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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Completed in 1855 this simple clapboard structure was the home of John Mercer Langston while he was living in Oberlin from 1856–1867. Originally consisting of two large wings, a front living area and a rear part, the structure has had the recent additions of a small brick shed and a screened porch on the rear and a small two-story bathroom wing on the west side of the house.

Although it is of the vernacular tradition with no historical style dominating, the structure has a front door with an elaborate quatrefoil carving in the Gothic revival character. A 1929 photograph shows that, at that time, the porch roof and columns were also of the Gothic revival character. However, this roof and columns have been replaced with new ones.

Entry to the house is through a central hall that contains a stairway. A recently constructed chimney near the front door gives the hall a somewhat cramped character.

The front sitting rooms flanking the hall, however, are quite spacious, having large elegant French windows. In these rooms are the original baseboards, chair rails, door and window trim. The sitting room on the west appears to have its original plaster ceiling with a beaded motiff. In all, this is a simple although very pleasant house.

الاستادية جرسان بالإرامة لأفقحو مراجا

PERIOD (Check One or More as			
🎦 Pre-Columbian	16th Century	🔲 18th Century	20th Century
📋 15th Century	17th Century	🕅 19th Century	
SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicab	le and Known) 1829	1897	
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Ch	eck One or More as Appropri	ate)	
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Conservation	Music	Transportation	

John Mercer Langston, the first black elected official in the United States and the first black Congressman from Virginia, was born in Louisa County, Virginia on December 14, 1829. He was the son of Ralph Quarles, a white plantation owner, and Lucy Langston, a slave of African and Indian ancestry. When both his parents died in 1843, John in accordance with his father's wishes, was sent to Ohio under the guardianship of a family friend, Colonel William D. Gooch of Chillicothe, Ohio. Living as a member of the Gooch family, John remained with them until the age of ten when they decided to move to Missouri, a slave state. Although Gooch's decision was apparently well-intentioned, the young black boy's future in such a state would have been extremely precarious. Thus, while the family was enroute to its new home, John's half brother, William, a carpenter and joiner in Chillicothe, overtook the Gooches declaring that they had no right to remove the boy from the jurisdiction of the court that supervised his guardianship. Formal court proceedings later upheld that contention, and John was placed in the care of Richard Long, the abolitionist minister of a Presbyterian Church in Chillicothe. After remaining with Long for three years, John was sent to Cincinnati to a private school where he stayed for two years. In 1844 Langston entered the preparatory department at Oberlin. He graduated in 1849 and continued at Oberlin, taking the theological course. However, his real interest was in law and rejection from law schools because of his race made him determined to pursue that field by reading the law privately with Philemon Bliss of Elyria, Ohio. In September 1854 he passed the bar and was admitted to practice. The following month he married Carolina Wall in Oberlin, and they lived on the farm Langston had bought in Brownhelm.

Langston continued to build up a successful law practice in Brownhelm that was largely composed of white Democrats. When he had established his voting residence there in March of 1855, he ran for the local office of township clerk on the Liberty ticket. He was elected to that office in April, thereby becoming the first known black elected to an office in the United States. Such unprecedented public endorsement of a black man at that time was an unusual acknowledgement of not only his ability but also his capability as a man.

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Form	10-300a
(July	1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries) Significance #8

Langston remained in Brownhelm until the spring of 1856 when he decided to move to Oberlin, a town he believed offered him greater opportunities for the advancement of his law practice. His law practice, still composed primarily of whites, continued to be successful. He was nominated and elected clerk of Russia township and, in 1857 he was elected to the City Council serving on that board until 1860 when he was elected to the Board of Education. While on the Board of Education he also served as a recruiter of black troops of the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Regiments.

STATE

Ohio COUNTY

Lorain

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In 1868, Langston left Oberlin and went to Washington, D.C. to fulfill an appointment as Inspector General of Education and Abandoned Lands for the Freedmen's Bureau. He did not remain in that capacity for very long because after meeting General O. O. Howard, Langston was soon asked to organize the Law Department of The Howard University. The department was established in January 1869 with Langston as its dean. When General Howard resigned from his position as President of Howard in 1873, Langston was appointed vice-president of that institution and assumed the duties of acting president until 1875 when he left Howard.

Langston's activities in Washington were not limited to Howard University. In 1871 he was appointed by President Grant to the District's Board of Health and served as legal counsel to that group. Then in 1877 President Hayes appointed him resident minister to Haiti and charge' d' affaires to Santo Domingo. He remained in diplomatic service until 1885 when the Democratic Party came into power. Although President Cleveland asked him to continue in his foreign service positions, Langston could not agree because he could not conscientiously support a Democratic administration.

Upon his return to the United States, Langston became president of the recently organized Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State College) in Petersburg, Virginia. Although he worked tirelessly to organize that school, his broader political interests necessitated his departure from Virginia State College so that he could run on the Republican ticket as Congressman from his district. The campaign was very difficult and Langston's subsequent victory was so bitterly opposed that he was unable, until September 1890, to assume his seat in Washington. Then he was only able to serve until March 1891 when his attempted re-election proved unsuccessful. He retired to his home in Washington and worked on his autobiography From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capital. On November 15, 1897 John Mercer Langston died at his home in Washington, D.C.

John Mercer Langston is of national historical importance because in 1855 he was the first black man to win an elective office in the United States; in 1868 he organized the Law School of The Howard University and the following year, served as its first dean; in 1885 he served as the first president of the newly organized Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, Virginia; and, in 1888 he was the first black United States congressman elected from the State of Virginia. Langston was also a recruiter for the 54th

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

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(Number all entries)

#8 Significance - page 3

and 55th Massachusetts Regiment during the Civil War; Inspector General of Education and Abandoned Lands for the Freedmen's Bureau; acting Vice-President of The Howard University from 1873 to 1875; legal counsel to the District of Columbia Board of Health; and, resident minister to Haiti and charge d' affaires to Santo Domingo.

The John Mercer Langston house in Oberlin is being nominated to commemorate the man because it is the only remaining extant residence connected with him. It has been kept in good condition on its original site and it is the home he lived in for twelve years, the period he was in Oberlin, being active in local politics and developing a highly respected reputation as an attorney.

#9 Major Bibliographical References

Langston, John Mercer. From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol. Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1894.

(Partial Listing)