Appendix L Blueprint, Sketches, Photographs of the House

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APPENDIX L
BLUEPRINT, SKETCHES, AND HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHS

The following provide graphical images of the House of the Black Burghardts from the period when Du Bois was making his renovations in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

First are two photographs of the House. These are followed by a series of 5 sketches of floorplans with dimensions. And the third is a series of photographs, one from the Du Bois papers and two others that were briefly on the internet, that are also of the House.

In the following discussion we make observations about the photographs and suggestions about when, by whom, and for what purpose each was made.

L.1 1928 Photograph of the House of the Black Burghardts
L.2 1933 Photograph of the House of the Black Burghardts
L.3 A Sketch of 1st floor interior dimensions
L.3 B1 Sketch of 2nd floor interior dimensions
L.3 B2 Sketch exterior dimensions of House
L.3 C1 Sketch 1st floor south wall dimensions
L.3 C2 Sketch of 2nd floor interior dimensions (incorrect measurements)
L.4 Vance 1928 Blueprint for “Cottage of Mr. W.E.B. Du Bois”
L.5 Three pictures of W.E.B. Du Bois, Nina Gomer Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson at the House

L.1 and L.2 Two Pictures of the House of the Black Burghardts.

L.1 is a picture published in the New York Times in an article discussing the 1969 dedication ceremony (May 16, 1969; 49). Since it is a reproduction of a photograph, it is quite grainy. The New York Times has not been able to provide us with the original photograph, nor does it have any further information about who took it. It is the most widely circulated picture and has been the basis for at least one artist’s rendering of the House.

L.1 was taken from the southwest of the House, probably from the opposite side of Egremont Road. There are no other structures apparent in the photograph. The roof of both the main block and the wing are in decrepit shape. The main block has a centrally located chimney, not the end chimney whose foundation exists on the site today. The trees in the photograph have not yet leafed-out.

When was it taken? The New York Times caption states that this was the “’House of the Black Burghardts,’ Great Barrington, in the 1930s.” This date cannot be correct. The correspondence between Vance and Du Bois in June and July of 1928 discuss improvements made to the House that are not evident in the picture. On June 7, 1928
Vance sent Du Bois a letter noting, “I enclose two photographs showing the present condition of the cottage.” In the same letter Vance notes: “The cottage will require an entire new shingle roof, as those on the old roof are gone” (Vance to Du Bois June 7 1928). Du Bois responded on June 12th, “Thank you for the plans and photographs. I am going, first of all, to have a roof put on the cottage” (Du Bois to Vance June 12 1928). And by July 18th of 1928 Du Bois informed Vance, “I have had a shingled roof put on the main part of my cottage and one chimney built” (Du Bois to Vance July 18, 1928). L.1 must have been taken before the summer of 1928.

This correspondence also provides one possible answer to who took this picture, namely the architect of Berkshire County, Joseph McArthur Vance, who had worked with James Weldon Johnson on his Great Barrington property. The correspondence holds out the possibility that this is one of Vance’s two “before” pictures that he sent to Du Bois (Vance to Du Bois June 7 1928). Du Bois and Vance first started corresponding in mid-April (Du Bois to Vance 4/17/1928), and appear to have met in Great Barrington on Thursday April 26th, 1928, (Vance to Du Bois 4/21/1928, Du Bois to Vance 4/23/1928). A mid-spring meeting with pictures taken either just before or after would have caught the trees before they had put out their leaves.

Another possibility is that this picture was taken at the same time that L.5 (discussed below) was taken though the presence of snow in L.5 and the lack thereof in L.1 rules this out.

Similarly, it seems unlikely that L.1 was taken by the former residents, the Woosters during their residence from at least 1907 until sometime in the mid to late 1910s. The House pictured in L.1 has a roof that makes it appear uninhabitable. It is always possible that Du Bois or Davis took the picture in the 1920s when Du Bois was interested in obtaining Great Barrington property. The most likely is that the photograph was taken when Du Bois, Davis, and Vance were making their plans.

L.2 is undated but was found in the Du Bois Papers along with others from 1933. It was taken from roughly the same angle as L.1, from the southwest and probably from across Egremont Road which is visible in the foreground. It is a tighter shot than L.1., and once again no other buildings are evident. Most of the vegetation is fully leafed out, though one tree near the front door is bare. In comparison to L.1, the roof of the main block has been reshingled and the chimney moved to the east end where its foundation can be seen today. However, the west wing of the House has begun to collapse.

Clearly L.2 was taken after the 1928 renovations had taken place. The state of the wing, in so much worse shape than in L.1, suggests that some time has passed, and the 5 years until 1933 seems reasonable. Moreover, there is a possible photographer in 1933. In August Du Bois wrote to Willoughby about putting up Nina and a woman friend the last two weeks of August of 1933 at the Sunset Inn (Du Bois to Willoughby 8/8/1933). We do not know for certain that Nina spent those two weeks in Great Barrington. However, in the summer of 1933 Du Bois, in addition to teaching at Atlanta University (Lewis 2000: 325), was organizing and running the second Amenia Conference with its weighty
purpose of strategizing the direction of the civil rights movement. It was held from August 18-22 on the Spingarn estate, Troutbeck, not far from Great Barrington in upstate New York. If Nina did stay in Great Barrington while Du Bois was busy at the Amenia Conference she may have photographed the House so Du Bois could see its present state. One contrary bit of evidence is the bare tree in front of the House. Is it diseased and dying or was the picture taken in the late spring early summer before all the vegetation has leafed out? If Nina did take the picture it is not surprisingly that it made its way into the Du Bois family papers for 1933.

Another possible date is in the 1940s. Warren Davis wrote to Du Bois in 1944 (Davis to Du Bois 2/4/1944) and again in 1949 (Davis to Du Bois 10/17/49) asking if he was interested in selling the property. Though no photograph is mentioned in either letter, Davis may have wanted to underline his point. It would have had to be the 1944 letter because by 1949 Du Bois’s response to Davis describes a much more decrepit structure that that pictured in L.2: “The present structure, of course, there is no chance of saving, and perhaps even the chimney ought to be torn down” (Du Bois to Davis 10/28/1949). The main block is in clearly salvageable condition in L2. The most likely of these speculations, always open to amendment, is that Nina was the photographer in 1933.

The exact dates of the L.1 and L.2 must remain a mystery until Vance’s photographs come to light, other archives (e.g. The Crisis and the Berkshire Eagle) are searched, and we better understand Nina’s and Du Bois’s itineraries in 1933. We can firmly state that L.1 pre-dates the renovations in 1928 and L.2 post-dates the same. Our working hypotheses date L.1 to 1928 and L.2 to 1933.

We put these photographs to use in understanding the footprint of the house, the very shallow front yard, and landscape features surrounding the House in developing research designs and interpretations for the archaeological work at the Homesite.
L.2 Photograph of the House of the Black Burghardts from the Du Bois Papers (1933 section). (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries)
L.3 Sketches of Floorplans of the House

A series of 5 sketches of floorplans are in the Du Bois Papers (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries). They are small pencil sketches of the dimensions for the interior dimensions of the 1st (L.3A and L.3B 1) and 2nd (L.3C 2) floors, and the exterior dimensions for the south façade (L.3B 2 and L.3C 1).

One of the five sketches is not consistent with the others or with the blueprint (L.4 discussed below). Two plans give interior gable lengths of 17’ .5” (L.3B 1 and C 2) whereas L.3A gives 17’ 7.5” and the exterior L.3C 1 gives 18’ 6.5”. These seem relatively minor discrepancies that are likely due to 6” thick walls. A larger discrepancy exists for the façade length. L.3C 2’s interior façade for the 2nd floor of the main block of the house is 25’ 8” whereas all other interior plans are the reasonably close interior 2nd floor dimension of 29’ 4” (L.3B 1) or the interior and exterior 1st floor dimensions of 29’8.5” (L.3A and L3B 2). The exterior plan (L.3B 2) has a façade that is 32’2.5” a discrepancy from the interior lengths that can be accounted for by factoring in five 6” walls. The short façade on L.3C 2 appears to be a misrepresentation of the length of the second floor hall.

These dimensions (excluding L.3C 2) are reasonably good fits to the dimensions that can be taken from the Blueprint (L.4). They also fit well on the measurements taken from the foundation stones that outline the footprint of the House on today’s surface.

These sketches appear to be part of Du Bois’s and Vance’s planning for the remodeling of the House in the spring and summer of 1928. Du Bois and Vance began their correspondence April 17, 1928 (Du Bois to Vance 4/26/1928) and appear to have met in Great Barrington on April 26, 1928 (Du Bois to Vance 4/23/1928, Du Bois to Willoughby 4/23/1928, Vance to Du Bois 4./21/1928). Vance wrote to Du Bois on June 7, 1928 that he had finally made it to Great Barrington, and was sending Du Bois “a layout for the changes.”

Can these sketches be the layout? A notation in brackets on the plans suggests that these are Vance’s and were sent to Du Bois. If so, they are odd plans since they record an existing structure rather than proposing changes to that structure. Moreover, the information provided on Credo at the Special Collections and University Archives of the W.E.B. Du Bois Library of the University of Massachusetts Amherst for these speculates that the handwriting is Du Bois’s. Are they Du Bois making notes to himself or are they Vance or one of his assistants taking measurements to prepare the blueprint? We don’t know, but if Vance’s papers could ever be studied and the answer may lie therein. Regardless, Du Bois received the final blueprint in August (Du Bois to Vance 8/10/1928).
We put these sketches to use in determining the dimensions of the footprint of the House of the Black Burghardts and fitting them to footing stones found through archaeological survey. See the discussion in Chapter 5 in the section “Mapping the House Footings and the Cellar Hole.”
L3.A Sketch of 1st Floor Interior Dimensions (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries)
L.3B 1 Sketch of 2nd Floor Interior Dimensions (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries)
L.3C 1 Sketch of 1st Floor Exterior Dimensions (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries)
L.3.C 2 Sketch of 2nd Floor Interior Dimensions (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries)
**L.4 Vance Blueprint for “Cottage of Mr. W.E.B. Du Bois”**

The Blueprint (L.4) is Du Bois’s and Vance’s plan for Du Bois’s country home. It calls for a Music Room and Library, second floor bathroom, and refurbished woodshed, all consistent with an interior more befitting of Du Bois’s needs for a country retreat than spaces for the homemaking, boarding, agricultural, and service work that were the jobs of his ancestors. As presented in the main text, the documentary and archaeological records suggest that very little of this plan took shape. As Du Bois notes in his posthumous autobiography (Du Bois 1968: 63)

> I planned eventually to make it my country home, but the old home was dilapidated; the boundaries of the land had been encroached upon by neighbors, and the cost of restoration was beyond my means.

We made use of these blueprints in the 2003 field season to assess the extent of planned renovations, and especially to test whether or not footings had been laid for the western chimney. As Chapter 5 relates, though we didn’t find chimney footings in this location, we did locate as yet unidentified stone features.
L.4 Vance 1928 Blueprint for “Cottage of Mr. W.E.B. Du Bois.” (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries)
L.5 Photographs of the House

L5 A is from the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers at the Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst with no attribution, location, or date. It is of Du Bois, his first wife, Nina Gomer Du Bois, and his friend and associate, James Weldon Johnson. They are in winter clothing standing in front of a white clapboarded building. A shuttered window is behind Nina and unidentifiable architectural feature is behind Du Bois. What appear to be shadows are cast on the building behind them.

This is a striking picture of Du Bois, and interesting to find him photographed with his wife Nina and friend Johnson. But we didn’t see its relevance to the work at the Homesite until two other photographs (L.5 B and L.5 C) were put up for auction on Ebay in 2005. Robert Cox, Head of Special Collections and University Archives, put a bid on them, but lost the bid.

L.5 B and C are both of the same 8 people, 4 men and 4 women, including Du Bois, Nina, and Johnson. They are in winter clothing of an early 20th century style. The ground is covered with snow. Behind them is a white shingled building. It can be seen in L.5 C that the building is made of two sections, one of 2-stories to the right and one of 1- story to the left. A roof for a small porch is behind them to the right and some sort of architectural feature is at ground level beyond. L.5 B has the group posing under the entryway roof; the ground level architectural feature is for a hatchway entrance to a cellar.

It doesn’t take long to realize that L.5 C is the larger picture from which L.5 A, the picture from the Papers, was cropped. Du Bois, Nina, and Johnson have exactly the same posture, bearing, and clothing in both. The background of the white clapboards and shuttered window, even the shadows cast on the building, are the same. The unidentifiable architectural feature behind Du Bois in L.5 A becomes identifiable in L.5 C as the junction between the 1- and the 2-story parts of the structure.

We do not know who took these pictures. There is no documented attribution. And it does not appear that one member of the party swapped places with another to record everyone’s presence at the event.

L.5 C, when compared to L.1 and L.2, is clearly of the House of the Black Burghardts. All these are pictures of a 2-story cape style house with a 1-story ell attached to the side. The house in all three is clapboarded house with a short entry way roof over its front door. The windows are of the same dimension. The relationship of the windows to the front door and to the ell are the same. They appear to have similar shutters. The hatchway is in the same position as a break in the cellar wall that was observed during the archaeological investigations. And the bare tree evident in L.1 and L.2 is the likely the source of the shadows behind Du Bois, Nina, and Johnson.
When were the L.5 photographs taken and who are the other people in the photograph? The information that accompanied the Ebay sale stated:

(DU BOIS, W. E. B.) Pair of small, amateur photographic portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Du Bois with Mr. and Mrs. James Weldon Johnson, and Dr. and Mrs. Ernest Alexander, taken at Great Barrington, MA, 23 February 1928, on the occasion of W. E. B.'s 60th birthday, silver prints in 3x5 inch format. Great Barrington, 1928

This is certainly consistent with the evidence from the photographs. The snow on the ground and the shadows from the tree, and the clothing certainly has a New England winter look. The ell appears upright, more like in the presumed 1928 photograph (L.1) than its ramshackle state in the presumed 1933 photograph (L.2). Unfortunately L.5 C does not show the roof of the main block of the House or the chimney, whose condition and location would let us know if the pictures were taken before or after the summer of 1928 restoration work.

What might draw Du Bois and friends to Great Barrington in the winter, sometime before 1933? As Du Bois notes in “The House of the Black Burghardts” (Du Bois 1928), he was given the House as a birthday present for his 60th birthday by friends. The contributors were organized by a Du Bois Testimonial Committee. Among the numerous pieces of correspondence about this testimonial, one identifies NAACP Board member Lillian A. Alexander as Secretary and the noted attorney Clarence Darrow as Chair; and advised that the gift is to be a surprise (“Letter from Lillian A. Alexander to unidentified recipient, February, 1928,” “Circular letter from Du Bois Testimonial Committee, 1928,” W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312)(e.g., W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Other contributors included Mary McLeod Bethune, Jane Addams, and Arthur Spingarn (see for instance Lewis 2000: 229). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries). Finally, in a letter to Ethel May Ray, Feb. 27, 1928 Du Bois notes: “I have also just been up into the snow of New England and had the loveliest Birthday present imaginable. Some friends behind my back have secured and given to me the house which my family used to live for 100 years or more, so that now I have a country estate” (“Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Ethel May Ray, February 27, 1928,” W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312).

It seems clear that some of Du Bois’s friends, including Mr. Ernest Alexander and Mrs. Lillian Alexander, traveled with Du Bois before February 27, 1928 where they gave him his 60th birthday present, the House of the Black Burghardts. Someone one took at least two pictures, one of the group assembled in front of the front door (L.5 B), and another of them in between the western ell and the main block of the House (L.5 A). A third photograph (L.5 C) was made by cropping the picture near the western ell

Though we do not have L.5 B and C or know of their whereabouts, seeing them on Ebay has clarified the origin of L.5 A which is in the Du Bois Papers. The contribution to the archaeology was to clarify our understanding of the slump in the foundation wall for the south face of the cellar, making it clear that was the cut for an entrance to the
cellar through the hatchway seen in L.5 C that likely predated the renovations of the spring and summer of 1928.
L.5 B (upper) and C (lower) Ebay photographs of Du Bois and others at the House. L.5 A was cropped by an unknown person from L.5 C. Note the substantial condition of the ell and the hatchway next to the front door. We do not know who presently owns these photographs.
Du Bois, W. E. B.


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Lewis, David Levering