each person of the Creek Nation, including blacks, women and children, was to choose a site for a 160-acre allotment of land.

Under the allotment system, full-bloods were assigned a kind of guardianship, ostensibly to protect them from losing their property to "grafters", but which in many cases, treated them as mere children incapable of handling their own affairs. In other cases, their appointed guardians grew wealthy off the Indian while he continued to live a humble life in a log cabin (Green, 1973:90). Mixed-bloods were allowed to sell off their "surplus", i.e. that part of their allotment excluding their 40-acre homestead.

Part of the allotment process included the "enrollment" of tribal members. All citizens of each of the Five Civilized Tribes were required to register with federal authorities and prove their identities as members of their tribes. Individuals were recorded either as Indians or Freedmen and there were many discrepancies, inconsistencies and ambiguities due to mixed black and Indian parentage. Occasionally there were notations in the enrollment records to explain such instances, such as "Creek Freedman of Indian blood" or "Freedman, 3/8 Indian". Because the 5,697 Creek Freedmen made up more than one-third of the total Creek population of 15,878 at the time of enrollment (Washington, 1948:33), they controlled more than one-third of the land allotments given to the tribe.

The result in Okmulgee was that many, if not all, Creek Freedmen, including the Silas Smith and Artra Sneed families, who had settled in or near the town, chose their allotments near or adjacent to the townsite. A comparison of the Hastain township maps shows that Creek Freedmen controlled more acreage in the immediate vicinity of Okmulgee than Creek Indians, and more than would have occurred at random. Although not substantiated, Hastain suggests that Freedmen were more likely to have enrolled earlier than many of the full-bloods because they better understood the economic possibilities of doing so:

The Freedmen were always in sympathy with the Government in its plan to carry out the terms of the treaties. They were the first to enroll and the first to secure allotments. They occupied and farmed the better portion of the Creek domain, while the full-bloods kept to the hills and backwoods. Many of the full-bloods were adverse to the plan of the Government to allot the lands to and among the individual members of the Tribe in severalty and neglected and refused to appear before the Commission, and enroll themselves or their family. As a result the Freedmen secured the better class of land (Hastain, 1910:7).

The allotments of Creek Freedmen were later platted into some of the first additions to the city of Okmulgee. Among these were the additions developed exclusively for blacks. One of the earliest was the Smith Addition (1904) carved from the allotment of Creek Freedman, Rebecca Smith, Silas Smith's second wife. Each of Smith's five children by his first wife and Rebecca Smith's granddaughter, Rebecca Bear, were all listed as Creek Freedmen and received allotments north of the city in 1898 (see Hastain township maps). Roxanna and Artra Sneed, Sr. were members of another Freedman family who secured allotments north of Okmulgee. Although Artra Sneed was enrolled as a Creek Indian, his wife Roxanna and their children were enrolled as Creek Freedmen. Another relative, William Sneed, who built two commercial buildings on E. Sixth Street in 1914, was listed as a Creek Freedman of Indian blood. Other Creek Freedmen who turned their allotments into additions to the city were Floyd Luckey (Luckey Addition, 1923), Julie Doil (Lincoln and Doil additions) and Beckey Murrell (East Side Acres, 1916). Most development in these additions did not take place until the 1910s and 1920s but it is interesting that as Okmulgee became a segregated town, black neighborhoods were carved from the allotments of Creek Freedmen.

A study of the enrollment and allotment records between 1898 and 1902 reveals the great number of residents of Okmulgee and the immediate vicinity, who were of African/Creek descent at the turn of the century. Sanborn maps of Okmulgee for 1898 show little change or growth from the first renderings completed in 1894 and in fact, they show the town's population actually declined by half in the intervening four years (Sanborn maps, 1894-96-98). The permanent residents of Okmulgee at that time included a handful of Creek Indians, several white merchants and a significant number of blacks, many of whom, like Silas Smith's wife and children, were enrolled as Creek Freedmen. At the same time, however, forces were at work that would drastically alter the racial composition of Okmulgee and the Creek Nation.

#### Arrival of the Railroad - 1901

Since the introduction of the railroad in Indian Territory in the 1870s, white intrusion into Indian Territory increased steadily so that by 1898, when Creek land was divided into individual allotments, whites had settled throughout the territory and even established their own communities. Although legally required to



obtain permits to live and work in Indian Territory, many whites ignored this formality as they anticipated poor enforcement and the eventual repeal of the protective laws. They were correct on both counts.

The first railroad tracks did not approach Okmulgee until the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company, later known as the Frisco, arrived in 1901 (Smith, et.al., 1986:12). In a 1959 retrospective of Okmulgee County, the Oklahoma Orbit declared that "Modern history for Okmulgee County began in 1899, after Creek tribal lands were allotted to individuals" (December 6, 1959:8), but additional forces were already determining the direction of that history. One of the provisions of the Treaty of 1866 granted railroad rights-of-way across the Creek Nation and in 1872, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad completed the first line of track along the eastern edge of the Creek Nation. The railroads that followed intruded deeper into Creek territory. Non-citizens opened businesses, leased grazing lands, married Creek women to obtain citizenship, or simply squatted on tribal lands (Green, 1973:82).

### Boom Town

The nearly simultaneous arrival of the railroad in Okmulgee and the discovery of oil near Tulsa, both in 1901, launched the little trading village into a period of phenomenal growth that had an immediate and permanent effect on its physical development. The railroad afforded settlers, both black and white, easy access to the previously isolated Creek capital and they poured into the county seeking opportunities to capitalize on the oil discoveries. From a population of only 200 in the spring of 1901, Okmulgee grew to almost one thousand people in less than a year, and to 1,200 by December, 1901 (Sanborn maps 1894-1901; Gideon, 1901: 151). Promotional literature published in 1901 recalled Okmulgee's humble beginnings but hastened to qualify that the town ". . . is no longer a village of Indian huts and Negro shanties, but it is a hustling, thriving business town of 1,500 people" (Information, 1901:68). By 1905, Okmulgee's population had increased to more than 4,000 inhabitants (Okmulgee Orbit, 1959:8) and the resultant construction boom turned the sleepy little hamlet into a bustling commercial hub almost overnight.

The influx of settlers must have been astounding to the 200 or so mostly Creek Indian and Creek Freedmen residents of the town who were outnumbered within a few months. Among the new settlers were a number of blacks who sought new opportunities in the frontier town. One man recalled the period,

. . . [the] beginning of Okmulgee, was a slow process until the railroad was brought through. They [residents of Okmulgee] were told that the white people were coming to build a city and they waited at the depot and when the train arrived, many white people came. That happened every day until there were hundreds of them. Then one day a train load of negroes came. Everyday more negroes were brought until there were many. These negroes settled along the railroad and in that way the negro settlement was started which is now the east part of Okmulgee (Foreman collection, 1937, Vol. 103:223).

The discovery of petroleum in Indian Territory coming on the heels of tribal dissolution also attracted speculators who flocked to Oklahoma after the turn of the century. As early as 1901, government reports registered concern over the possibility that unscrupulous people would take advantage of Indian allotments for their oil and gas potential. The commission reported:

Unusual activity in the matter of selecting allotments was displayed during the month of June (1901) when the discovery of petroleum was made near the town of Red Fork in the Creek Nation. For the most part these applications for allotments in this vicinity were stimulated by the action of speculators, who desired to secure leases from the citizens who might secure the lands in that vicinity in allotment. The commission exercised all possible care to see that the best interests of the Creek citizens were subserved (8th Annual Report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, ended June 30, 1901:31).

One of the safeguards imposed by the commission was the appointment of non-Indian guardians as trustees to protect individual Indian interests. In spite of this system, and in some cases, because of it, many non-citizens made their fortunes by obtaining Indian allotments in the oil fields.

Despite such abuses, some of Okmulgee's Creek Freedmen managed to profit from their allotments and contribute to Okmulgee's built environment. The earliest surviving commercial building associated with Okmulgee's black heritage is the Key Block (200 N. Morton) built in 1902 by Hiram Key (figure 1). According to local sources, members of the Key family were Creek Freedman (Hayes, interview 1991). Part of the Romanesque Revival commercial building at the northwest corner of Morton and Fifth Street housed a dry

goods and grocery store operated by John B. and Annie Key. The northern half of the building was comprised of six dwelling units and several offices (Sanborn maps, 1907; city directories var.). The 1902 Key Block was a catalyst for other black businesses in the 400 block of N. Morton (now 200 block), during the first decade of the century. Former postmaster James A. Roper and John W. Foster shared a real estate office in the Key building. Other black tenants included physician, John E. Porter, and attorney, David J. Wallace. Attorney Wallace and his family also lived in the 400 block of N. Morton at that time. The Morton Street businesses constituted one of several black business zones scattered throughout the central business district just after the turn of the century (Sanborn maps and city directories, var.).

Churches and schools were among the very first institutions established by blacks in Okmulgee and as their congregations grew and prospered in the post-railroad boom, new churches were built to accommodate the increase. The black Baptist church, organized as New Hope Baptist (later First Baptist Church Central), moved from the block northwest of the town square to a new building at Second and Morton streets. A second black Baptist church, organized as Zion Bethel Baptist in 1903, held services in a frame dwelling on E. Third Street, in a black residential area that sprang up with the arrival of the railroad. While some type of private schooling was available to black children through their churches as early as 1894, the first public school for blacks opened in 1901 (Doan, n.d., 1990:117). This was probably the original frame Dunbar School, built at the northwest corner of Second and Delaware streets and later replaced by Banneker Elementary School.

In response to the growing numbers of black families who were moving to Okmulgee, new additions to the city were platted, some exclusively for black occupants. Most newly-arrived blacks lived in the residential areas that were developed north and northeast of the town. The earliest known addition to the city of Okmulgee was the Smith Addition (1904) platted by Creek Freedman, Rebecca Smith. In 1906, North Side Addition was platted to the east of the Smith Addition and, by 1909, a number of Okmulgee's black residents had built houses there. Walnut Grove Addition (1906) was carved from the Rebecca Smith allotment just east of the Smith Addition. As the prospect of statehood for the territory became assured, a black presence was firmly established in Okmulgee.

The enrollment of tribal members, the allotment of individual lands, and the systematic subversion of tribal authority, were all steps toward the dissolution of the Indian Nations. At the same time, Non-citizens, whose numbers increased with the completion of the railroad and oil discoveries, pressed the issue of statehood for the territories. Finally, the Creek tribal government was scheduled to be abolished on or before March 4, 1906, prior to Oklahoma statehood (Green, 1973:84). Despite some attempts to defy the U.S. government, the Creek Nation passed out of existence as a sovereignty in 1906. Oklahoma and Indian territories became the state of Oklahoma the following year (Green, 1973:88).

The year 1907 was a watershed year for blacks in Oklahoma, too. Some of the territories' black statesmen had engaged in a lobbying campaign to reserve the proposed state as a home for former slaves and displaced Southern blacks, but that was not to be. Any hopes blacks may have held for their status in the new state were dashed when the first law enacted by the new state legislature segregated whites from blacks in railroad cars. It was soon followed by laws prohibiting marriage between whites and blacks. The relatively benign legal treatment of blacks by the Creek Indians was replaced with a series of Jim Crow laws adopted to effect a white-dominated and racially segregated state.

In Okmulgee, precedent and the considerable size of the black community helped to insulate its members from the worst effects of racism in the late 1890s and early 1900s, but as more whites moved to the town, the relative size of the black community dwindled. Between 1901 and statehood, whites increasingly dominated the town's affairs. With statehood, they assumed control of the town's future and began to determine the scope and direction of its physical development.

#### Okmulgee's Golden Era: 1907-1920

The arrival of the railroads, coupled with the discovery of the county's first productive oil fields near the town of Morris, in 1907, quickened the pace of growth and transformed Okmulgee into a bustling boom town. The Morris strike was followed in quick succession by a series of spectacular oil and gas discoveries in the county, including those near Beggs (1910-11 and 1918), Hoffman (1917), Wilcox (1919), Olean (1920), Phillipsville (1920), and the King and Wood pool near Henryetta (1920). By 1920, Okmulgee County was

producing one-sixth of Oklahoma's total oil production (Meachem, 1990:19). These discoveries promised unprecedented wealth for the town and those who controlled it. From the vantage point of 1959, the Oklahoma Orbit dubbed the years from 1907 to 1920, Okmulgee's "Golden Period" (Oklahoma Orbit, 1959:8).

Much of the early residential and business development associated with Okmulgee's historic black community was initiated at this time. While a few of Okmulgee's black families can trace their heritage to Creek Freedmen or to the Oklahoma land rush, the majority date to the period following statehood (1907), when Okmulgee's prospects seemed wide open for enterprising people regardless of race.

Flush with oil, gas and coal revenues, Okmulgee's white civic leaders began a campaign to build a town that reflected its newfound wealth. Promotional booklets that extolled Okmulgee's virtues were produced and distributed throughout the country to attract others to the town. As oil money poured into the town, Okmulgee's citizens embarked on a full-scale building frenzy and erected a City Hall (1908), the Okmulgee Opera House (1909), and a hospital and three theaters (1910) (Meachem, 1990:18). Along Sixth Street, new brick commercial buildings replaced the old frame stores and offices. These included several black-operated frame business buildings in the 300 block that were replaced by a large, white-owned, brick commercial block in 1907.

In the years following statehood black businessmen apparently were induced to vacate prime and/or highly visible commercial areas. Shortly after the new city hall was built in 1908, on the corner opposite the 1902 Key building, all black businesses and residences disappeared from the street. Although the 1902 Key Block remained under black ownership through the 1950s, it was occupied by whites (9). Oil money was rebuilding the central business district of Okmulgee and the new commercial buildings surrounding the Creek Council House were owned and occupied by whites. It was about this time that black businesses began to appear on E. Fifth Street, north of the main thoroughfare (Sanborn maps, 1907; City directories var.).

Some of Okmulgee's blacks who profited directly from oil discoveries were Willie King, a Creek Freedman whose allotment was near Beggs, in one of the greatest oil pools in the county. Oil and gas profits skyrocketed John B. Key from his dry goods store in 1909, to the presidency of the J. B. Key Oil and Gas Company by 1920. Key's oil money built one of Okmulgee's outstanding historic commercial buildings (Key

Block, 309 W. Seventh Street), about 1919. Other blacks who profited from oil joined Key as officials of his company. They were James Thomas, vice-president, J.H. Wallace, secretary, and W. F. Haygood, treasurer. W. F. Haygood, who came to the Okmulgee area shortly after the turn of the century, first leased and then purchased several farms on which oil was later discovered. After he moved into the city of Okmulgee, Haygood built one of the more noteworthy craftsman-inspired bungalows in East Okmulgee (1014 E. Third St.).

Most of Okmulgee's black citizens, however, profited indirectly from the oil boom. Some had occupations that were either peripheral to the oil industries or engendered by the boom, such as construction and equipment maintenance. Others provided services to the town's black labor force and the rural blacks who came into town to conduct business. Some jobs were directly related to the railroad. A study of the Okmulgee city directories at this time shows that many blacks were employed by the railroads as pullman porters, baggage handlers, and laborers.

Also, while oil, coal, and their related industries spurred Okmulgee's phenomenal growth between 1907 and 1920, the introduction of other industries and businesses augmented the city's economic base and provided jobs for the many residents who did not strike it rich. Agricultural industries that ginned and baled regionally-grown cotton, and four major glass factories were among the stable employers through the 1920s (Meachem, 1990:22). Most of these companies were owned and operated by whites, however, and blacks were often relegated to unskilled or labor-intensive work within the plants (city directories, var.). Still, many black wage-earners were able to make a good living for their families and purchase houses in the developing black additions of Okmulgee, during this period of prosperity.

The growing black labor force required housing, doctor and dental care, schools, legal services, food and entertainment. In a segregated society, it was incumbent upon the black community to fulfill most of those needs. A number of black professionals and entrepreneurs, encouraged by the opportunities inherent in a boom town, established practices and opened businesses in Okmulgee to serve that community. Although not all black professionals and businessmen advertised in the city directories, the classified sections provide some indication of the type and variety of services available to Okmulgee's black residents at that time. Among the black advertisers in 1909 were two barbers, a blacksmith, four grocers, two hotels, two lawyers, two pharmacists,

three doctors, three realtors, a shoemaker and two tailors. Although not advertised, six ministers, eight teachers and the principal of Dunbar School were also listed in the directory in 1909. This cadre of doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, dentists, and teachers, together with the group of businessmen who came to Okmulgee in the 1900s and 1910s, had perhaps the greatest impact on Okmulgee's subsequent development.

While most current residents of Okmulgee are quick to mention E. Fifth Street as the historic black business district, this identification actually evolved over time, largely in response to increased pressure from the white community to vacate properties on Sixth and other prime commercial streets. The 1909 and 1912 city directories clearly indicate that black owned and/or operated businesses were scattered throughout the central business district with the majority located on N. Morton, E. Sixth and E. Seventh streets. The 1911 Sanborn maps depict the 600-700 blocks of both E. Sixth and E. Fifth streets with the words "occupied by Negroes" superimposed across them. Black businesses on E. Sixth Street in 1909 included the 2-story Lyons Hotel at 604 E. Sixth Street (razed), one of three "colored" hotels listed in the city directory that year. The hotel housed at least 12 permanent residents and employed two maids and a cook. More than a dozen black businesses operated on both the north and the south sides of the 600 block of E. Sixth Street in 1914. In that year William Sneed, a Creek Freedman, built two brick commercial buildings on E. Sixth Street. They survive today.

It was only as the town experienced its period of extraordinary growth between 1907 and 1920, that Sixth Street became more visible and more valuable as prime commercial real estate. As whites began to dominate the political and economic life of the city from the mid-1910s, E. Fifth Street, north of Sixth Street, began to emerge as the black commercial district. Gradually black businesses moved from Sixth Street, as they had earlier moved from Morton and the blocks surrounding the town square. Finally, only the Wallace Building (Owl Drug), at 617 E. Sixth Street, remained of the many black-operated businesses initially built on E. Sixth Street and the black businesses became increasingly concentrated in the 300-700 blocks of E. Fifth Street.

By 1910, the first 1-and 2-story frame commercial buildings cropped up in the 600 block of E. Fifth Street, forming the core of what became Okmulgee's premiere black commercial district from that time forward, throughout the historic period. Among the first businesses were three restaurants, a barber shop, a meat market

and a grocery store, all operated by black businessmen. Many of Okmulgee's black citizens rented rooms upstairs or at the rear of these buildings. Around the corner, on the east side of Severs Avenue were another restaurant and grocery. Within a few years after the first frame buildings appeared on E. Fifth Street, many were replaced with brick buildings, a development indicative of prosperity within the black community. The period of most remarkable construction on E. Fifth occurred between 1913 and 1920, during the heyday of Okmulgee County's oil boom.

Attorney Robert S. Gamble and John E. Glass constructed the first brick building on E. Fifth Street at 417-19-21 E. Fifth Street, in 1913 (Lilly interview, 1991). The 2-story commercial building set the standard for subsequent brick buildings constructed by blacks in the business district. The following year, W. S. Sneed, a black man of Creek descent, built two adjacent brick commercial buildings near the Wallace Building (Owl Drug, 617 E. Sixth) (10) at 619 and 621 E. Sixth Street (figure 13). Although the Wallace Building and the adjacent ca. 1918 Dreamland Theatre were later demolished, the two Sneed buildings survive. These were the last black commercial buildings constructed on E. Sixth Street and by 1920 they no longer had black tenants (City directories, var.). From that time forward virtually all new black businesses opened on E. Fifth Street.

Most of the historic commercial buildings that remain on E. Fifth Street were constructed in the oil boom period after 1913 and, while the businesses continued to thrive through the 1920s and into the 1930s, most of the extant buildings were in place by 1920. They include the 1913 Glass Building (417-19-21 E. Fifth Street) (figure 14); the ca. 1915 Taylor Building which served as the office of Dr. R. B. Taylor until his recent death (figure 14); the 1915 Harrison Block (515-17-19 E. Fifth), built by Daniel Harrison (figure 16); the 1920 White Building (509 E. Fifth) (figure 17) which replaced an earlier frame office building owned by Dr. James White; the 1920 Copeland Building (607 E. Fifth) built in 1920 by Robert B. Copeland (figure 17); and the enlarged ca. 1928 Masonic Building (503 E. Fifth) (figure 15). One of the few surviving frame business buildings is the H & H Building (501 E. Fifth Street) built about 1920 (figure 15). The building remained in the House and Hayes families until recently and it housed a number of black businesses, including a restaurant operated by Berry and Garland House in the 1920s and the H. & H. Cab Co. established by Joseph Hayes and Edward House in 1946 (Hayes, correspondence, 1991).



One of the most outstanding extant buildings erected by a black businessman during the boom years was not located on E. Fifth Street and did not serve the black community. In 1919, John B. Key built two commercial complexes, the Key Block at 309-315 W. Seventh Street (figure 18), and the Key Building (razed) at 114-116 E. Seventh Street (Neither should be confused with the 1902 Key Block at 200 N. Morton Street). The 1919 Key Block, across from the Okmulgee courthouse, survives as one of the more impressive and ambitious examples of commercial architecture associated with blacks in Okmulgee. Today it is one of the most intact and best-maintained black commercial buildings in the city. Ironically, it was never occupied by black tenants. By 1919, when the complex was constructed, Okmulgee's black and white business districts were strictly segregated and the Key Block was built in the white district. Except for the few black businesses that lingered in the 600 block of E. Sixth Street, nearly all black-owned and operated businesses were concentrated on E. Fifth Street with the exception of neighborhood groceries which were within the confines of clearly defined black communities.

As business boomed during the 1910s, other dimensions of Okmulgee's black community thrived, as well. In 1914, a black newspaper called the Okmulgee Light operated from the Wallace Building on E. Sixth and was run by editor William J. Brooks. Professor W. H. Fort, principal of Dunbar High School, was associate editor along with realtor J.W. Foster. Although the city directory did not list social and fraternal organizations of blacks at that time, the Okmulgee Light reported on these and other community activities. During the 1910s, Okmulgee's black community supported a variety of fraternal lodges including some of which conducted meetings in individual homes. The newspaper advertised several black businesses on E. Sixth Street including Mr. Jackson's Restaurant (608 E. Sixth), the Owl Drug (617 E. Sixth) and Melbrow and Nash's staple and fancy groceries (623 E. Sixth, in the newly constructed Sneed building). It also announced that "two Afro-American Pictures made by Negroes" would be shown at the Globe Theatre" (Okmulgee Light, November 27, 1914: Vol. 1, No. 35). In addition to community activities, the classified section advertised choice lots for sale in Walnut Grove Addition from \$190 to \$400 per lot as well as new houses under construction in the North Side Addition (Okmulgee Light, 1914). The newspaper itself had a subscription of 1,100 people in 1914.

The years described by the Oklahoma Orbit as Okmulgee's "Golden Period" were certainly productive ones for the city's black citizens. Between 1907 and 1922, major black residential additions were developed, black institutions were established or improved, and the black commercial district on E. Fifth Street was reinforced as wood-frame stores were replaced by substantial brick buildings. Most of the important institutional and commercial buildings associated with Okmulgee's black heritage were constructed in that narrow space of time.

As the black community prospered in the 1910s and early 1920s, its institutional buildings were improved and expanded. The "Dunbar Negro Public School", as it was shown on the early Sanborn maps, was joined by a new brick Dunbar High School (razed), across the street. The original frame Dunbar School continued to serve as an elementary school but by 1936, it was replaced on its site by Banneker School (razed).

New churches were erected and old ones received face-lifts. By 1909 a black Methodist Episcopal church was erected at the northeast corner of E. Third and Chickasaw (now Woods Drive), in East Okmulgee. It is now known as Franklin United Methodist Church (figure 2). In 1915, the First Baptist congregation built a new brick building at the southeast corner of First and Central Avenue (figure 10) and in 1921 the residence that served the Zion Bethel Baptist congregation was replaced with a brick church at the corner of Osage and Third streets, renamed East Side Baptist Church. Both Baptist churches are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1984). Replacing the frame structures with new brick buildings reflected the prosperity and sense of permanency their congregations had attained. A small but influential Presbyterian congregation built the Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church (razed) at 600 N. Muskogee Street about 1916. Mt. Olive's founding members were among Okmulgee's earliest pioneers and community leaders and included James A. Roper, David Wallace, and Dr. Robert B. Taylor. When the congregation dwindled, the white Presbyterian Church invited the black congregation to join its ranks in 1966, thus becoming the first known integrated church in Okmulgee. Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church was demolished the same year (Lilly, correspondence, 1991).

While the construction of these churches reflected existing black populations, they also attracted black residential development to their vicinities. One of Okmulgee's earliest historic black communities grew up around the First Baptist Church on Central Avenue. Some of the town's most influential business and

professional families built homes near the church. Restaurateur C. E. House, who married a Creek descendant, Ruth Ella King, built a stately Classical Revival house at the northwest corner of E. Second and Central Avenue in 1916 (figure 11). Other residences of note near the First Baptist Church (Central) include the substantial bungalows of Dr. James White, at 503 N. Central Avenue (figure 12), and of funeral director, Victor Brown, at 510 N. Central Avenue, (figure 12), both built about 1918.

Walnut Grove Addition (1906), north of the Okmulgee townsite, became one of the fashionable areas for black middle-class and professional families in the 1910s. Several of the more noteworthy of Okmulgee's earliest residences were constructed in Walnut Grove during that period. They include the Chester Arthur Evans House at 820 N. Porter (1914) (figure 9), the Dallas Gallimore House at 903 N. Porter (ca. 1911), the A. G. Wallace House at 519 N. Porter (ca. 1918) (figure 9), the Robert S. Gamble House at 523 N. Muskogee (ca. 1910) (figure 8), and the Spencer Adams House at 601 N. Muskogee (ca. 1914) (figure 8). The Adams House may have served as the manse of Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church (razed) which stood across the street at 600 N. Muskogee. All these dwellings are extant although some have been altered.

Following the arrival the railroad in 1901, many blacks built houses east of the Frisco tracks, particularly on E. Third, E. Second and E. First streets near the Baptist and Methodist churches. Some of Okmulgee's earliest black families, including Creek Freedmen Roxanna Sneed and Hiram and Ada Key, built houses in the 1000 and 1100 blocks of E. Second and E. Third streets. The Sneeds, Keys and several other East Okmulgee families were listed as farmers in early city directories and this area remained semi-rural with large vacant areas from the railroad tracks to Woods Drive, until the mid-1920s (city directories) (11). Other black additions were developed to the north and northeast of East Okmulgee and by 1930, the vacant lots were filled in with bungalows and Popular plan houses.

The siting of Dunbar School, between the original townsite and the new black residential additions to the northeast, bridged the city's two most populous black enclaves, served as a focal point of black community life, and reinforced the perception of those areas as exclusively black residential neighborhoods. Adjacent areas such as E. Fourth Street and additions to the north and east were subsequently developed for black occupation.

Although the schools are gone, the identification of this section as Okmulgee's principal black residential area persists to the present.

While the majority of black development was taking place to the northeast of the city, a third black residential community developed around the Key Addition (1909) at intersection of 15th and Florida streets southwest of the original townsite. This addition was platted by members of the Key family who are reported to have been Creek Freedmen. The Key Addition was platted from a Creek Freedman allotment, although it is unknown if it originally belonged to a family member. The John B. and Annie Key family lived in a large, 2-story, brick house at 520 15th Street as early as 1909 (razed). A number of other black families, many of whom were farmers, resided in the immediate vicinity even before the addition was filed (1909 city directory). The presence of so many farmers indicates that this community, like that in East Okmulgee, retained a semi-rural character, for some time after the turn of the century. In contrast, additions like Walnut Grove Addition, were more suburban and housed some of Okmulgee's rising black professionals including teachers, lawyers, doctors and pharmacists (City directories and plat maps, var.).

The so-called Golden Period was an era of opportunity for both whites and blacks but although the black community appeared to be prospering in Okmulgee, it was increasingly excluded from active participation in municipal affairs. This was due, in part, to the segregationist attitudes and practices embraced by white immigrants, and to the inability of blacks to maintain a large percentage of Okmulgee's population. Pioneer accounts, deed records and Sanborn maps show that blacks, who comprised about a third of Okmulgee's total population in 1910, owned businesses, houses, schools and churches throughout the town in the 1890s and early 1900s (OHS, Black Baptist Churches TR, 1984). From such evidence, it appears they were able to work and compete with whites on a fairly equitable basis. The advent of statehood in 1907, combined with the rich local oil and coal discoveries however, brought much greater numbers of whites to the town in the following decade and by 1920, blacks comprised only 19% of the total population (OHS, Black Baptist Churches TR, 1984). Through both legislated and socially mandated restrictions on blacks, the white majority was able to segregate the town's business and residential sections along racial lines, regardless of earlier settlement patterns to the contrary.

### A Separate City

By 1920 Okmulgee had become racially polarized to the extent that, for all intents and purposes, Okmulgee had two separate communities. Although Okmulgee's black community continued to be prosperous, its development was a parallel rather than cooperative venture with the larger white community. In some ways, the separatism was a reflection of national attitudes in the period following World War I.

America's involvement in Europe during World War I brought communities like Okmulgee into the national milieu and they began to both share and reflect the trends and sentiments of the country as a whole. In reaction to its experiences in the war, America entered into a period of national isolationism in the 1920s. The country established its first immigration restrictions and quotas in 1924 and 1926, in an attempt to keep out foreign influences. Fear of subversive ideas led to the deportation of suspicious foreigners in the wake of the Russian revolution. Locally, Muskogee and Tulsa had already shown their intolerance of foreigners during World War I, when German-Americans were beaten and harassed in the summer of 1917. German-Americans responded by assimilating into the larger community as quickly as possible by changing their names and using English instead of German in their church services (Baxter, et. al. 1986:17). The climate of fear and distrust was most evident in the national re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s.

Oklahoma suffered its share of Klan-related violence, and lynching of blacks were reported in Okmulgee County during the 1910s and 1920s. One of the most dramatic and violent events of this period occurred when most of the large black community of Tulsa was burned in 1921. The impact of the Tulsa riots on Okmulgee is difficult to assess. Local citizens recalled that some of Tulsa's black professionals fled in fear to Okmulgee and others remember seeing the Ku Klux Klan march down E. Fifth Street about that time (Lilly, interview, 1991). Black and white communities in Okmulgee appeared to be more rigidly segregated in the 1920s than at any previous time. A comparison of city directories from 1909 through the 1920s shows that the two races, who still had rather loosely-defined areas of habitation in the earlier years, drew well apart in the early 1920s. By 1928, separate white and black residential and commercial areas were very sharply-defined, occasionally to ridiculous lengths. The Yale Theatre had an entrance on Sixth Street for whites and a separate entrance on Fifth Street for blacks that led to a balcony in such a way that the two races never mingled.

Despite regional racial tensions, Okmulgee's black communities continued to grow and develop through the 1920s. When the initial building frenzy of the first oil discoveries slowed somewhat, after 1920, most of the significant extant commercial buildings were in place on Fifth Street. Okmulgee's black communities focused on establishing new and enlarging older residential additions and building new or improving existing institutional buildings. A number of residential additions had developed to the north and northeast of the city in the 1910s (East Acres, 1916; Monticello, 1918; Washington Addition, 1918) and during the 1920s, that number increased. New black residential additions that were platted and developed in the 1920s include Liberty Addition (1920), Cary Addition (1921), and a second Monticello Addition (1923). The Luckey Addition (1923) joined the Key Addition in the less populated black community to the south of the city (City plat maps, var.).

The explosion of new residential building in the northern and northeastern sectors of the city warranted a third public school for black children and Attucks School (originally East Side Colored School) was built in 1922 in response to increased enrollment from that area (WPA City Guide, 1936). According to local sources, part of the original Attucks School is incorporated in the existing Head Start building on Kennedy Street. In 1925, the city of Okmulgee built a yellow-brick library (razed) for black patrons on the western portion of the Dunbar High School campus. In addition to erecting larger buildings new buildings for established churches like East Side Baptist Church (1921), congregations in the new neighborhoods built a number of small single-story frame churches, many of which survive today. Among the older congregations are the Cleaves Memorial Chapel (ca. 1917), which has replaced its original church on site. Others include The Church of the Living God, at the southeast corner of Smith and Woods Drive (figure 21).

The burden of operating and maintaining separate municipal facilities within racially segregated Okmulgee was mitigated somewhat by the oil money that came to the city coffers. Nevertheless, Okmulgee's black community was called upon to finance or augment their separate institutions when they surpassed basic requirements such as schools. In 1922, Okmulgee's black citizens secured \$25,000 in donations from federated clubs and their own leading citizens to construct the first "colored hospital" opened in the state of Oklahoma (WPA City Guide, 1936). The 2-story, 18-room red brick facility was erected at the corner of what is now Third and Woods Drive. The first nurse was Miss Reav Roper, daughter of pioneer citizen James Roper, and a

graduate of Wheatley Provident Hospital. Other leading citizens who worked at the hospital in its early years included its first superintendent Dr. R. Kyle, and his assistant Dr. A.L. Wallace, and later Dr. James White, Dr. Stanley Daigle, and Dr. K. James Guess. Known only as "the Okmulgee Colored Hospital", the hospital served Okmulgee's black citizenry from 1922 to 1956. It currently functions as a community center and was listed on the National Register as the Okmulgee Black Hospital in 1984.

Recreational facilities were often part of the black schools but one neighborhood park, marked as Simon Park on old city maps, was donated and developed by members of the community, according to local sources. The park is located at the southwest corner of Muskogee and First streets, across from the site of Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church (razed). It once boasted a miniature golf course, recreation hall, concession building and a swimming pool, which has since been filled in (12). The park is also remembered as Bullock's Park for James and Lillie Bullock who operated and maintained it (Bullock, correspondence: 1991). Some playground apparatus remains on the site (figure 7). Fraternal and beneficent societies abounded in the black community of the 1920s and about 1928 the Masonic Hall at 503 E. Fifth Street (figure 15) was enlarged from a single story to a 2-story building. It was one of the last of the substantial brick buildings constructed on E. Fifth Street during the historic period.

The 1920s saw respectable, even dramatic, oil production in the county, that continued to sustain the town throughout the decade but the heady days of the early strikes and the frenzy to build a city had passed. Suburban residential areas were developed and older, outmoded housing areas were abandoned. Like urban centers throughout the country, the automobile allowed commuters to live further away from the central business districts and they abandoned their central city homes for new ones in the suburbs. This was true of Okmulgee's black neighborhoods to a lesser degree but many of the oldest houses built by early black residents of Central, Muskogee and other downtown streets, were abandoned as the East Okmulgee neighborhoods gained in popularity in the 1920s.

While black farmers like William Shealey (figure 19) and Artra Sneed had lived in East Okmulgee, east of the Frisco tracks, as early as 1903, much of the land between the tracks and Woods Drive remained undeveloped until the mid-1920s. As the area gained in popularity with the second generation of Okmulgee's

black citizens, bungalows and Popular plan houses began to fill in the vacant blocks in the 800-900 blocks. At the same time, redevelopment occurred in the 1000 and 1100 blocks of E. First, E. Second and E. Third, where many of the area's original shotgun-type houses were replaced with more substantial bungalows and later, ranch houses. Still other houses were enlarged or remodeled in response to increased prosperity. By the end of the 1920s, East Okmulgee appeared more like a typical suburban addition, as promoted by developers of the day, than the semi-rural area it had been in 1910. Some of the most outstanding Craftsman-influenced bungalows were built East Okmulgee during the 1920s. They include the W. F. Haygood House (1923), at 1014 E. Third Street, and the Mack Brown House (ca. 1922) E. Third Street (figure 3).

A new Catholic church, Uganda Martyrs, together with its affiliated parochial school, were constructed in the 800 block of E. Third in 1927 to serve the black community (figure 5). The 2-story frame house at 806 E. Third Street (ca. 1923), immediately west of the church sanctuary, was used as a rectory for the priests who served both Uganda Martyrs and St. Anthony's Catholic churches. Uganda Martyrs School, originally a 3-story brick building, is the only surviving remnant of the period of separate schools. The school is sited in the same block as Uganda Martyrs Church but faces Choctaw Street. Although the third floor was destroyed by fire, the second floor houses the Uganda Martyrs Convent and the first floor is the Multi-Purpose Parish Hall used for various Catholic activities (Bullock, correspondence, 1991). Its windows have been partially filled in with concrete blocks but it is an otherwise intact, if unadorned, utilitarian school building. Uganda Martyrs Church, on the other hand, one of the more noteworthy of Okmulgee's extant black churches, is in excellent condition and retains its original architectural fabric to a remarkable degree.

An oil glut in the late 1920s, followed by the Great Depression of the 1930s, curtailed growth throughout Okmulgee and very few major additions or building projects were undertaken until after World War II. Therefore the period of significance for Okmulgee's extant historic buildings associated with its black citizenry encompasses the years between 1902, the construction date of the earliest known commercial building, and 1929, which marks the end of the development period and includes the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church.



### Integration and Modern Times

Despite the intent behind the establishment of separate schools, Okmulgee's black populace was well-served by its schools. The prohibition against black students in Oklahoma's state universities, although reprehensible, allowed teachers to pursue graduate degrees elsewhere in the country at state expense. As a result, many of Okmulgee's black teachers had a much more cosmopolitan education than most white teachers during this period, and they brought that experience back into their classrooms. But, as Oklahoma's segregated educational system persisted into the second half of the century, many of Okmulgee's gifted black students who were forced to obtain graduate degrees in the North or West, chose to remain in those regions. Although Okmulgee's black churches and schools had nurtured a vigorous social and intellectual community during the town's initial development, it wasn't enough to sustain subsequent generations after the oil played out and hometown opportunities for young black people were scarce.

Integration had its casualties, too. After the last graduates of Dunbar High School received their diplomas in 1969, the school was demolished. Other institutional losses included Banneker School, the black public library and Attucks School, all of which were demolished or altered beyond recognition with integration. Only a rock retaining wall survives on the original Dunbar School site to commemorate Okmulgee's first black public school (figure 6). Today, the once-bustling Fifth Street commercial district is practically abandoned, its brick buildings only partially occupied, if at all, with boarded or broken windows. Some of the older historic homes bear the ravages of time and the absence of funds to maintain or repair them. Simon Park is overgrown with weeds. It is remarkable that the Black Hospital survives as a vestige of the separate black community.

In spite of legally and socially mandated segregation, through the 1950s and 1960s, Okmulgee's black communities persevered and today constitute significant and vital segments of the city's built environment. Among the casualties of desegregation are the separate schools and library that served the community for so many years. However, some of the lasting contributions of Okmulgee's historic black community are represented by the commercial, institutional and residential buildings and landscapes that survive in various parts of the city. Today many descendants of Okmulgee's early black residents, Creek Freedmen and pioneer settlers alike, attest to the town's unique heritage. They live, for the most part, in neighborhoods that were

platted or developed in the first quarter of this century for black families. The houses, churches and commercial buildings that survive from the historic period are monuments to the aspirations and perseverance of Okmulgee's early black pioneers.

## Notes

(1) - At the time of enrollment (ca. 1898) Creek Freedmen constituted more than a third of the total Creek population (Washington, 1948:33; enrollment records, var.). Still other members of the Creek Nation, although listed in the Indian rolls, had at least one grandparent of African descent. It is of note that the Creeks, the smallest of the Five Civilized Tribes at the time of enrollment, had both a greater percentage of black members and a greater number of blacks than any of the other tribes (Comparison of enrollment figures, 1898). It is not surprising, then, that so many of Okmulgee's early residents were Creek Freedmen since so many Creeks were of African descent.

(2) - 1894 and 1896 Sanborn maps show Okmulgee with a population of 400, but the later map (1898) shows only 200 inhabitants. The decline in population could have been caused by an exodus of merchants to Muskogee when the railroad came to that town. Another possibility is that one or another of the maps were in error (Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, 1894, 1896, 1898).

(3) - The man generally credited as Okmulgee's first resident, Silas Smith, was married twice, both times to Creek Freedmen. Smith's first wife, Minnie, lived in Okmulgee by 1870 and may have been Okmulgee's first black resident. She was the mother of Smith's five children, all of whom received allotments north of Okmulgee. Minnie Smith died about 1891 and Smith married Rebecca, a widow and grandmother of about 49. Rebecca Smith and the Smith children were among the numerous Okmulgee-area citizens of African descent who were enrolled as Creek Freedmen between 1898 and 1914.

There is some question of Smith's own racial heritage. Many early pioneers remember Smith as a white man who was married to a black woman, but one, George Beidleman, recalled Smith as "a man who was part negro" (Doan, n.d.:741). This is probably in error and possibly a reflection of what the narrator believed to be true, based on the fact that Smith's wife was black. Most other accounts, including Nicholson's 1870 report on the Indian Nations, describe him as a white man with a black wife.

Part of the confusion could be due to the designation of Smith's children, including Silas Smith, Jr., as "colored" in city directories. The 1900 census listed Silas Smith, Sr. as white and the 1909 city directory showed Silas Smith without the requisite "c" for "colored" by his name. Later city directories show a "Silas Smith (c)" living in the vicinity of Muskogee and Cherokee. This was probably Silas Smith, Jr. who survived his father and was living on or near his step-mother's allotment in a black addition in North Okmulgee.

(4) - There had been so much intermarriage between blacks and Indians among the Creeks that it was difficult for government officials to determine which were "Creek Indians" and which were "Creek Freedmen" when it came time to enroll members of the tribe and they were reduced to assigning fractions to people. People were sometimes noted as "3/8 Creek". A number of Creek citizens of African descent were listed as Creek Indians on the rolls if they were considered to have more Indian blood than African (Creek enrollment records, var.)

(5) - In 1894, the year the Indian lands were surveyed, the first Sanborn Fire Insurance map was made for the town of Okmulgee, possibly in anticipation of increased growth and eventual annexation or incorporation into the United States.

(6) - There are references to a Methodist congregation and an Indian school that also allowed whites holding services and classes in the Council House prior to 1900. However, there was no separate building solely for the purpose of educating or ministering to whites during this time. However, the 1894 Sanborn maps clearly depict two "colored" churches and a "colored" school.

(7) - The original black Baptist congregation organized in 1892 and had a church in the block northwest of the Council House by 1894. By 1901 the Baptists built a new frame church at the northwest corner of Morton and Second streets (Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, 1894-1901). In a general history of the territory written in 1901, D.C. Gideon wrote that the "colored people early effected a church organization and erected the African

Methodist Episcopal (AME) church opposite the Capital Hotel". This is the church shown in the 1894-1901 Sanborn maps. Apparently the AME church was the better known of the two in 1901. It may have been associated with Smith and his family since it was located across the road from their house and hotel. If so, the roots of the AME congregation may actually predate that of the First Baptist Church.

Sometime between 1901 and 1903, however, both Smith's hotel and the "Colored ME" church disappeared from the maps. Both lots remained vacant for many years afterward regardless of the frenzied building activity all around them. Shorter Chapel AME may be the descendant of the early AME church. The congregation purchased property on the corner of Third and Central in 1900 and erected a frame building sometime after that. A brick building was constructed as Shorter Chapel A.M.E. in 1916 (Hayes, correspondence: 1991).

The AME church also contained a school for black children in the 1890s as did the Baptist church in 1901. It is evident from these early sources that black residents played an important, possibly a dominant, role in Okmulgee's pre-1900 history that simply was not recorded by subsequent settlers.

(8) - James Roper was postmaster of Okmulgee from 1898 to 1901, at the least (the date of this source). He married Hannah Rorax in 1897 and had two children. Gideon's biography mentioned that Roper had been a postmaster in Arkansas for four years where he also served as Justice of the Peace from 1887-1888. It is of note that the source from which this information is taken made no mention of Roper being black and the only real clue to his identity in that source is that he attended Meharry Medical College, which was a black college (Gideon, 1901: 448). Roper remained in Okmulgee until his death in 1936 and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery with his wife Hannah Rorax Roper. A house built by his daughter Melvina and her husband W. Simpkins survives in East Okmulgee at 1101 E. Third Street (figure 19).

(9) - According to Mrs. Katherine Hayes, her uncle Willie King owned a real estate business in the 1902 Key Block through the 1940s but it was operated by his trustee, Crittenden Smith, as blacks were unable to conduct business in that area at that time.

(10) - In city directories, although the druggist was a black man the business was not designated "c" for "colored", probably because the business was part of a chain of pharmacies.

(11) - Two of the oldest extant dwellings in that area are the Melvina Roper and W.V. Simpkins House (1101 E. Third) and the Roxanna and Artra Sneed House (1100 E. Second) in the same city block. The Sneed and Roper families were among the very earliest of Okmulgee's citizens, black or white, and the houses date to at least 1909, although the Roper house appears to have been moved to the site after the mid-1920s. The Sneeds were shown to be farmers in the early city directories and their house may be a remnant of an early farmstead. Roxanna, Artra Sneed and their children held a number of allotments in the area north of Okmulgee and it is likely that they lived in the region long before the building boom of the railroad era.

(12) - Other local sources remember that Lawrence Kennedy built the original swimming pool and that a later one was built by George Simons (Lilly, correspondence, 1991).

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aldrich, Gene Black Heritage of Oklahoma. Thompson Book and Supply Co., Edmond, OK. 1973.

This book primarily enumerates the struggle for equality, suffrage, and civil rights in Oklahoma and the contributions of "Great Men" including Okmulgee resident, E. Melvin Porter, to further those goals. There is one chapter on early settlement and history and an entire chapter on the history of miscegenation law which is interesting in terms of Creek Indians and the problems they encountered due to the large instance of intermarriage between blacks and Indians within the tribe. Aldrich discusses the first differentiation of blacks and whites by legislation in Article XIII, Sec. 3 of the first state constitution. "Colored" children were defined as "children of African descent". The term "white children" included "all other children" (page 36). The book reports that E. Melvin Porter was instrumental in the repeal of miscegenation laws from 1965, when he first introduced legislation, to 1969 when it finally passed by Supreme Court decision. There was no information germane to the history of Okmulgee's black communities.

Baxter, Scott et. al. Resource Protection Planning Project: The European Ethnic Experience in Oklahoma, 1870-1920. Oklahoma Historic Preservation Survey, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. 1986.

This document provided good background information on European ethnic experience in this region of Oklahoma and a model by which the black experience could be compared.

Campbell, J.B. Campbell's Abstract of Creek Freedman Census Cards and Index. Phoenix job Printing Company: Muskogee, Oklahoma. On file at the Oklahoma Historical Society library. Oklahoma City, OK. 1915.

Campbell's abstract of Creek Freedman census cards was most useful in determining the race and relationships of early Okmulgee residents and thus in developing a picture of the racial composition of the city. One of the persistent problems in sorting out which members of the Creek Nation were of African heritage was due to an inconsistent methodology for determining racial status. The children of Silas Smith, for example, were listed as "colored" even though Silas Smith Sr. was white, because their mother was black. Since their mother was also a Creek Freedman the children were enrolled as Creek Freedmen, too. It was not determined if they were also descendants of Creek Indians, although that, too, is possible but not recorded.

Crockett, Norman L. The Black Towns. The Regents Press of Kansas: Lawrence, Kansas. 1970.

Crockett's account of the many all-black towns that developed in Oklahoma and Kansas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Crockett's research is very detailed and reveals information on town leaders, citizens, occupations, buildings, etc. There is no specific information about Okmulgee, although it provides good background for several Okmulgee residents who moved from Boley and other black towns.

Debo, Angie. The Road to Disappearance. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. 1941, reprinted 1966.

Angie Debo's important work contains a general discussion of "mild" form of slavery practiced by the Creek Indians. Brief but interesting treatment of intermarriage between Creek Indians and blacks. This book provided information for further research.

Doan, Pat et. al., History of Okmulgee County, Oklahoma. Okmulgee Historical Society and the Heritage Society of America, eds. Tulsa Historical Enterprises, Inc., n.d.

Although this volume of local history and genealogy is undocumented, it was a very useful tool in understanding the basic chronological development of the city and county of Okmulgee from its Creek Indian origins to the present time. There were a number of intriguing anecdotes and comments about blacks that I would have liked to follow up on but was unable to do so because their sources were not cited. Individual biographies of pioneer black families, written by family members, were particularly helpful in determining the reasons for black emigration from the southern states to Oklahoma, types of work, family traditions, educational goals, etc. Because these histories were solicited and only those families who chose to do so were included in the volume, a good many people unrepresented who should be included in a comprehensive history of black contributions to Okmulgee. The history has a good collection of historic photographs including buildings such as the Charles Evans House and the C.E. House House.

[Eighth] 8th Annual Report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes; ended June 30, 1901:31. On microform at the Oklahoma Historical Society library, Oklahoma City, OK. 1901.

The report showed government concerns over abuses of the guardianship system that was established to protect Indian land allotments. There is probably much more valuable information in these annual reports but they are not indexed and are difficult to access.

Gideon, D.C. Indian Territory: Descriptive Biographical and Genealogical with a General History of the Territory. The Lewis Publishing Company. New York and Chicago: 1901.

This is a typical promotional book of its period that describes the history and leading citizens of the area. It is noteworthy for the detailed information on James A. Roper, an early non-Creek black pioneer of Okmulgee, and a public official prior to statehood. Its favorable article about Roper is particularly noteworthy in light of increased white immigration into the territory and its incumbent segregationist attitudes. Roper's heritage was not stated although his alma mater, Meharry Medical College, was a Negro college. In another section of the book, Gideon discusses the history of the town and notes that Silas Smith was the first citizen of Okmulgee, having arrived before Severs and Belcher. It gives more information about the "colored people" of Okmulgee than the Oklahoma Orbit article devoted to Okmulgee's history published more than 50 years later.

Green, Donald E. The Creek People. Published by Indian Tribal Series: Phoenix, AZ. 1973.

This book has an excellent chronology of Federal/Creek Nation treaties, commissions, and policies to the disenfranchisement of the Indians but there is very little about Freedmen or black members of the tribe. Nevertheless, it provided good physical descriptions of Creek towns both at the time of the Creek removal to Oklahoma through their evolution in Indian Territory. No index.

Federal Writers Project. Indian-Pioneer Histories. On file at Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City. (See Grant Foreman Collection).

Foreman, Grant. Collection of Indian-Pioneer Histories. On file at Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, Ok. Multi-volume collection, 1937-38.

A series of oral interviews under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was conducted during the mid- to late-1930s with white pioneers, Indians and former slaves. A number of Okmulgee County residents were represented in this collection of oral histories and they provided a wealth of information about the early settlers and buildings in Okmulgee. Some of the Indian narratives contain the only information about living arrangements of slaves and their masters prior to emancipation. The many references to Silas Smith, his wife, and their hotel, provide the basis for my assumption that Smith and his family served as the nucleus of the early black settlement in Okmulgee. Excellent sources of information on a variety of topics including early settlers, buildings, the impact of the railroad, race relations, etc.

Franklin, Jimmie Lewis. Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, Oklahoma. 1982.

Lewis book, an expansion of his master's thesis, is a good, general overview of black history in Oklahoma from about 1900 forward. No specific information on Okmulgee.

Franklin, Jimmie Lewis. The Blacks in Oklahoma. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. 1980.

This is a good, concise general history of black challenges in Oklahoma highlighting the struggle for civil rights. It discusses the relatively good relationship between Indians and blacks after the Civil War to the institution of Jim Crow legislation accompanying statehood. A general reader, the only specific information on Okmulgee concerned E. Melvin Porter and his political career. No index. Lewis's incisive treatment of the subject should be of interest to students of Oklahoma's black history with regard to civil rights.

Hastain, E. Hastain's Township Plats of the Creek Nation. On file at the library of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK. 1910.

This collection of township plats is organized by northings and eastings and includes all the territory previously designated as the Creek Nation. The maps note the name and enrollment number of each individual allotment given to Creek Indians and Creek Freedmen upon the dissolution of the tribal system. The maps revealed that nearly all the land immediately adjacent to the original townsite of Okmulgee was allotted to Creek Freedmen, thus providing a basis for the substantial black population in the vicinity of Okmulgee at the turn of the century. The wife and children of early citizen, Silas Smith, claimed six such allotments out of which some of Okmulgee's earliest suburban additions were carved. Excellent primary source.

Information Concerning the Indian Territory (answering such inquiries as would be made by people who contemplate seeking homes or making investments). Compiled by Ex-United States Land Appraisers. Indian Territory Publishing Co.: Muskogee, Indian Territory. 1901. On file at Oklahoma Historical Society library, Okmulgee vertical files.

This promotional literature sought to encourage white immigration to the town of Okmulgee. It expressly stated that it is "no longer a village of Indian huts and Negro shanties". Good background on the

development of the county and its physical growth. Photographs of turn-of-the-century Okmulgee buildings are included.

Littlefield, Daniel F., Jr. Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War. Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut. 1979.

Discussion of the pro-slavery factions of the Creeks among wealthy Lower Creek slave holders such as the McIntoshes, the Marshalls, and others, and how they influenced the posture of the tribe toward the American Civil War. Because the discussion ends with the Civil War, there is very little information that pertains directly to the period of significance in Okmulgee.

Low, W. Augustus and Virgil A. Clift. Encyclopedia of Black America. McGraw-Hill Book Company: New York and others. 1981.

This is a general resource for those interested in a survey of black history in the United States. It contains a good account of the Tulsa race riots of 1921, which cast a pall on race relations in Eastern Oklahoma, including Okmulgee, for decades afterward.

Martin, Baird. Historical, Industrial and Civic Survey of Okmulgee and Okmulgee County. Prepared for "American Guide Series", WPA Writer's Project. Financed by the Okmulgee Chamber of Commerce and supervised by the Okmulgee Daily Times. May, 1936. [Portions of the manuscript are on file in the library of the State Historical Society], Oklahoma City, OK.

American Guide Series draft documents compiled under auspices of Works Progress Administration, 1936. This manuscript, one in a series of city guides prepared across the country during the 1930s, contained some of the only information found on institutional buildings important to Okmulgee's black community that have since been demolished. It described Okmulgee's separate schools and library (James Bruce, contributor), health facilities (Willie Allen, contributor), and the black newspaper, the Okmulgee Observer (James Bruce, contributor). Includes excellent descriptions of the physical plants of Dunbar High School, Banneker and Attucks elementary schools and of the Dunbar Branch Library, all since demolished. These were the only written descriptions of these buildings found.

Meachem, Weisiger Associates. Architectural/Historic Survey of Certain Parts of Downtown Okmulgee. Unpublished survey report for the city of Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Norman, Oklahoma. April, 1990.

The historic development section of this survey is a good, concise context for Okmulgee's central business district, the larger context within which the black business community had to operate. It also provided the best "thumbnail sketch" of oil and mineral discoveries and how they affected Okmulgee. The survey contains the most specific documentation found on Okmulgee's physical environment to date and offers clues for further research.



Moore, David and Edward Galloway. Nacogdoches Multiple-Property Nomination. Unpublished National Register Nomination prepared by Hardy-Heck-Moore, Inc. for the City of Nacogdoches, Texas. Austin, Texas. July, 1990.

This is one of several National Register nominations prepared by the firm of Hardy-Heck-Moore that served as source material for Okmulgee Property Types contained in this report.

Nicholson, William. "Indian Agencies in Kansas and the Indian Territory in 1870" in The Kansas Historical Quarterly. On microform indexed under "Smith, Silas" in Indian-Federal Relations, Sec. X, pg. 376. On file at Oklahoma Historical Society library, Oklahoma City, OK. 1870.

A brief but enlightening analysis of Creek Indian and Freedman relationships as compared to other Indian tribes, subsequent to the Civil War. Discusses the extent of intermarriage among Creek native Americans and African Americans. Also gives specific descriptions of Silas Smith, his wife, and hotel.

Oklahoma Historical Society. Black Baptist Churches Thematic Nomination and Okmulgee Black Hospital nomination. National Register of Historic Places. 1984.

This thematic nomination for the black churches, together with the nomination for the black hospital, provided the best analogous contextual information on Okmulgee's black community with specific relevance to a study of its historic architecture.

Perdue, Theda Nations Remembered: An Oral History of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1865-1907. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut. 1980.

Perdue includes some wonderful recollections and a few helpful observances about blacks in Indian Territory after the Civil War but there is nothing specific on Okmulgee.

Smith, Michael et. al. Resource Protection Planning Project: Patterns of White Settlement in Oklahoma, 1889-1907. Oklahoma Historic Preservation Survey, Oklahoma State University: Stillwater. 1986.

This document provided good background on white settlement and the encroachment on Indian lands from the land rush to statehood.

Teall, Kaye M. Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book. Oklahoma Public Schools: Oklahoma City. 1971.

This is a series of reprinted newspaper articles on historical topics of concern to blacks in Oklahoma. There are only three direct references to Okmulgee but there is interesting information on the Creek Freedmen, especially regarding treatment of freedmen among other tribes. Excellent resource for an overview of Oklahoma black history through primary source materials. The collection concentrates on the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It has no specific information regarding this project. Also, it should be updated to include the past two decades and to enlarge its scope.

Tolson, Arthur L. The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541-1972. Edwards Printing Company. New Orleans, La. 1966. (see Tolson, A.)

Tolson, A. "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory, 1889-1907: A Study" PhD dissertation, University of Oklahoma. 1966.

Both this work and Tolson's The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541-1972, are excellent sources of information about black history in Oklahoma but there is little information on Okmulgee. However, any researcher interested in Oklahoma's black history should avail themselves of these two works.

Washington, Nathaniel Jason. Historical Development of the Negro in Oklahoma. Dexter Publishing Company: Tulsa, Oklahoma. 1948.

Although this book is dated in many regards, it is one of the best and most complete overviews of black history in Oklahoma. It is also relevant as a product of its time and, as such, gives important insight into the aspirations of black Oklahomans in the post-World War II period. Some broad statements appear to be based on opinion rather than scholarship but in several cases Washington uses statistics deftly to underscore his points which include a correlation between Klan-related violence in Louisiana and the out-migration of blacks in that state. He also used the Freedman and Creek enrollment files to show the strong influence blacks must have played in Creek life when more than a third of the tribe was comprised of Freedmen at the time of enrollment. Figures were checked against enrollment data on file at the Oklahoma Historical Society Archives and found to be accurate.

Withers, Vicki. A Checklist of Theses and Dissertations Relating to Oklahoma History, University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State, through 1973. Published Masters Thesis, Oklahoma State University: Stillwater, OK. 1974.

This checklist contained many sources of interest to historians researching a number of topics concerning black history in Oklahoma but there were few theses or dissertations that were applicable to this particular project. An update should be conducted to include the nearly 20 years of graduate papers that might contain information relevant to the study of historic black communities.

### Interviews and correspondence

Bullock, Sara Evans. Interview with Terri Myers in Okmulgee, June 20, 1991.  
Correspondence, November 15, 1991.

Gallimore, Zenobia. Interview with Terri Myers in Okmulgee, June 20, 1991.  
Correspondence, November 18, 1991.

Hayes, Katherine. Interview with Terri Myers in Okmulgee, June 18, 1991.  
Correspondence, October 31, 1991.

House, Elmer. Interview with Terri Myers in Okmulgee, July 3, 1991.

Lilly, Vivian. Interview with Terri Myers in Okmulgee, June 20, 1991.  
Correspondence, November 13, 1991.

Wesley, Marzetta. Interview with Terri Myers in Okmulgee, July 2, 1991.

The interviews conducted with these residents of Okmulgee, Oklahoma, were possibly the most important sources of information about specific buildings and the people who built or occupied them during the period of significance. In addition, nearly all the interviewees took the time to review drafts of the historic context and provided valuable insight and information about Okmulgee's historic black communities that could not have been obtained elsewhere. The author is very grateful for the time and efforts volunteered by these Okmulgee residents.

### Newspapers

Oklahoma's Orbit, Sunday, December 6, 1959: 8. Special issue on Okmulgee. In Okmulgee vertical files, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK. 1959.

This historical retrospective of the "Golden Decade" of Okmulgee County is a general history of the county with an emphasis on the period from 1907 to 1918, the oil and gas boom years. There is very little specific information regarding Okmulgee's black population with the exception of a mention of "three separate schools for negroes" at that time. Indian contributions limited to a discussion of their "overnight" riches from oil and gas discoveries on their allotments. The article mentioned that the town of Okmulgee was officially surveyed and platted in 1904 (page 118) and that Attucks School was built in 1922 (page 224).

Okmulgee Observer, September 19, 1953. On file at University of Oklahoma Western History Collection. Norman, OK. 1953.

Although the black newspaper, Okmulgee Observer was begun in 1928 by editor B. J. Wilson and remained in circulation through the mid-1950s, only this copy has been located. Neither the Oklahoma State Historical Society library and archives, nor the Okmulgee Public Library had any other editions of this newspaper. This single copy gave a glimpse of black society in Okmulgee in the post-World War II era but it would be very useful to future research if other, earlier copies could be located. Possible sources to contact might include Langston University, any descendants of B. J. Wilson the newspaper editor for the duration of the newspaper, local collectors and possibly the black newspaper family in Muskogee, Oklahoma. This edition of

the Observer showed the emergence of black suburban residential development in South Okmulgee near West 17th Street.

Okmulgee Light, vol. 1, No. 35, Friday November 27, 1914. William J. Brooks, editor; J. W. Foster and W. H. Fort, associate editors; Rev. T. H. Wiseman, publisher. On file Okmulgee City Library, microfilm. 1914.

Only one copy of this early black newspaper was located in the Okmulgee Public Library. No other copies were found in either the archives of the state Historical Society in Oklahoma City or at the University of Oklahoma at Norman. The paper is known to have survived for several years as it was listed in the 1916 city directory. Other copies may be in the possession of local residents. They would be an excellent source of information about early black development in Okmulgee. This single copy provided information about early churches, businesses, fraternal organizations and suburban residential developments for blacks.

#### Miscellaneous Sources

Okmulgee City Directories: 1909, 1912, 1916, 1918, 1922, 1928, 1930. Okmulgee Public Library.

County Deed Records, var. Office of the County Clerk, Okmulgee County Courthouse

Creek Enrollment files and County Census records, Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society.

Vertical files "Okmulgee", Oklahoma Historical Society library, Oklahoma City, OK.

#### Maps

Hastain Township Maps, (see Hastain, E. above)

Okmulgee City Additions Map, n.d. Located at City Hall, Okmulgee, OK.

This map shows additions to the original township and a number of buildings including churches, schools, the Council House as well as parks and cemeteries. The map was not named or dated.

Okmulgee City Plat Maps, collected. Dates, var. Office of Planning and Development, City of Okmulgee.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Maps of Okmulgee for the years 1892, 1894, 1896, 1901, 1907, 1911, 1916, 1920, and 1924.

Sanborn maps of Okmulgee were extremely helpful in tracking the evolution and eventual segregation of black built environment in the city due to their denotation of special buildings, such as churches and schools, with the words "Negro" or "Colored". The 1911 Sanborn maps also marked an entire section of town as "being occupied by colored people". Comparisons between maps of different years depicted changes in buildings as well as the evolution of the black community and how they related to the increasingly larger white community. On microfilm at the Okmulgee Library and University of Oklahoma, Western History Collection.

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1022 E. Second Street
- figure 20 - George and I. E. Carroll House, ca. 1907  
600 E. Fifth Street (or 117 N. Severs)
- figure 21 - Church of the Living God, ca. 1920  
corner of Smith and Woods streets
- figure 22 - Shorter Chapel A.M.E., ca. 1916, rebuilt 1977  
201 E. Third Street
- figure 23 - Kenedy House, ca. 1925  
406 Delaware Street

Figure 1 - Key Block, 1902  
200 N. Morton Street

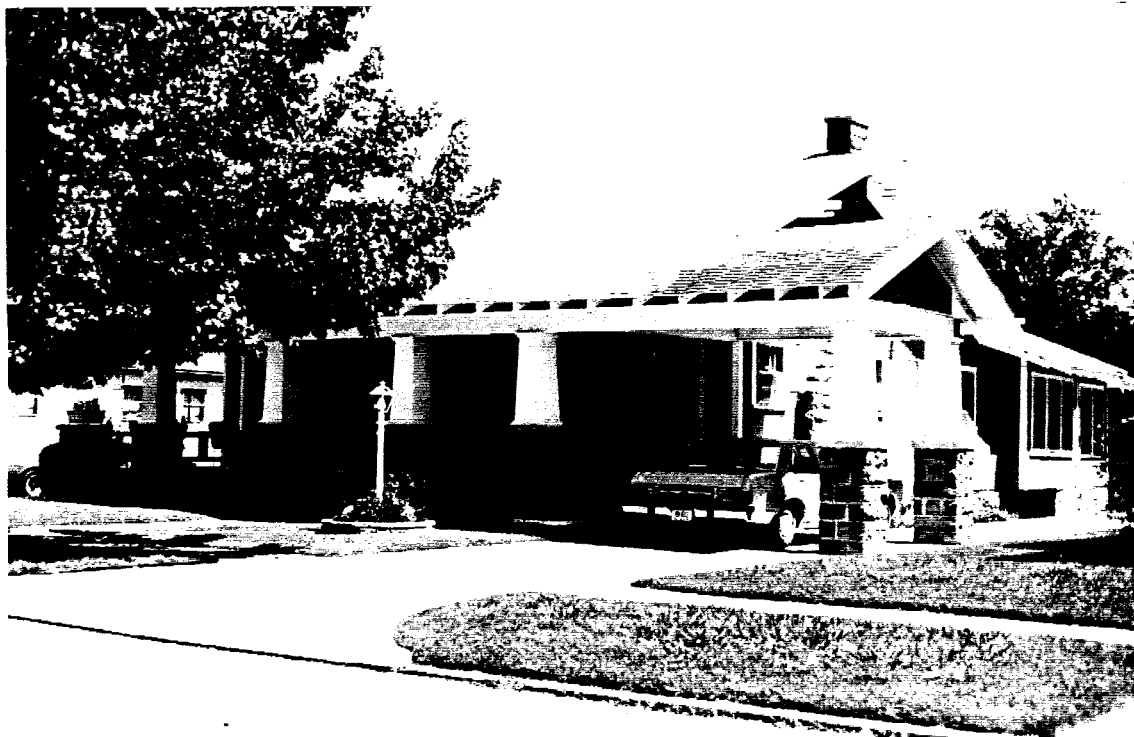


Figure 2 - Franklin United Methodist Church, ca. 1909  
1001 E. Third Street





Figure 3 - W. F. Haygood House, ca. 1923  
1014 E. Third Street



Mack Brown House, ca. 1922  
908 E. Third Street



Figure 4 - Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church, ca. 1927  
800 block E. Third Street



Figure 5 - Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church and School, both ca. 1927  
800 block E. Third Street and southwest corner Choctaw and E. Third streets

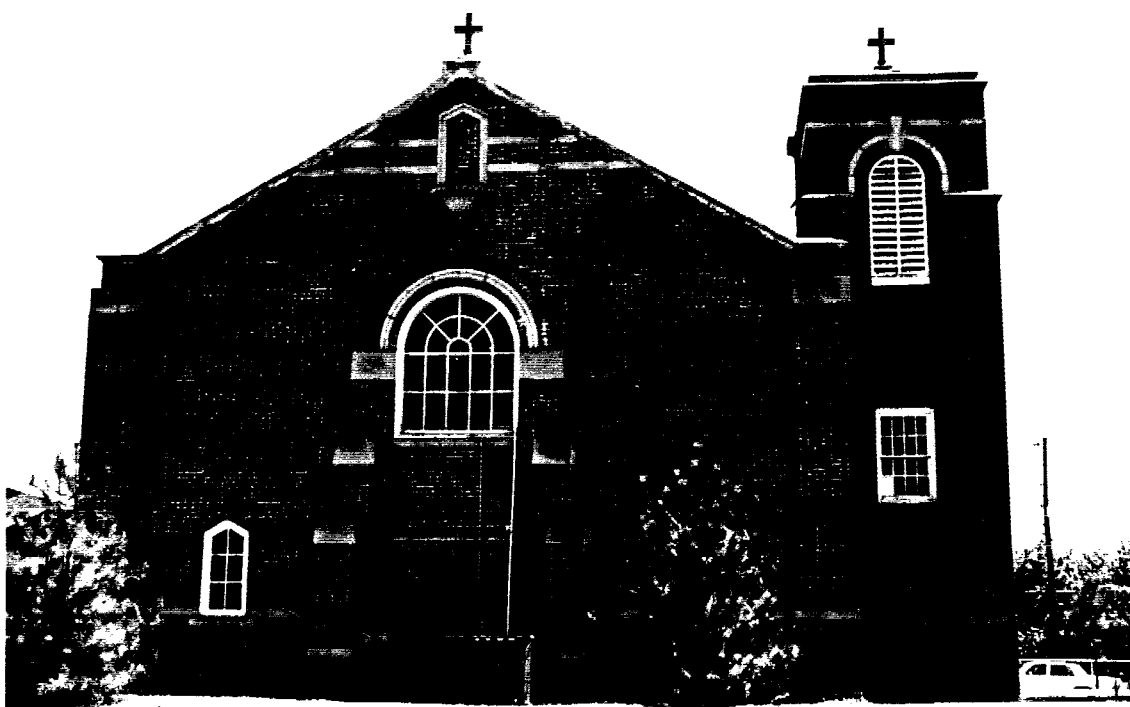


Figure 6 - site of original Dunbar School and Banneker School  
northwest corner Second and Delaware streets

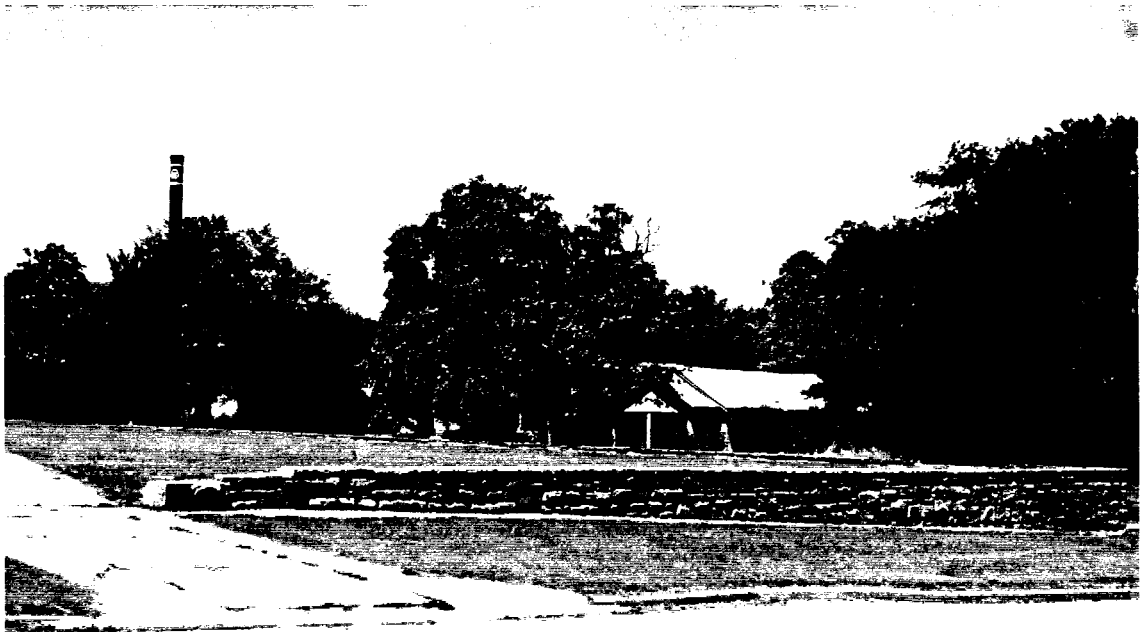


Figure 7 - Simons Park (also known as Bullock's Park)  
southwest corner First and Muskogee streets



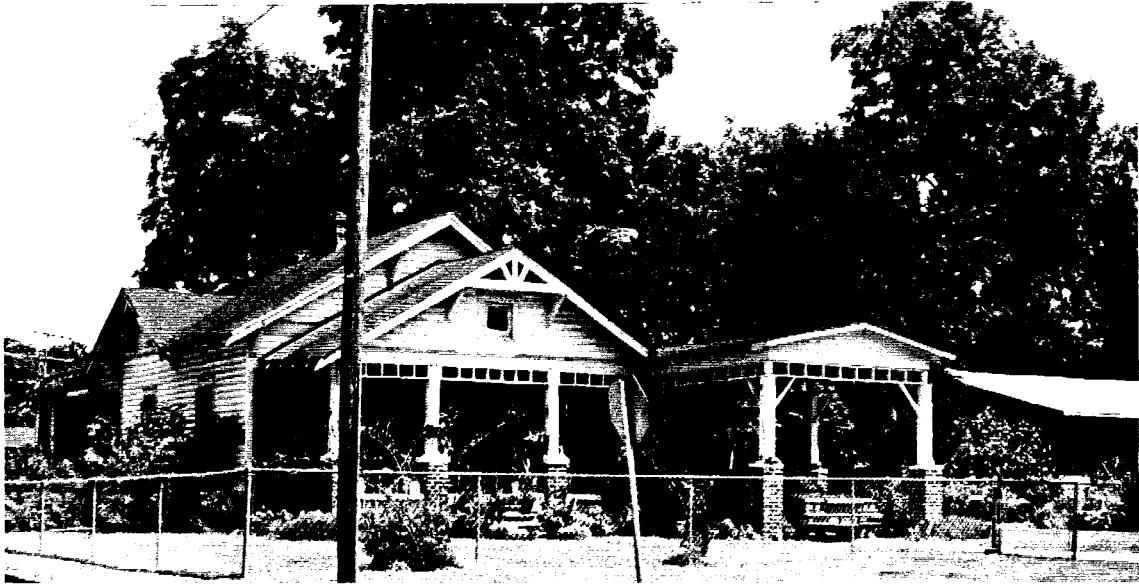
Figure 8 - Spencer Adams House (also known as the Presbyterian Manse), ca. 1914  
801 N. Muskogee Street (should be 601)



Robert Gamble House, ca. 1910  
523 N. Muskogee Street



Figure 9 - Wallace House, ca. 1918  
519 N. Porter Street



Charles Evans House, ca. 1914  
820 N. Porter Street

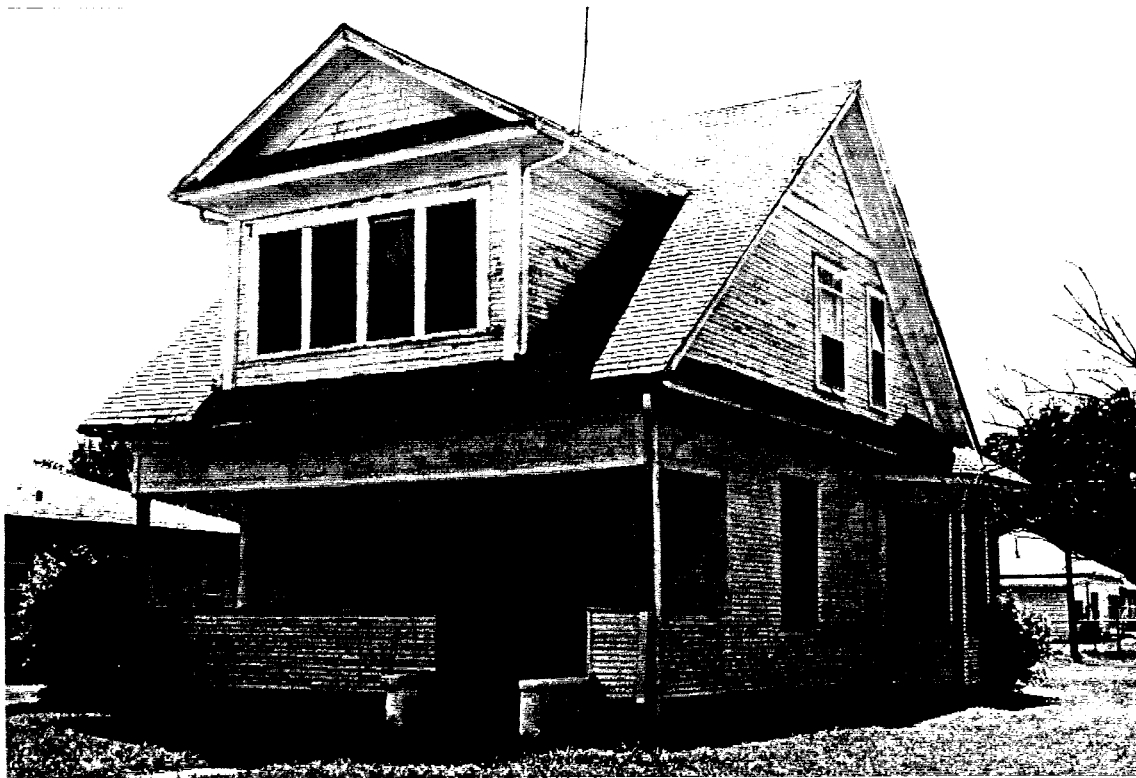


Figure 10 - First Baptist Church (Central), 1915  
521 N. Central Avenue





Figure 11 - C. E. and Ruth Ella King House House, 1916  
500 N. Central Avenue (or 121 E. Second Street)



Figure 12 - Victor Brown House, ca. 1918  
510 N. Central Avenue



Dr. James White House, ca. 1918  
503 N. Central Avenue

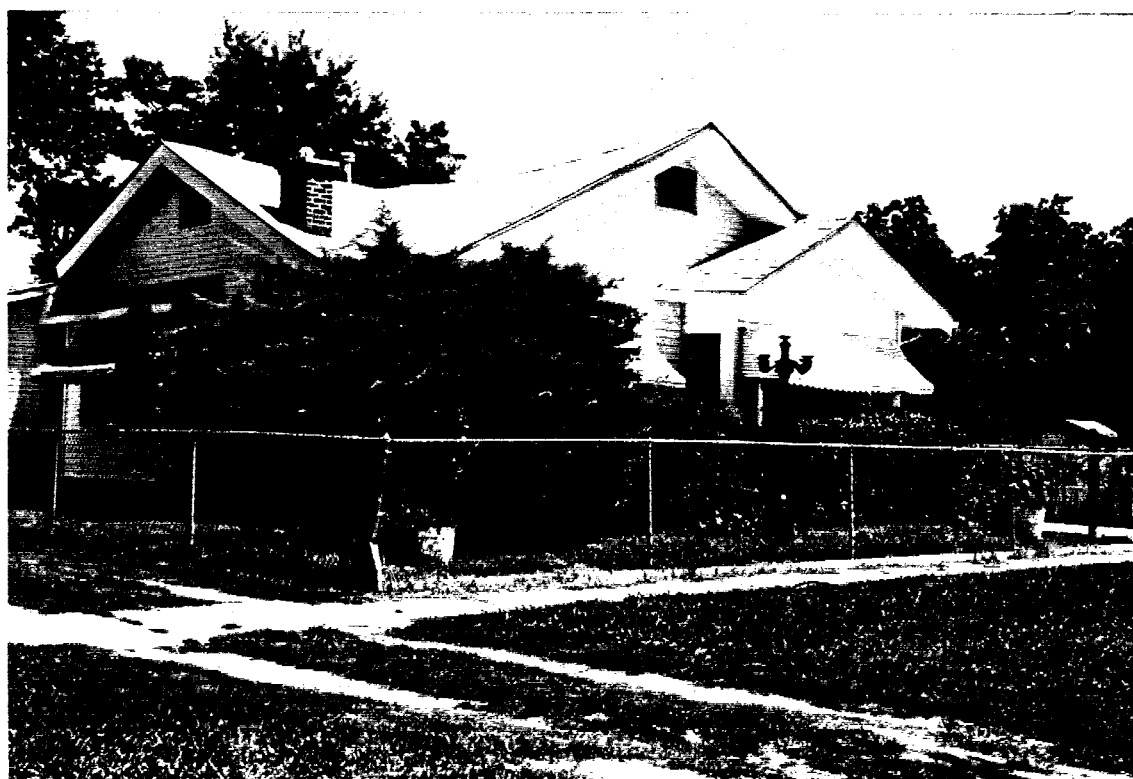


Figure 13 - W. S. Sneed buildings, 1914  
619 E. Sixth Street



Figure 14 - R. B. Taylor Building, ca. 1913  
423 E. Fifth Street



Glass Building, ca. 1913  
417-19-21 E. Fifth Street



Figure 15 - Masonic Hall, current appearance ca. 1928  
503 E. Fifth Street



H & H Cab Co., ca. 1920  
501 E. Fifth Street

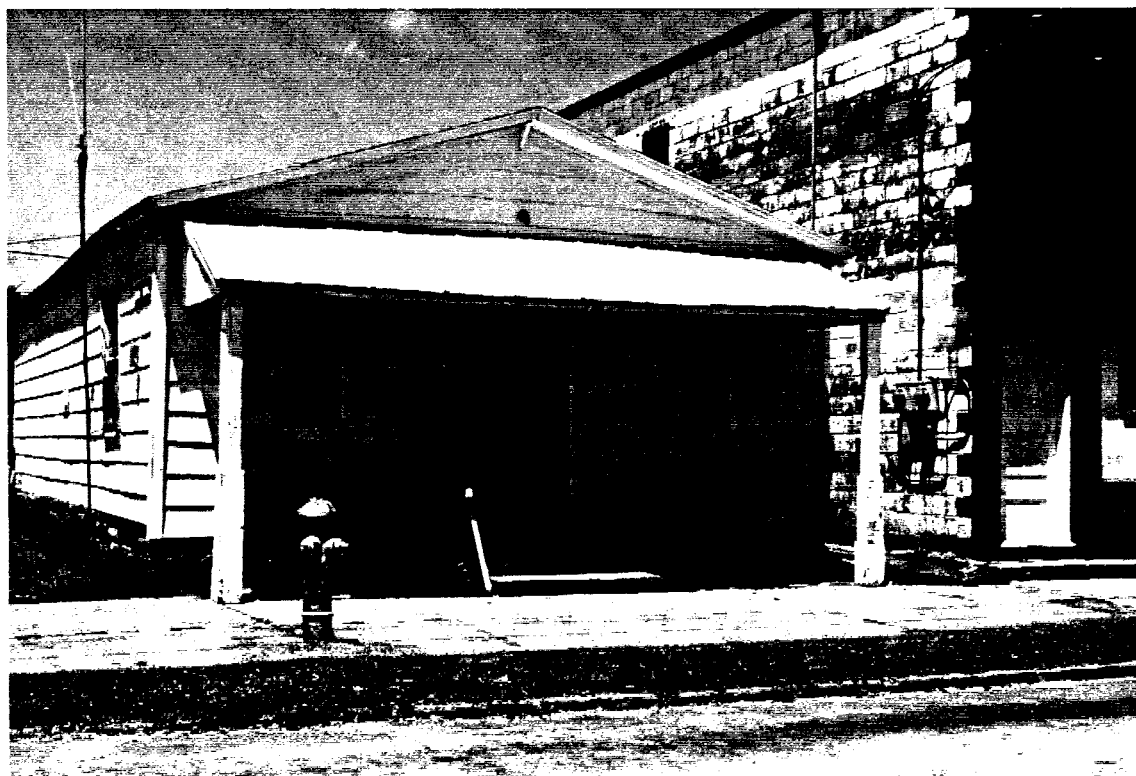


Figure 16 - Harrison Block, 1915  
515-17-19 E. Fifth Street

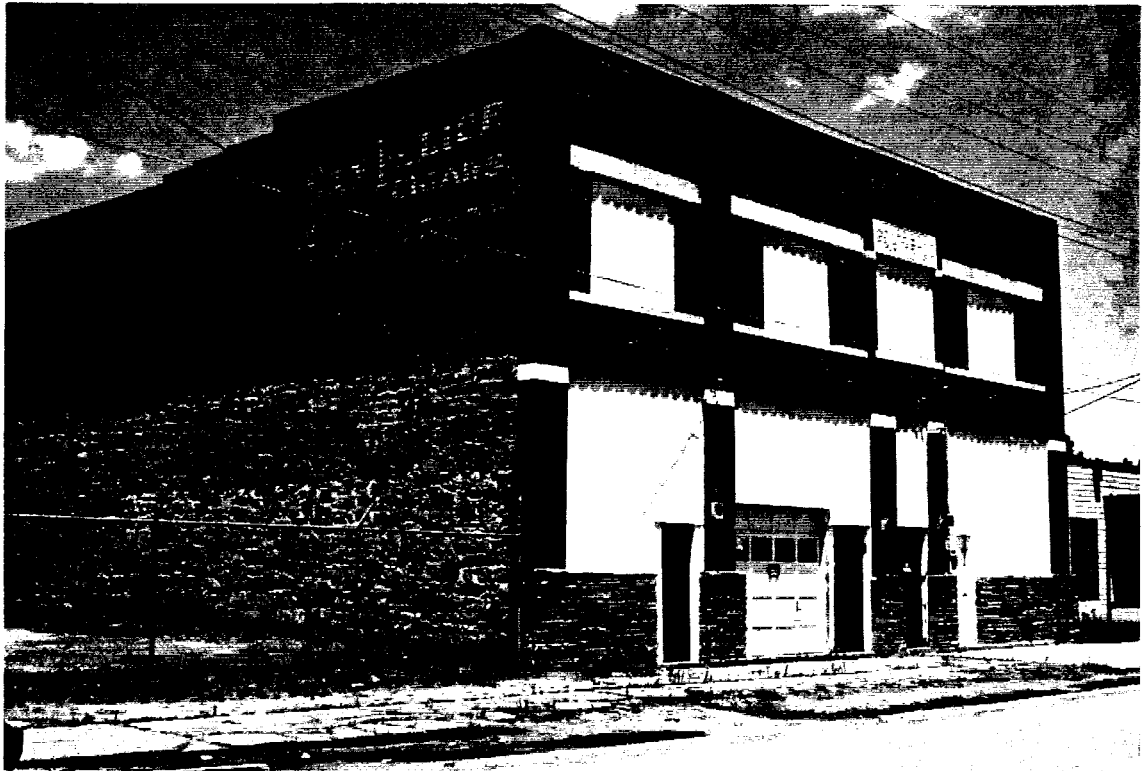


Figure 17 - Robert B. Copeland Building, 1920  
600 block E. Fifth Street



James White Building, 1920  
509 E. Fifth Street



Figure 18 - Key Block, 1919  
309-317 W. Seventh Street





Figure 19 - Melvina Roper Simpkins House, ca. 1910  
1101 E. Third Street



William Shealey House, ca. 1915  
1022 E. Second Street



Figure 20 - George and I.E. Carroll House, ca. 1907  
600 E. Fifth Street (or 117 N. Severs)



Figure 21 - Church of the Living God, ca. 1920  
corner of Smith and Woods streets



Figure 22 - Shorter Chapel A.M.E., ca. 1916, rebuilt 1977  
201 E. Third Street



Figure 23 - Kenedy House, ca. 1925  
406 Delaware Street



## SUMMARY

The contributions made by Okmulgee's black citizens - Creek Freedmen, pioneer settlers, oil men and entrepreneurs - to the city's physical growth and development of the city are considerable and significant. Hundreds of domestic dwellings and about a dozen major commercial buildings associated with the city's black community survive from the historic period. The earliest building attributed to blacks is the Key Block, a commercial building constructed in 1902 in the central business district, but the bulk of the remaining black commercial and residential structures were built between 1913-1927, a period of phenomenal growth following oil, coal and gas discoveries in the region. Three historic institutional buildings, also dating from this period, have already been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Although few historic high-style buildings are associated with Okmulgee's black community, the cohesive concentrations of bungalows and vernacular dwellings and the collection of substantial commercial buildings adequately convey the sense of time, place and historic associations required for nomination to the National Register.

It is recommended that a survey be conducted of the black neighborhoods, the E. Fifth Street commercial district, and the outlying individual properties identified in this report, to determine their eligibility for listing in the National Register. Such a survey would determine the boundaries of potential historic districts and the contributing or non-contributing status of properties within those districts. The preliminary research compiled for this project indicates that two residential districts, concentrated along N. Central Avenue and on E. Second and E. Third streets in East Okmulgee, in addition to the E. Fifth Street commercial area, may possess the necessary architectural integrity and historic associations to qualify for listing in the National Register. Individual buildings that may be eligible for listing as part of a Multiple Property nomination, either by virtue of their architectural merit or of their historic associations, include:

W.S. Sneed Buildings, 619 and 621 E. Sixth Street  
1902 Key Block, 200 N. Morton (corner of Fifth Street)  
1919 Key Block, 309-317 W. Seventh Street  
Franklin United Methodist Church, 1001 E. Third Street  
C.E. and Ella King House, 500 N. Central Avenue  
Charles Evans House, 820 N. Porter  
Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church, 812 E. Third Street  
Mack Brown House, 908 E. Third Street

Many of the properties identified in the list of figures which accompanies this report would qualify as contributing structures in historic districts. If a comprehensive survey does not indicate the designation of such historic districts, these properties should be considered for inclusion in a Multiple Property nomination with those listed above.

In addition, it is recommended that an effort be made to further document Okmulgee's extraordinary black history through interviews and artifact collection. An oral history program, operating in conjunction with a municipal preservation plan, could augment the interpretation the city's black historic architectural resources and engender public support of revitalization projects. The Okmulgee Public Library, which already houses a number of historic newspapers, maps and documents of local importance, would be an appropriate repository for taped interviews and transcripts. Ultimately, however, Okmulgee's unique black heritage has significance beyond the local level and such a collection should be made available to scholars for research.

Finally, continued efforts should be made to identify other black architectural resources whose origins may have been lost as Okmulgee evolved into a segregated city. Subjects for future research might include the South Okmulgee community that emerged around the Key Addition near S. Florida and Fifteenth streets and the black rodeo grounds on S. Mission Road on property owned by Willie King.

## APPENDIX

### Physical Development of Okmulgee's Black Community

#### Additions

1904 - Smith Addition - Rebecca Smith, a Creek Freedman successfully petitioned the courts to allow her to sell part of her allotment. The Smith Addition immediately north of the original town of Okmulgee, was one of the first additions to the city.

1905 - Haynes Addition southeast of the original city.

1906 - Walnut Grove Addition - Carved out of the Rebecca Smith allotment, this became a popular addition with Okmulgee's class of rising professionals in the 1910s.

1906 - Northside Addition was platted from the allotment of Tobe Tiger, a Creek Indian.

1908 - Boyd and Weimer Addition to the south of the original city was platted out of the allotment of Sarah Smith, a Creek Freedman.

1909 - 1913 - Key Addition also in the Sarah Smith allotment, this addition was platted by a member of the same Key family that built one of Okmulgee's earliest brick commercial buildings and later the block of buildings directly north of the courthouse. This addition included the family home of John B. and Annie Key at Florida and 15th Street but it has been demolished. The area was surveyed in 1909 but not filed until 1913.

1910 - Grissom Addition To the west of the Smith Addition.

1911 - Northeast Addition - also appears to have been platted from the Rebecca Smith allotment.

1916 - East Side Acres

1918 - Monticello Addition - carved out of the William Morton allotment

1919 - Washington Addition

1919 - Elizabeth Dunbar and Adam Brady tract - from small allotments immediately south of original townsite.

1920 - Liberty Addition carved out of the Hopsy Tiger Addition, a Creek.

1920 - Crume and Crittenden Smith Addition - Crittenden Smith was the guardian for Creek Freedman children, Ruth Ella King House and Willie King House.

1921 - Cary Addition carved from the Lear Cuff, Creek Freedman, allotment

1923 - Luckey Addition from the Floyd Luckey, Freedman, allotment.

1923 - Monticello Addition (2nd) William Morton filed for himself from his own allotment.

1946 - Taylor Addition carved out of the George Hill allotment. Taylor (2nd) Addition platted in 1966.



Historical Sketch of Okmulgee's Black Settlement  
from The History of Okmulgee County and oral histories.

1868 - 1890

Silas Smith, a blacksmith sent by the U.S. government to repair agricultural implements, married a Creek Freedman named Minnie who was mother of his children. Minnie Smith and her children were probably the first black residents of Okmulgee. She died some time between 1891 and 1898 and Smith remarried, again to a Creek Freedman, Rebecca Smith. Smith established a hotel by 1870 operated run by his wife for the delegates to the Creek National meetings. The hotel was located at the northeast corner of Fifth Street and East.

1889

Oklahoma land rush. A number of blacks seeking homesteads join in the land rush bringing more blacks to the territory. Their numbers increase as word gets back to relatives in the South.

1890

Census estimate for Okmulgee in 1890 only 136 (Meachem Weisiger Associates, 1990:15) but of that number were enough blacks, either Freedmen or immigrants, to establish two black churches by 1894.

1892

New Hope Baptist Church established.

1894

Sanborn map depicts "Colored Baptist Church" on west side of Morton Street in block northwest of the Council House and a "Colored ME Church and School" in the block west of Smith's hotel facing East Street (now Grand). Smith's hotel is shown as "Okmulgee Hotel". Population is given as 400 but that figure drops to 200 by 1898.

1898-1901

James Roper, a black teacher and former Justice of the Peace, is appointed postmaster.

1900

Black exodus from the south continues as crop failures and past grievances work to encourage a new start. New arrivals include Berry Petty, whose family followed in 1903, and the members of the Cowan family about 1902.

1901

The railroad connects Okmulgee to the outside world. Many blacks arrive by railroad.

1902

John B. Key, a black grocer and dry goods store proprietor, constructs the Key building at the northwest corner of Fifth Street and Morton. This is the oldest known extant building associated with Okmulgee's black community. Many black professionals and businessmen become tenants from 1902 through the 1910s.

1903

Zion Bethel Baptist Church established in East Okmulgee, would become Eastside Baptist with new church on this site in 1921.

1907

Dalcour family came by train, Martha Buford and Preston Figures families arrive.

1908

Mence family driven out of LA due to boll weevil come to Okmulgee. William Fort, later principal of Dunbar School arrives.

1909

Charles Arthur Evans arrives in Okmulgee sends for Alberta to be his wife, 1913. About this time Robert S. Gamble arrives. Daniel Berry House and son, Clanton Edward House arrive in Okmulgee for better business opportunities and better schools. Bought a home on N. Delaware and joined Shorter AME.

1911

More members of Cowan family arrive. Gallimores come to Okmulgee via Boley.

1914

Dallas Gallimore bought home in Walnut Grove. Alberta and Chester Evans built home in Walnut Grove.

1915

First Baptist Central builds first brick Baptist Church in Okmulgee. Estelle Woodruff born in Okmulgee.

1916

John Latimer and Donzel Hill move to Okmulgee County. House House built at Central and Second streets. Oil strikes on W.F. Haygood property in county.

1918

Henry Haygood dies in World War I.

1919

Josie and Pow Nash came to Okmulgee and brought Josie's brother John.

1921

Eastside Baptist Church built on site of Zion Baptist. Tulsa race riots. Black section of Tulsa burned

1922

Black hospital built at Third Street and Woods Drive.

1923

W. F. Haygood House built. Haygood moves to town.

1930s

Benjamin and Porter Mann arrive. Benjamin has store at corner E. First and Wood Dr. Porter had sundry store on E. Fifth until he sold it to pharmacist Simpkins.

1935

Vivian Gamble Lilly began teaching at Banneker School.

1938

D.P. Lilly hired as Okmulgee County Agricultural agent.

1948

Dwight Coleman opened shoe shop on E. Fifth Street. (In 1954, became first black mail carrier in county).

1949

Aaron C. Keaton became first black deputy sheriff in Okmulgee County.

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