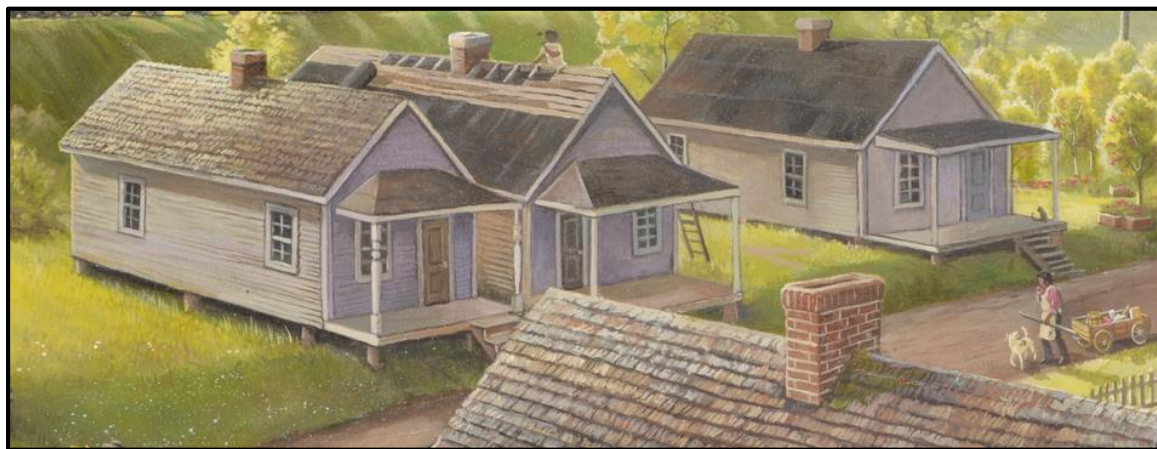


BUILDING A SHOTGUN HOUSE IN DAVIS BOTTOM BACKGROUND ESSAY

A *shotgun house* is a long, narrow building built on piers of stone or wood. The advantage of building shotgun houses is that you can build a lot of houses close together on narrow lots. There is room behind the houses for chicken coops, sheds, and outhouses. In the 1890s in Davis Bottom, there were still many vacant lots and some families had a garden beside their house. Almost all the houses had a front porch, where people would visit and play games like checkers. If it was hot, sometimes they slept on the porches.

A shotgun house is one room wide, and three, four, or five rooms long. It has a brick fireplace and no basement. Shotgun houses can be built of brick, stone, or wood. The shotgun houses in Davis Bottom were made of wood. In the 19th century, few families had inside running water. Most had to get their water from a nearby public water source. They hand pumped the water into buckets, which they then carried back home. In the winter, they heated their houses with coal or wood.



In the painting, a new home is being built. You can see the beams that will hold up the roof. The man on the roof is nailing the roof boards. He has already covered part of the roof with tar paper. Some of the houses in the painting have shingled roofs. Some have only tar paper roofs. In the painting, all the houses stand on wooden piers. Historic photos of Davis Bottom show that the houses were built on piers. During excavations, archaeologists also uncovered the remains of some wooden piers.