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# Preserving Rosenwald Schools

by Mary S. Hoffschwelle



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**B**eginning in 1912, the Rosenwald school building program, under the auspices of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University), began a major effort to improve the quality of public education for African Americans in the South. This effort led to the establishment of the Rosenwald Fund. By 1928 one in every five rural schools in the South was a Rosenwald school; these schools housed one third of the region's rural black schoolchildren and teachers. At the program's conclusion in 1932, it had produced 4,977 schools, 217 teachers' homes, and 163 shop buildings that served 663,625 students in 15 states. Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Fund contributed more than \$4.3 million, and African American communities raised more than \$4.7 million.

The program was a major force in rural school design. At the time, new ideas about pedagogy and health were bringing about changes in school designs. Concerns included lighting, ventilation, heating, sanitation, instructional needs, and aesthetics—all intended to create a positive, orderly, and healthy environment for learning. The Rosenwald school program applied these progressive ideas to the rural South and created buildings that served as models for all rural schools.

Many of the Rosenwald schools constructed between 1913 and 1932 remained in operation until the 1960s and 1970s when the 1954 Supreme Court ruling against racial segregation (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*) was implemented. Some fell into disuse or changed function as rural populations declined. While many schools are gone, there is a growing interest in the history and preservation of existing structures. Once again communities are coming

together, this time to save those schools. These communities face numerous obstacles. Many schools have been abandoned or severely altered. Finding a new use poses a challenge, and funding and technical assistance may be difficult to obtain. And yet, Rosenwald schools continue to find new life and new ways to serve the needs of their communities.



## BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND RURAL SCHOOLS

In the turmoil after the Civil War, African Americans sought out educational opportunities at schools opened by the Freedman's Bureau, the American Missionary Association, and African Americans themselves. Eventually the task fell to local counties and municipalities, who



**Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) and Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932) collaborated to provide African American children in the South with safe, purpose-built schools. This school building program produced 4,977 schools and was a major force in rural school design during the first half of the 20th century.**

Photos courtesy Library of Congress

This publication will help those interested in Rosenwald schools identify former schools and understand how they functioned in the greater community. Case studies of successful projects illustrate potential new uses for schools, and a special section on interpretation will assist organizations with strategies to tell the Rosenwald school story to different audiences. A “grassroots guide” provides how-to information on getting started, steps for rehabilitating a Rosenwald School, and additional resources to guide community organizations in their preservation efforts.

were often mandated by state constitutions to provide one school system for whites and one for African Americans. In 1896 the Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld “separate but equal” railroad cars, which set a precedent for the segregation of public facilities, including schools. Unfortunately, they were not equal; by the early 20th century most schools for African Americans across the South were underfunded and in serious disrepair. Black children learned in dilapidated buildings with few amenities other than makeshift desks and benches.

## LOWE'S CHARITABLE AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION



**Durham's Chapel School, Sumner County, Tenn.**

Photo courtesy of Tennessee Preservation Trust

In 2008 the grassroots effort to preserve Rosenwald schools took a great leap forward when the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation provided a \$1 million grant to the National Trust for Historic Preservation to save 17 Rosenwald schools and, through adaptive use, to return them to vibrant facilities in their communities. In 2009 and 2010 Lowe's awarded an additional \$1.5 million for the restoration of 24 more schools. Both the funding and the publicity generated helped create awareness of the national importance of these schools.

"The role Rosenwald schools played in the educational and civic lives of communities throughout the South cannot be underestimated," said Larry D. Stone, former chairman of the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation. "Preserving these historic structures and returning them to be valuable gathering places is important to our nation's history and the communities where they are located—both worthy goals Lowe's is proud to...support."

Many counties refused to provide public school buildings at all. African American children often learned in churches, lodge halls, and other private buildings.

Booker T. Washington, principal of Tuskegee Institute, sought to change all that with his rural school program. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Washington preached a gospel of self

help for black southerners, emphasizing economic advancement through industrial (vocational) education without challenging racial segregation and the disenfranchisement of black voters. Critics such as W.E.B. Du Bois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called for a direct challenge to segregation. Wash-

ington attracted support from black and white Americans who agreed that economic and educational needs should be addressed first and feared that a more confrontational approach would unleash a white backlash.

Washington's overarching goal for southern African Americans was to ensure access to quality educational opportunities. To meet this end, he devised a strategy to provide children with safe, purpose-built school buildings. Washington planned to organize black school patrons to buy land and build schools that would then be turned over to local school authorities. These schools would feature a Tuskegee-style industrial curriculum combining basic literacy and numeracy skills with agricultural and trades programs for boys and home economics for girls. Knowing most African American communities could not afford these projects, Washington turned to the white philanthropists who supported Tuskegee Institute.

In 1912 Washington approached Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Co. and a new member of Tuskegee's board of trustees, with his idea about building schools for black children in the rural South. Rosenwald had already shown interest in supporting building programs by offering matching grants for the construction of African American YMCAs. He was fascinated by Booker T. Washington and agreed wholeheartedly with Washington's philosophy of self-help as well as Tuskegee Institute's Industrial Program.

The same year, Rosenwald celebrated his 50th birthday by distributing gifts to a number of causes, including \$25,000 to Tuskegee for matching grants to African American teacher-training institutions. Washington gained Rosenwald's permission to use \$2,800 of leftover money from the initial distribution for six experimental rural schools. With a shared faith in the power of self-help, Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald insisted on local contributions to match Rosenwald grants for these experimental schools, rather than full public or philanthropic funding. They

believed that personal sacrifices of hard-earned cash, materials, and labor would strengthen African Americans' commitment to their communities. This self-help requirement made rural African Americans the driving force behind the Rosenwald program and the arbiters of its meaning for southern communities. This grassroots support was a critical ingredient for the success of the Rosenwald school building program to come.

The six original schools built in Alabama included Notasulga and Brownsville in Macon County, Loachapoka in Lee County, and Big Zion, Little Zion, and Madison Park in Montgomery County. Each received about \$300 toward construction costs. Rosenwald's next step was a \$30,000 gift in 1914 for construction of 100 rural schools, followed by gifts for up to 200 more schools in 1916, each of which could obtain a maximum grant of \$300.

Rosenwald and Washington worked together to alleviate the problems of African American rural education until November 15, 1915, when Washington died. He was in New York when his final illness struck. He is reputed to have said, "I was born in the South, have lived all my life in the South, and expect to die in the South." He left New York for Tuskegee, where he died shortly thereafter.

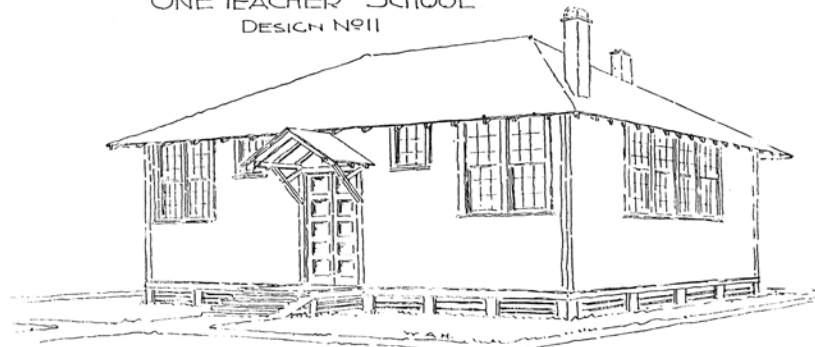
Tributes and condolences came from all over the country, including from William Howard Taft, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller. Julius Rosenwald wrote to Washington's widow, "My heart is too sad to attempt words of consolation for you in your and our country's great loss. One of our noblest and foremost citizens has passed to his reward. The service he has rendered his fellow men will live forever."

### TUSKEGEE PLANS, 1912-1920

After Washington's death, Julius Rosenwald continued to work with Tuskegee. Margaret Murray (Mrs. Booker T.) Washington oversaw the construction program, and Clinton J. Calloway, director of Tuskegee's Division of Extension, coordinated the applications and grants for schools. In 1912 Robert R. Taylor, direc-



PERSPECTIVE VIEW  
ONE TEACHER SCHOOL  
DESIGN NO. 11



DESIGN NO. 11.—ONE TEACHER SCHOOL.

**The Sweet Gum School in Macon County, Ala., followed Tuskegee University's design No. 11 for a one-teacher school and featured a classroom for academic instruction, a smaller industrial classroom, a kitchen, library, and cloakrooms.**

Photo courtesy of Fisk University, Franklin Library, Special Collections

tor of the mechanical industries program and staff architect for Tuskegee, developed the initial Rosenwald building plans which appeared in the Institute's 1915 publication, *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community*.

*The Negro Rural School* featured three building types: a one-teacher school, a central (consolidated) school, and a county training school. These Tuskegee-designed schools are easily distinguished from later Rosenwald buildings. They feature hipped and clipped-gable rooflines and central entrances protected by projecting gable or shed porch roofs. The "batteries" of windows, which provide the major light source for instructional rooms, group four to seven double-hung windows, and pairs of these windows pierce the other sides of the building as well.

Reflecting the Tuskegee-style curriculum intended for these schools, the plans include space for industrial education, most often providing a smaller classroom for girls' domestic science work as part of the school building and locating boys' vocational work in a separate shop building. Tuskegee's plans also introduced many features that would be repeated in later Rosenwald schools. The smallest design was for a one-teacher school, but it was not a one-room school. Throughout the rest of its existence, the Rosenwald school program would continue to classify its buildings by the number of teachers, rather than the number of rooms, to emphasize that its schools provided workrooms, cloakrooms, and, in larger schools, auditoriums and offices as well.



The Pee Dee Colored School in Marion County, S.C., a two-teacher school, was built in 1922-23. It followed Community School Plan No. 2-C, pictured on the opposite page. More two-teacher schools were constructed than any other type school.

Photo courtesy of South Carolina Department of Archives and History

Lighting and ventilation, two critical aspects of progressive school design, also received attention from the start. Tuskegee designs grouped windows into batteries to maximize the effect of natural light in the interior and raised the building on short piers for ventilation and moisture control. Progressive educators believed that schools should serve as community centers and that small rural schools should be consolidated into single larger facilities, in part to support an expanded curriculum, but also to create a sense of community between neighboring districts. Even the one-teacher school plan called for folding doors between the workroom and classroom that could be opened to create a larger space for special events and provided for a future classroom addition.

The larger central school plan included a school building, a separate industrial building for blacksmithing and carpentry, and a teacher's home within a larger site that included practice farm plots. Tuskegee provided two alternative floor plans for one- and two-story structures.

### REORGANIZATION OF THE BUILDING PROGRAM, 1919

By 1919 the Rosenwald building program had overwhelmed the administrators at Tuskegee, and Julius Rosenwald undertook a review of the program's operation. He hired Fletcher B. Dresslar, professor of school hygiene and architecture at Nashville's George Peabody College for Teachers, to assess the Tuskegee plans and structures. In his 1920 *Report on the Rosenwald School Buildings*, Dresslar lambasted the structures that he had inspected. The Tuskegee plans were adequate but did not meet Dresslar's standards for lighting, ventilation, and sanitation. Worse yet, county school officials and contractors altered the plans and bought cheap materials to stretch construction dollars further. When local

citizens did the work, they often were not skilled carpenters and had little or no supervision, so they made mistakes in interpreting the plans. Dresslar recommended that the Rosenwald Fund require more on-site supervision and complete adherence to its designs as conditions of financial assistance. He also called for new plans that would better address his concerns for lighting and ventilation and allow for an auditorium and future classroom additions.

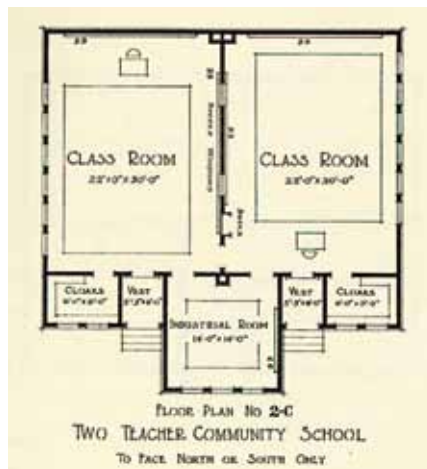
At the same time, an audit of the Rosenwald program's financial records at Tuskegee revealed mistakes caused by lack of oversight and the crush of work pressing on staff members. Furthermore, some white state and county officials complained about having to participate in a program run by black administrators.

Julius Rosenwald responded by placing his school building program under the auspices of the philanthropic foundation he had created in 1917, the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Rosenwald believed that philanthropies should use their grants as seed money to encourage individuals and public agencies to take responsibility for needed programs and services in their communities. He saw the

Rosenwald school program as an incentive for southern states to meet their responsibility to provide decent public schools for black children. Rosenwald disapproved of perpetual trusts, because he did not think that they could respond properly to the unknown needs of the future. Thus he directed the Rosenwald Fund's officers to expend its assets to meet its goals in their present time. A small staff based in Chicago, headed up first by Francis W. Sheppard and then by Alfred K. Stern, directed the Rosenwald Fund's early operations.

Samuel L. Smith, a former Tennessee Negro school agent, became the director of the Rosenwald Fund's new Southern Office in Nashville in 1920. Now the goal was to construct model rural schools. The Fund required that grant recipients meet specific minimum standards for the site size and length of school term, and have new blackboards and desks for each classroom, as well as two sanitary privies. School grants were based on the number of teachers employed, ranging from \$500 for a one-teacher building to a maximum \$2,100 for a school for ten or more teachers. From 1921 to 1931, the Fund also offered grants of \$200 per classroom for additions to existing Rosenwald schools.

African Americans had to contribute cash and in-kind donations of material and labor to match the Rosenwald grant, but they often did much more. Local African American leaders initiated building campaigns, wrote to state education departments, Tuskegee Institute, and the Rosenwald Fund for information, lobbied county superintendents and school boards for additional fundraising, and recruited their fellow citizens' support. School patrons organized themselves into committees to find and buy land, to cut trees and saw the lumber for the school, and to haul the building materials to the school site. Patrons sometimes even built the school themselves. Those who pledged contributions of money and labor included rural wage earners such as sawmill and domestic workers, farm owners and tenants, and the members of church congregations and fraternal lodges. Some donated a day's pay or the proceeds of an acre of cotton; others



The two-teacher Community School Plan No. 2-C featured two classrooms in addition to an industrial classroom. The design also called for movable blackboards to open up the interior space. Additional Rosenwald school plans can be found at [www.historysouth.org](http://www.historysouth.org).

sold chickens. School rallies, community picnics, and entertainments brought in cash as well. The result was a school building that stood as a tangible expression of a community's determination to provide a decent education for its children.

Although the Rosenwald program emphasized that its schools receive additional contributions from "white friends," overall the personal contributions by white southerners constituted

**JULIUS ROSENWALD BELIEVED that philanthropies should use their grants as seed money to encourage individuals and public agencies to take responsibility for needed programs and services in their communities.**

the smallest category of support for Rosenwald schools. The largest source of funding was from tax revenues. The county school board was required to provide public support, take ownership of the new school property, and commit to maintaining it as part of the public school system. From 1920 to 1928, between 400 and 500 schools were built annually, with the Fund's aid totaling from \$356,000 to \$414,000 each year.

## COMMUNITY SCHOOL PLANS, 1920-1928

Dresslar and Smith prepared the plans that would become the archetypal Rosenwald schools of the 1920s and early 1930s. The Rosenwald Fund published the designs, titled *Community School Plans*, repeatedly from 1920 until 1931. Some of the community school plans incorporated and upgraded earlier Tuskegee designs, and others reflected contemporary school designs for white rural schools and the plans that Dresslar and Smith had previously collaborated on for the Tennessee Department of Education. The community school plans also eliminated some features of the earlier Tuskegee designs; gable roofs replaced the hipped and clipped-gable rooflines, and the plans were exclusively for one-story structures.

Dresslar and Smith were especially concerned about lighting and the conservation of children's eyesight. Accordingly, they limited windows to one side of the classroom to reduce eyestrain by ensuring that a single stream of light falling from left to right would illuminate the blackboard and desks. In addition, the plans maximized natural light by using narrower window framing in the sashes and much taller windows that stretched from the interior wainscot cap up to the eaves. Another of Dress-

lar's concerns was ventilation. "Breeze" windows set high under the eaves or on interior walls provided cross ventilation by pulling air from the windows across the room and into a hallway or adjacent classroom. In addition to sliding doors and movable blackboards to open up interior space, designs for larger schools published in the *Community School Plans* included auditoriums for school and community events.

Rosenwald schools also had their own color schemes and requirements for interior appointments. Especially in the early years of the building program, school facades were often painted with a nut brown or “bungalow” stain and white trim; white with gray trim and light gray with white trim were also recommended. Interior paint schemes employed bands of

as possible, limiting decorative details to a bare minimum. Simplicity was a key progressive design concept denoting order, rationality, and functionalism. It also served to make these buildings more affordable, more modern in appearance when compared to the vernacular buildings they replaced, and modest in comparison with white schools.

Although Tuskegee Institute had distributed plans for teachers’ homes and shops, these structures were not part of the Rosenwald building program in the early years. However, when local school boards resisted spending additional money for these facilities, the Fund, beginning in 1920, offered to pay 50 percent of the cost of a teacher’s home at schools with at least an eight-month school term. Initially the grant could run as much as \$1,000, but in 1922 the Fund scaled its maximum award back to \$900.

Shops provided a space for industrial education. The industrial education requirement was embraced by some black and many white educational reformers and philanthropists as a “safe” strategy for improving public education for black children. Industrial education assured white southerners that the existing racial hierarchy would remain intact, but with a more contented and better-skilled black work force. For some African Americans, it was simply a strategy for buying white support to secure better academic programs for black schools.

In 1927 Fund officials sanctioned grants of between \$200 and \$400 for shops if built according to Rosenwald plans, fully equipped, and properly staffed.

## PRIVIES AND WELL HOUSES

Improved sanitation for better health was a major concern of all the Rosenwald school planners, at a time when few rural schools boasted any sort of toilets. Tuskegee’s *Negro Rural School* publication included illustrations of well houses to keep the water supply secure and clean, and both bucket and pit privies. *Community School Plans* likewise included plans for pit privies that could accommodate several students and had tall screens protecting the entrances for privacy. The 1931 *Community School Plans* did include provisions for indoor plumbing, although the planners acknowledged that pit privies would remain essential for schools without a piped water supply.

**ROSENWALD BUILDING FACADES generally were as simple as possible, limiting decorative details to a bare minimum. Simplicity was a key progressive design concept denoting order, rationality, and functionalism.**

color to accentuate the effect of the battery windows on light levels and students’ vision. Walnut or oak-stained wainscoting ran along the lower section of classroom walls, surmounted by gray or buff painted walls and light cream or ivory ceilings. The resulting horizontal bands of color reflected and intensified natural light entering from the windows set above the wainscot, while the darker wainscot minimized glare at desk level for seated pupils. Light tan and translucent window shades also aided in controlling light levels.

School equipment received the same careful scrutiny to ensure that the building would have the greatest impact on its occupants. Blackboards lined three walls. Modern patent desks (standard school issue desks) replaced the rough wooden slabs, pews, and benches typical of many other black schools. Often African American community members found it difficult to pay for patent desks in addition to their contribution to the building and asked to be relieved of this burden. White school officials would have preferred to transfer used furnishings from white schools over to black ones. However, the Rosenwald Fund remained firm and refused to make final payment on buildings that did not meet its standards for the exterior or interior.

Schools built according to the community school plans are the most easily recognized Rosenwald schools. Rosenwald building facades generally were as simple

From the beginning Washington and Rosenwald envisioned campuses that functioned as gathering places for the community. In smaller schools, people pushed aside movable partitions between classrooms or raised blackboards to create openings between the rooms so that they could gather together. Larger schools had auditoriums and gymnasiums. In addition to school plays, competitive sporting events, student socials, and graduation ceremonies, Rosenwald schools also opened their doors to the community for speeches, public meetings, and entertainments such as magic shows, movies, and dramatic performances. They offered practical instruction that attracted not only students but parents too.

## SHOPS AND TEACHERS’ HOMES

Rosenwald shop buildings and teachers’ homes associated with larger schools helped to make them centers of community life by offering practical instruction that attracted both students and parents from surrounding districts, and by attracting better qualified principals and teachers who would become local leaders. Tuskegee’s three- and five-room plans for teachers “cottages” were simple homes that featured large kitchens that could double as home economics classrooms. Double doors were recommended between living and dining rooms that could open up for club and community gatherings.



## ROSENWALD SCHOOLS USING OTHER PLANS

Not all Rosenwald schools followed the Tuskegee or community school plans. To qualify for funding, the Rosenwald program only required an “approved plan.” Some schools followed designs developed by state departments of education. In South Carolina, numerous schools were built according to plans developed by R.E. Lee at the Clemson Agricultural College (now Clemson University). Others probably copied plans developed by architects for other schools, or commissioned their own.

Some atypical Rosenwald schools are large, two- and three-story buildings located in cities, rather than the one-story structures usually found in rural neighborhoods. They received Rosenwald aid because they served as the only secondary schools for African Americans in a given county, and were sponsored by county rather than city school boards. In 1929 the Julius Rosenwald Fund adopted a policy that allowed towns to apply for construction grants to build schools that offered at least two years of high school and vocational instruction for both genders, further accelerating the trend toward larger schools. As a result, the program changed its name from the rural school program to the southern school program.

## THE ROSENWALD SCHOOL IN THE LANDSCAPE

One of the reasons that the Rosenwald program required a minimum two-acre site was to create a landscape with the school as its focal point, ideally surrounded by the shop and teachers’ home as well as a playground, practice garden, well, and privies. Practice garden and farm plots supported the industrial training offered at Rosenwald schools, and also modeled proper landscaping for rural homes. Tuskegee’s *Negro Rural School* publication recommended adding flowering plants, fences, and lawns. *Community School Plans* included advice on walkways, lawns, shrubs, and trees. Even after the Rosenwald building program ended, the landscapes that it had created still concerned the officials of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. S. L. Smith published two bulletins in 1936 that addressed the needs of African American schools but could also apply to all rural schools: *Improvement and Beautification of Rural Schools and Suggestions for Landscaping Rural Schools*. Thus, documenting and preserving a Rosenwald school may not be limited to a single structure, but include a range of site features that make up the Rosenwald school landscape.

Just as important as the Rosenwald program’s planned buildings and landscapes is the way that Rosenwald

schools fit into existing African American landscapes. Sometimes the Rosenwald buildings were “open-country” schools in an agricultural setting of fields, fences, hedges, and woods close to the places where parents worked. In many more instances, the Rosenwald school sat adjacent to or near a church. The congregation may have spearheaded the local building campaign or donated the land. Rosenwald schools located in towns and cities are part of larger African American built environments that may include churches, cemeteries, lodge buildings, and funeral homes, as well as residential structures. Furthermore, a Rosenwald school may be located on the site of an earlier African American school that dates as far back as the 1860s. These schools represent a tradition of African American education since the Reconstruction era as much as they exemplify the innovations of progressive school design. The preservation of a Rosenwald building is not complete without a full consideration of its context in the landscapes of African American life in the early 20th-century South.

## EXPANDING GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Although construction grants remained the heart of the Rosenwald school program, the Rosenwald Fund added other school-related grant opportunities. Insistence on a minimum school term as a requirement for construction grants led to matching grants for term extension so that more black students could enjoy a full school year and teachers could earn a decent salary. Recognizing that county boards of education did not pay for adequate classroom materials, the Rosenwald Fund subsidized low-cost

**The Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, Fla., a Rosenwald school, was built in 1927 as Lee County’s only four-year secondary school for African Americans. Designed by L.N. Iredell, its gleaming white stucco and Spanish Mission Revival styling are a far cry from Tuskegee or Rosenwald Fund plans.**

Photo by Mary S. Hoffschwelle



## IS IT A ROSENWALD SCHOOL?

When you see an early 20th-century school building, how can you determine if it is a Rosenwald school? Certain architectural characteristics will be present on Rosenwald schools. However, not all schools built according to Tuskegee or community school plans were Rosenwald schools, or even historically black schools. Tuskegee and community school plans were state-of-the-art for rural schools, and were developed with broad application in mind. Large numbers of schools that never received Rosenwald aid were constructed for black and white children according to the plans. Tuskegee and community school plans were widely circulated and re-published into the 1940s. Also, a few schools still referred to as “Rosenwald” schools are actually later replacement buildings that do not follow the earlier plans.



Some Rosenwald schools may still have the folding partitions that were opened up to provide space for larger community gatherings.

Photo courtesy of San Domingo Community and Cultural Center

**1. “Read” the building for information!** Rosenwald schools had distinguishing features, the most noticeable being tall, narrow batteries of windows. Even if windows have been altered or filled in, the original configuration may be evident. Most were built on short piers, sometimes enclosed by skirting. Most smaller schools are plain, rectangular frame structures. Look for hipped or clipped gable roofs on Tuskegee plan schools, and gable roofs on community school plan buildings. Inside, the walls may still feature blackboards above the wainscot, moveable blackboards or folding partitions joining rooms together, a stage at the end of one classroom and small cloakrooms for boys and girls. Larger schools may be built in an “H” plan with auditoriums, stages, and offices in addition to cloakrooms. Sites may still include playing fields, vocational buildings, a teacher’s home and privies.

**2. Do your research!** The plans and examples illustrated in this publication give you an overview of the basic Rosenwald designs. Look for copies of *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community* and *Community School Plans* at major libraries and state archives. Rosenwald Fund archival

collections are housed at Fisk University’s Franklin Library in Nashville, Tenn. A portion of those records have been digitized, and are available online at <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu>. Much of the information needed to confirm a Rosenwald school can be found locally. County school records, local residents, and local histories can get you started. State archives housing state education department records or school insurance records may also turn up photo collections and other valuable records. Many state historic preservation offices have located the Rosenwald schools in their state, or have websites with information. Visit [www.rosenwaldschools.com](http://www.rosenwaldschools.com) for more research resources. Contact the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Rosenwald Schools Initiative located in the Charleston Field Office 843-722-8552 or [Rosenwald@nthp.org](mailto:Rosenwald@nthp.org).



To identify a Rosenwald school, look for tall narrow batteries of windows, short piers, and gable roofs such as those found on the Lincoln School in Pikeville, Bledsoe County, Tenn.

Photo courtesy of Southeast Tennessee Development District

school libraries, offering sets of carefully chosen works that include positive accounts of African American history and culture. First offered to selected Rosenwald schools in 1927, Rosenwald libraries were later made available to any African American school and rural white schools as well.

Rosenwald radios, made available at special rates beginning in 1929, brought the news and culture of the nation into rural black schools and provided a source of information and entertainment that could be shared with community members. Starting in 1929, the Rosenwald Fund offered to pay for buses to transport students to consolidated schools as an incentive for school boards to extend this service permanently.

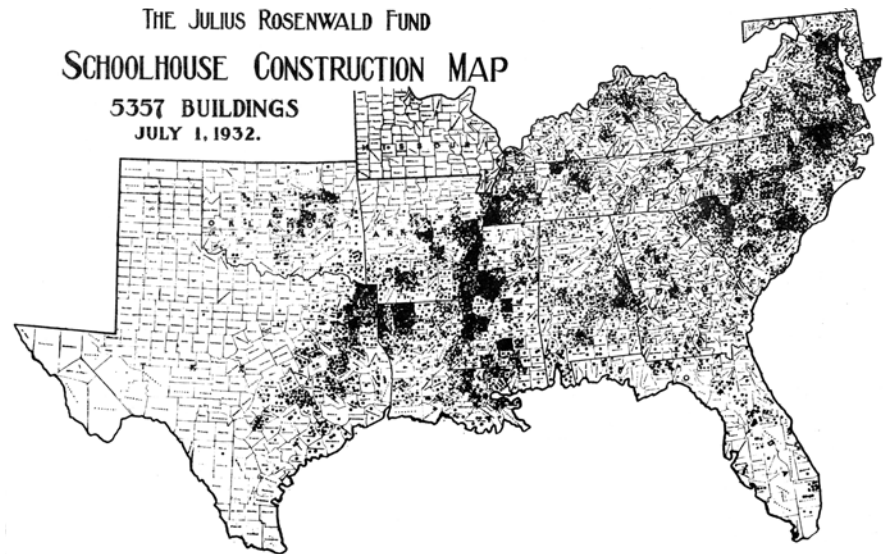
School and community pride was the goal of Rosenwald School Days, which began in 1927 and were celebrated annually well into the 1930s. Teachers, principals, students, and parents would gather at their schools on a designated day to clean, repair, and paint the buildings, improve the grounds, and contribute money for other projects, as well as enjoy a program of songs and speeches.

### INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION, 1920-1930

In the 1920s, the Rosenwald Fund attempted to reinvigorate the concept of industrial education. It encouraged the construction of urban industrial high schools that would offer modern trades education to black youth in work already identified with African American laborers. However, only five urban industrial high schools were constructed. Most of the cities that applied for this aid eventually opted for a smaller grant applied toward an industrial department within a regular high school rather than building new, costly trades schools. The Fund stopped accepting applications for this unsuccessful experiment in 1930.

### CHANGING DIRECTIONS, 1928-1932

The rural school building program's diversified offerings matched Julius Rosenwald's and his foundation's growing interest in developing a more comprehensive



The Julius Rosenwald Fund Schoolhouse Construction Map from 1932 shows the geographical distribution of 5,357 Rosenwald buildings across 15 states.

sive approach to the problems faced by African Americans. In 1928 Rosenwald embarked on a major reorganization of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Edwin R. Embree, formerly of the Rockefeller Foundation, became president under an expanded board of trustees. Embree began scaling back the school building program and shifting the Fund into a broad array of projects in rural and higher education, public health, and race relations.

At the same time, the Fund began to decrease aid to small schools. Since 1928, the Rosenwald Fund had offered a 50 percent increase in aid for “permanent” (generally brick) construction, which tended to favor the large plans. A similar incentive went to school buildings in “backward” counties, where African Americans made up less than 5 percent (after 1931, 10 percent) of the population and no Rosenwald building had yet been constructed, to attract counties that had not yet responded to the program. Meanwhile, grant amounts for schools with up to six teachers had been cut in 1927 to encourage the construction of larger consolidated elementary and secondary schools. Aid to one-teacher buildings, which had been cut from \$500 to \$200, ended completely in 1930, and grants for two-teacher buildings and additions to existing Rosenwald schools stopped in 1931.

### THE SCHOOL BUILDING PROGRAM DRAWS TO A CLOSE

In 1932 the Rosenwald Fund staff and trustees started winding down the school construction grants. In part, the decision to move away from the building program was based on the Rosenwald Fund's philosophy and changing priorities. Rosenwald, Embree, and the board of trustees felt that if they continued construction grants indefinitely, southern school boards would remain dependent on Rosenwald aid and contributions from local African Americans and would continue to shirk their full responsibility for black education. They also wanted to redirect their resources. The stock market crash and the ensuing Great Depression wiped out much of the value of the Sears, Roebuck stock that supported the Rosenwald Fund, increasing the pressure to abandon the building program.

In 1932 the Rosenwald Fund announced that no further construction grants would be forthcoming. One last Rosenwald school was constructed in 1937 in Warm Springs, Ga., at the behest of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Southern Office closed at the end of 1937. Eleven years later, the Julius Rosenwald Fund distributed its last grants and went out of existence, just as its founder had intended.

## THE LEGACY OF ROSENWALD SCHOOLS

Rosenwald schools served generations of teachers, students, parents, and other community members. Rosenwald alumni recall hard work, discipline, and community-oriented activities. Boys often began fall and winter school days pumping water and building fires. Girls and boys helped the teacher clean the school and maintain the grounds. Recollections about teachers and classroom activities emphasize strict standards of personal deportment and attention to their studies, as well as the fun children had sharing lunches and playing sports. Former Rosenwald students described the positive life lessons parents and teachers instilled in them, but resented that white authorities continued to pay little attention to the needs of black children, sending them cast-off textbooks and equipment from the white schools and offering few or no secondary grades for them to continue their education. Nonetheless, Rosenwald Schools educated a new generation of black leaders.

The building plans have their own architectural legacy. Fletcher Dresslar, Samuel Smith, and other state education officials made Rosenwald schools the nucleus of a movement to reform all southern school architecture. They created the Interstate School Building Service (ISBS) in 1928 with financial support from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Rosenwald school plans, and other school designs based on them, appear throughout the ISBS school plan book, *For Better Schoolhouses*, published in 1929. Even after the Rosenwald school building program ended in 1932, the Rosenwald Fund and the ISBS kept reprinting and distributing the plans. During the Great Depression, the federal government made funds available for school construction under the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and New Deal agencies like Works Projects Administration. Consequently, many southern communities built with the now familiar Rosenwald designs.

Another sort of legacy is the school that still carries the Rosenwald name but

on a new structure. In the late 1940s and 1950s, southern states undertook massive school building campaigns in hopes of forestalling legal challenges in public school segregation. Desegregation, integration, and new building standards inspired further new school construction, which inherited the Rosenwald name. While not technically Rosenwald schools their association with the earlier Rosenwald program and the survival of the Rosenwald name proclaim their importance to a community's identity and heritage.

Going to a Rosenwald school initially meant being in the vanguard of education for African American children. The architecture of the schools made a visual assertion of the equality of all children, and the activities at the school made it a focal point of community identity and aspirations.

Although the Rosenwald program did not challenge school segregation head-on, it did challenge the racial ideology behind segregation. Progressive educators and school architects recognized Rosenwald schools as part of their campaign

for modern, standardized school plans. The modest, cost-conscious designs with their industrial rooms identified them as rural schools for black children, but these features also made them useful to states that were rapidly expanding their public school infrastructure and vocational education programs for all students. Professional educators and cost-conscious school administrators borrowed freely from Rosenwald plans in developing their own state-approved school designs. They used these plans to build black schools that did not receive Rosenwald grants and to build schools for white children as well. Consequently although educated separately, many southern white and black children learned in classrooms that looked and felt the same—open, bright, orderly, clean.

Yet as Rosenwald schools' modern design principles became commonplace and public school authorities retreated back to the neglect from which the promise of grant money had lured them, Rosenwald schools temporarily lost

*continues on page 15*

### ROSENWALD SCHOOLS, TEACHERS' HOMES, AND SHOPS

State	Schools	Homes	Shops	Total Buildings
Alabama	389	7	11	407
Arkansas	338	19	32	389
Florida	120	1	4	125
Georgia	242	12	7	261
Kentucky	155	2	1	158
Louisiana	395	31	9	435
Maryland	149	2	2	153
Mississippi	557	58	18	633
Missouri	3	0	1	4
North Carolina	787	18	8	813
Oklahoma	176	16	6	198
South Carolina	481	8	11	500
Tennessee	354	9	10	373
Texas	464	31	32	527
Virginia	367	3	11	381
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,977</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>5,357</b>

# GRASSROOTS GUIDE TO *Preserving Rosenwald Schools*

Thousands of Rosenwald Schools have been abandoned and lost over the years, but many have been given new life as thriving community centers, studios, museums, and even private homes. In order to give each of these historic schools a second chance and a new use, it was necessary to rehabilitate them. This guide will help you begin planning your own Rosenwald school rehabilitation project.



BEFORE



AFTER

Hope School, Newberry County, S.C.

Photo courtesy of South Carolina Department of Archives and History

## DEFINITION

**Rehabilitation:** the repair of a building, making it usable again while preserving its distinctive features.

## 10 TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

- ❑ **Determine ownership of the school building and property.** Will the owner sell, donate, or give permission for you to repair and use the building?
- ❑ **Identify the immediate threats.** Demolition? Water intrusion? Vandalism? Animals? Insects?
- ❑ **Seek professional help.** Call the Rosenwald Schools Initiative of the National Trust to discuss your project.
- ❑ **Get organized.** Who will lead the project? Fundraise? Volunteer? Determine partners and alliances that can help your project succeed. Consider forming your own 501(c)(3) nonprofit group.
- ❑ **Do your research.** You can use this information to garner support and to understand the school's historic significance.
- ❑ **Seek official designation.** Listing in the National Register of Historic Places or state or local register will be especially helpful when applying for grants. Contact your state historic preservation office (SHPO) for more information about this process.
- ❑ **Determine a new use that will be financially sustainable and compatible with the building.** A community needs assessment can be especially helpful.
- ❑ **Plan your project.** Determine what work will need to be done, who will do it, and how much it will cost.
- ❑ **Build community support.** Get the community excited about your rehabilitation project. You are saving an important piece of history!
- ❑ **Call for assistance!** The National Trust for Historic Preservation and your state historic preservation office are there to help.



**Canetuck Community Center, Currie, N.C.**

Photo courtesy of Canetuck Community Center



## SAVE YOUR HISTORIC WINDOWS!

Windows are the most important and distinctive feature of Rosenwald schools. Size, arrangement, and material (generally wood) are all significant.

Even damaged and poorly maintained windows can often be repaired. Hire a professional skilled in window restoration to evaluate and restore your windows.

If your windows are missing or damaged beyond repair, they can be replicated by a qualified contractor. You may also be able to salvage windows that have been discarded from other historic buildings. Never replace your school's wood windows with vinyl! Always fit new windows to the original openings.

For more information refer to *Preservation Brief 9: The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows*.



**Durham's Chapel School, Sumner County, Tenn.**

Photos courtesy Tennessee Preservation Trust

## NEED HELP WITH YOUR PROJECT?

### **Rosenwald Schools Initiative, National Trust for Historic Preservation.**

For more information, visit online at [www.rosenwaldschools.com](http://www.rosenwaldschools.com) or email [rosenwald@nthp.org](mailto:rosenwald@nthp.org).

**State Historic Preservation Office.** Find your state's SHPO online at [www.ncshpo.org](http://www.ncshpo.org).

**Statewide and Local Preservation Groups.** Your SHPO can help you find local support.

**National Park Service.** The National Park Service's Preservation Briefs cover a variety of topics from roofing to paint. Go to [www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/htm).

## REPAIR FIRST! RULES FOR A SUCCESSFUL REHABILITATION PROJECT



Rosenwald Schools have many distinctive architectural features, and it is critical to repair and retain as many as possible during the rehabilitation. For example, in Wicomico County, Md., volunteers working with the San Domingo Community and Cultural Center are restoring the San Domingo School, a three-teacher school built in 1919 using Tuskegee plans. They removed aluminum siding to expose the original wood siding and opened up original window openings. The organization replicated 38 new wood windows and restored ten original windows. Siding was replaced only as necessary.

Photos courtesy of San Domingo Community and Cultural Center.

- ❑ **Do choose** a new use that will not require destroying distinctive historic features.
- ❑ **Do retain** interior spaces and materials when possible, including floor plan, ceiling heights, movable partitions, lighting, blackboards, tin ceilings, wainscoting, doors, flooring, transoms, etc.
- ❑ **Do replace** features that are missing or cannot be repaired with features of the same size, material, and styling.
- ❑ **Do protect** and repair existing historic materials and architectural details such as exterior siding, windows, and porches.

## IS THE BIGGEST THREAT TO YOUR BUILDING DEMOLITION OR NEGLECT?

If you can't repair it in its original location, as a last resort, you may be able to relocate the building. Refer to *Preservation Brief 6: Moving Your Building*.

## CAN'T REPAIR YOUR SCHOOL YET? "MOTHBALL" IT!

If you don't have the means to immediately repair your Rosenwald School you can protect it from future costly damage by identifying immediate threats and protecting the building from them. For example, after hurricanes damaged the Concord School in Mount Enterprise, Tex., the Concord High School Alumni Association invested \$7,000 in repairs to stabilize the building until further work can be done.

**Leaky roof?** Temporarily cover leaks with tarps, metal flashing, or other waterproof materials. Make sure they are securely fastened.

**Vandalism?** Have volunteers periodically check on the building. Vandalism is less likely if you are



Photos courtesy of CHSAA

able to maintain a presence on the site. Be sure to board up windows and secure doors.

**Broken glass or missing windows?** Board them with plywood until they can be repaired.

**Pests and animals?** Cover and block all points of access to rodents, bats, birds, and other animals.

## GET THE MOST FROM YOUR VOLUNTEERS

**Volunteers can be a wonderful asset.**

Match volunteers to jobs based on each individual's skills.

**During construction,** make sure volunteers are supervised and following your rehabilitation plan.

## ACCESSIBILITY



Columbia School in West Columbia, Tex.

At the Columbia Rosenwald School in West Columbia, Tex., a wooden ramp provides handicapped access to the schoolhouse museum. It has been added to the rear door and is not visually obtrusive. Generally ramps should be constructed of wood or other compatible materials and painted to match or blend with the building. Ramps should be placed in the least obtrusive location, such as side or rear entrances.

*Preservation Brief 32: Making Historic Properties Accessible* contains helpful information about this process.

## BEFORE YOU HIRE HELP

If you hire architects, contractors, or engineers be sure to:

- **Check references.**
- **Seek professionals who work with historic buildings.**
- **Get more than one bid, but remember that lowest is not always best.**
- **Call your SHPO for help in selecting the right professionals.**
- **Meet with each person before hiring.**
- **Make sure that you feel comfortable with any professional you hire.**

**Warning:** Not all contractors, architects, or engineers will take special care with historic buildings.



BEFORE



AFTER

Interior of the Emory-Tunstall School, Hale County, Ala.

Photo courtesy of Hale Empowerment and Revitalization Organization



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some of their luster. In recent years, grassroots activists have begun new campaigns for Rosenwald schools, joining forces with preservationists, educators, and historians. While many Rosenwald schools had fallen victim to changing school practices, neglect, and the elements, many others have been cherished by their alumni and community members. Alumni have erected monuments at the sites of surviving and lost Rosenwald schools. Other buildings still serve as schools, preschools, community centers, and social service offices. In some cases they have reverted back to the churches that first sponsored them. Some have new lives as private homes and apartments. Rosenwald schools remain an integral part of community life across the South.

### **INTERPRETING THE PAST: TELLING THE STORY OF ROSENWALD SCHOOLS**

Rosenwald schools have been rehabilitated for a variety of uses, including community and senior centers, museums, and offices. Whatever the use, Rosenwald schools have an important story to tell about segregation, perseverance, and the importance of education. Often the schools are saved by people with a tie to the school and the community, whose main mission in preserving the building is to keep the story alive. At some point in most projects the question arises: How do you rehabilitate a school for a new purpose while still preserving and presenting its past?

Very few Rosenwald schools have a future as a museum. Financially, small museums are hard to sustain. The museum model for Rosenwald schools has the added impediment of the rural nature of most schools. Successful museum models can be found, but often are located in towns or parks, or use extensive outreach efforts to bring larger numbers of visitors to the sites, such as curriculum-coordinated school programs. More often a portion of the building is used for interpretation while reserving other spaces for community use.

### **Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center: Museum and Community Center, Cassville, Ga.**

Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center is named for Dr. Susie Wheeler, an early graduate of the Noble Hill Rosenwald school, whose teachers inspired her to become an educator. She spearheaded the effort to preserve Noble Hill and reopen it as an African American heritage museum with a range of annual events and celebrations. In one of the school's classrooms, visitors learn about African American life in northwest Georgia from the late 19th century to the present. The other classroom is used for community meetings, training seminars, and special events. Education continues with interpretive panels located on the grounds. [www.noblehillwheeler.com](http://www.noblehillwheeler.com).

### **From a School to School Program: Carroll School, York County, S.C.**

In an effort to enhance its curriculum outside the classroom, Rock Hill's School District Three restored the 1929 three-teacher Carroll School in rural York County. Fifth graders visit the school to learn about early education and the effects of the Great Depression on their community. Elements of the hands-on program are taught by school alumni. School district teachers also recorded oral histories from the African American community. The York County Culture and Heritage Museums administers the school programs, which are open to other districts outside Rock Hill District Three. [www.chmuseums.org](http://www.chmuseums.org).

### **A Successful Museum: West Columbia, Tex.**

The Columbia Rosenwald School reopened in October 2009 as a part of the Columbia Historical Museum. The school is used as an interactive children's museum where students experience school life in a one-teacher school (pictured on page 17 and the cover) and learn about Rosenwald schools. The school was moved to the site of the Columbia Historical Museum and is easily accessible for school programs. [www.westcolumbiatx.org](http://www.westcolumbiatx.org).



**The Rosenwald Schools Initiative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation exhibit, *Rosenwald Schools: Reflection, and Revival*, continues to travel to libraries, community centers, colleges, and welcome centers.**

Photo by Elizabeth Johnson

### **A Museum on the Wall: Scrabble School**

The main function of the restored Scrabble School (profiled in a case study on page 22) is as a senior center, but it also contains an innovative exhibit that does not use any floor space or detract from its current use. By installing interpretive panels where the school's blackboards had been, the architect was able to teach visitors about the school in a way that visually creates a classroom setting. Digital screens will offer access to oral histories, allowing descendants and guests to be immersed in the school story. [www.scrabbleschool.org](http://www.scrabbleschool.org).

### **Virtual Exhibits: Interpretation on the Web**

To reach the broadest possible audience, consider a virtual exhibit. Websites are inexpensive to design and provide worldwide access to exhibits. K-12 schools as well as university programs can be a good resource to help research and develop an exhibit and create a website. See Scrabble School's website at [www.scrabbleschool.org](http://www.scrabbleschool.org) or search for Rosenwald Schools online. Use social media sites like Facebook and YouTube to showcase projects.



Collecting oral histories is an increasingly popular method for telling the story of Rosenwald Schools. Audio and digital media such as podcasting broaden the audience for greater access to information. Pictured here is Mabel Dickey with Mt. Zion School near Florence, S.C.

Photo by Jason Clement

### Taking the Story on the Road: Off-Site Exhibits

Robeson County, N.C., has only one Rosenwald school extant of the 15 that were built there. To commemorate the schools' legacies, the Afro-American Cultural Center of Robeson County, the North Carolina Rosenwald Schools Community Project and the Sankofa Center trained volunteers to conduct a county-wide oral history project. Twenty former students shared their memories, which were incorporated into a portable traveling exhibit, *Remembering the Rosenwalds in Robeson County*.

In 2009 the Rosenwald Schools Initiative of the National Trust, with funding from The Humanities Council<sup>®</sup> a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, developed a portable travelling exhibit, *Rosenwald Schools: Reflection and Revival*, telling the story of Rosenwald schools from the days of Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington to the revival of interest and passion for restoration in the present day. The exhibit travelled to nine South Carolina venues over two years and remains in service. It was developed as a prototype

that could be easily adapted to interpret the history of another state's schools. For information on the exhibit contact Rosenwald@nthp.org.

### Taking the Story on the Road: Documentaries

Focusing on the Rosenwald school in Mt. Union, Tex., Herman Wright's 2005 documentary, *The Long Black Line*, tells the story of Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the African American mothers, fathers, and teachers who helped transform children's lives.

Claudia Stack's 2011 film, *Under the Kudzu*, focuses on two Rosenwald schools in Pender County: Canetuck Rosenwald School, a primary school, and the Pender County Training School, a high school. The schools are two of the 813 that were built in North Carolina, the highest number of any state.

### No Time to Write a History? Harvest It!

Saving the physical structure is important, but it is equally important to capture the history of the school—and do it quickly. Remember that many Rosenwald alumni are older. They are the heart of, and the reason for, preserving Rosenwald schools. Even if you can't compile a full documentary history, do collect oral histories from those with memories of the school, so they can be shared with future generations. Local schools will often collaborate on this. Just be sure that a part of your interpretive plan is to "harvest" the history of your school.

### Commemorating Rosenwald Schools: Historical Markers

Many organizations have chosen to commemorate their schools through marker programs. Local or state markers can provide interpretive information for sites where the school no longer exists. For information on programs in your state, call your state historic preservation office for direction, or search online for marker programs. Local programs may be offered through municipalities or local historical societies.

## ALTERNATIVE USES FOR ROSENWALD SCHOOLS

Whether small or large, Rosenwald Schools can be reused for a variety of new purposes while still retaining their architectural integrity. Larger schools are being used for housing, community centers, and mixed-use business and educational facilities. Smaller schools can be the perfect home, community center, or town hall. When conducting a community needs assessment, this listing of possible adaptive uses may help guide thinking outside of the box!

- Preschool, daycare, after school program
- Community college
- Satellite classrooms
- Recreation center
- Offices
- Municipal building
- Senior center
- Training center
- Hostel
- Visitor Center/Trail Head/Bunk House
- Chapel/Church
- 4-H center
- Community center
- Museum
- Living history center
- Special event venue
- Library
- Store
- Restaurant
- Mixed-use development
- Housing



## CASE STUDIES

### Buckingham Training School Shop Building

*Bringing Communities Together*

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### Cairo Rosenwald School

*Making the Most of Your Resources*

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### Innovative Partnerships Build, Restore, and Reuse Rosenwald Schools

*Hamilton School*

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### Reconstructing the Memory of Scrabble School

*Creating and Interpreting a Civic Space  
Through Collaboration*

22

## CASE STUDY 1

## Buckingham Training School Shop Building

*Bringing Communities Together*

Wilbert M. Dean attended Buckingham Training School in Dillwyn, Va., from 1953 to 1956. On a trip to show his sons the school, he found the school demolished and the shop building derelict. The Town of Dillwyn was about to sell the site, which was being used as a trash dump, to a motorcycle repair business. Dean thought it deserved better, envisioning a rehabilitated shop building in a new community park. Luckily the Town Council supported the concept.

Buckingham Training School, constructed in 1932, was the first secondary school for African Americans in Buckingham County. It was located on a nine-acre campus which included the training school, a vocational shop building, a one-room elementary school, and outside restrooms. The shop building was one of 160 Rosenwald School shops constructed and designed to teach male students agriculture and building trade skills.

The shop building's restoration got a jumpstart with a planning grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Alice Rosenwald Flexible Fund. A \$50,000 grant from Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation, in partnership with the National Trust, supported the actual restoration work and set the stage for additional corporate support.

Walmart Corporation granted \$50,000 for furniture and equipment. A team of Southwest Virginia Walmart managers and associates volunteered for a work day at the park site, staining picnic tables, trash receptacles and fence lines, and mulching shrubbery and flower beds. Dillwyn Mayor J. Ervin Toney stated, "Lowe's and Walmart set benchmark examples for other businesses to follow."

Buckingham received support from the Commonwealth of Virginia and private foundations, including \$112,000 through the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification Commission, \$2,000 from the John L. Brown Fund for the Benefit of the Scottsville Area, and \$89,000 from the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation. The Bama Works Fund of the Dave Matthews Band gave \$25,500.



**The shop building at the Buckingham Training School in Dillwyn, Va., shown here before and after rehabilitation, now serves as an all-purpose building in the newly dedicated Ellis Acres Memorial Park.**

Photo courtesy of Ellis Acres Memorial Park, Inc.

Wilbert Dean got the community involved in a number of ways. Research into other park facilities and community needs yielded a design incorporating rehabilitated historic structures with modern amenities. Students from the Community Design Assistance Center at Virginia Tech generated a conceptual master plan for Ellis Acres Memorial Park. Buckingham Training School alumni were inspired to form the “Ellis Acres Boosters” to generate “fellowship, funds and fun.” Press releases and news coverage keep the community informed of events at the park and continuing fundraising efforts.

The rehabilitated shop building which contains a conference room, two multipurpose rooms, and commercial kitchen provides space for many community services. These services include programs for at-risk youth, career counseling, work-force training, GED classes, senior citizen activities, and community meetings. A computer center with broadband services and virtual training capability is planned.

The new park, which is named Ellis Acres Memorial Park after the school founder, the Reverend Stephen J. Ellis, features a memorial structure, covered pavilions, playgrounds, a small sports area, and trails.

As the African American community came together to build the Buckingham Training School, the entire Buckingham/Dillwyn community came together to preserve its history and provide educational and recreational facilities.



**Special events at the park help to engage supporters. For instance, Training School alumni, community volunteers, Walmart store employees, 4H Club members, the Buckingham/Dillwyn Garden Cub, the Woman’s Club of Buckingham County, and local Master Gardeners participate in annual Earth Day events.**

Photo courtesy of Ellis Acres Memorial Park, Inc.

Buckingham Training School was built at a time when blacks and whites could not attend school together, and African Americans were barred from voting and from using almost all public facilities. The new Ellis Acres Memorial Park brings these formerly segregated communities together in a common cause. For more information visit [www.dillwynva.org/ellisacres](http://www.dillwynva.org/ellisacres).

As Wilbert Dean said, “We can take this land that was designed to segregate the county and split it apart, or we can take the same land and these same facilities to bring the county together, to make Buckingham a better place and improve the quality of life.”

## CASE STUDY 2

## Cairo Rosenwald School

### *Making the Most of Your Resources*

Cairo Rosenwald School, near Gallatin, Tenn., was constructed in 1922 as a one-teacher school. The modest structure served as a school until closed by school consolidation in 1959. Owned and operated by the Cairo Improvement Club, it continued in use as community meeting space, but time and the elements took their toll.

In 2008 the Tennessee Preservation Trust (TPT) received \$46,987 from Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation, in partnership with the National Trust, for the rehabilitation of Cairo Rosenwald School. The generous grant from Lowe's combined with a major volunteer effort helped to bring the project to fruition.

Local individuals and organizations joined TPT to accomplish the restoration. A local contractor donated his time and provided subcontractors. Planning and architectural drawings were also donated, as was daily project management. TPT board members donated both time and money. The Sumner County Historical Society pledged \$500 toward the restoration.

Work on Cairo School started in December 2008. Once the structure was stabilized, stone foundations were repaired along with piers and cross beams beneath the flooring. The wheelchair ramp was removed from the front of the building and rebuilt less conspicuously at the rear. Front steps were rebuilt according to historic photographs. Excavation of the crawl space revealed a root cellar underneath the school.

By the end of January 2009, all foundation, structural, and siding work was completed. Over half of the window sills were repaired and new upper sashes were custom-made for the side windows. A new cover was added to the awning and the main roof was repaired and painted. The original windows were repaired and reinstalled in February.



**Attendees at the 2009 National Preservation Conference tour the restored Cairo Rosenwald School, a one-teacher school located in Sumner County, Tenn.**

Before courtesy of Cairo Improvement Club. After photo by Mary Hoffschwelle

This work, along with roof repair, hand-scraping, repairing and repainting the wood siding, upgrading electrical systems, repair of historic wood windows, and custom-milled replacements of missing elements required a great volunteer effort to assist contractors in coming in on budget. Contributing to the success of the project were services donated by Middle Tennessee State University, TPT staff and board of directors, architects, contractors, and the Sumner County Sheriff's Department. Thanks to a dedicated volunteer corps, strong leadership, and careful attention to detail, work on the Cairo Rosenwald School was completed in May 2009, on time and on budget.

As Dan Brown, former executive director of the Tennessee Preservation Trust, noted, "The Cairo Rosenwald School represents how a building can anchor its community, providing a space for education and fellowship that is shared by generations."

## CASE STUDY 3

## Innovative Partnerships Build, Restore, and Reuse Rosenwald Schools

### *Hamilton School*

Julius Rosenwald believed in partnerships. His philanthropy on behalf of African American education began as collaboration with Booker T. Washington, and his Rosenwald Fund insisted on contributions from various sources to ensure long-term success. The Rosenwald School in Hamilton, N.C., cost \$4,500 when it was built circa 1920: \$3,000 came from the public school district, \$1,000 came from the Rosenwald Fund and \$500 came from local African Americans. The school operated until 1960.

In 1999 Preservation North Carolina, a statewide nonprofit organization, acquired the school. Soon thereafter, the Hamilton community decided to rehabilitate its school. It took a variety of partners working together to find a way to save the school and find a new viable purpose for it. Members of the Hamilton community approached Roanoke River Partners, Inc. (RRP), a grassroots nonprofit that promotes rural economic development, to assist in purchasing and renovating the school.

RRP purchased the school in 2007. Reminiscent of the original partnerships that funded the Hamilton School, the Conservation Fund, the Mid-EAST Resource Conservation and Development Council, and private donors pooled their resources to acquire the school.

Deed in hand, the RRP began work to secure funds to preserve the building and its history. In 2007-8, RRP received major grants from Marion Stedman Covington Foundation; Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation, in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation; and the Conservation Fund's Creating New Economies Fund (CNEF).

Additional partners included local and state foundations, state agencies, conservation groups, the Town of Hamilton, Martin County Historical Society and Arts Council, The Enterprise Newspaper, national, state and regional media, East Carolina University Center for Sustainable Tourism, the Roanoke Rivers Mayors Association, representatives from other Rosenwald school projects, private donors, alumni, and volun-

teers. They provided funds, in-kind contributions, publicity, and memories of their school days.

The restored school will take advantage of its location in the Roanoke River region. Reborn as the Rosenwald River Center, the building will serve as a river/community center; an interpretive site to tell the Rosenwald story; and an economic incubator to cultivate eco-tourism and cultural heritage initiatives throughout the Roanoke River Region. As a community center that also interprets the Hamilton School story, it looks to the future but remains buoyed by its past. Partnerships made it possible, at the beginning and today. For more information visit [www.roanokeriverpartners.org](http://www.roanokeriverpartners.org).



**A unique partnership between the Roanoke River Partners and the Conservation Fund resulted in the restoration of the Rosenwald school in Hamilton, N.C., for a variety of community uses. The town is located at the mid-point along the Roanoke River Paddle Trail System and paddlers frequently stop at the new river center to learn more about history of the region.**

Photos courtesy of Roanoke River Partners

## CASE STUDY 4

## Reconstructing the Memory of Scrabble School

### *Creating and Interpreting Civic Space through Collaboration*

In Rappahannock County, Va., committed citizens recently restored the Scrabble School to serve as a senior citizen's center. Constructed in 1922, the two-teacher Scrabble School was the first of four Rosenwald schools in the county.

Historically, financial support from the community was an important requirement for obtaining grants from the Rosenwald Fund. The African American community raised 33 percent of the funds for the Scrabble School. The Rosenwald Fund paid 29 percent with most of the remainder coming from public funds. Scrabble School served as both school and community gathering place until closing in 1968, at the end of the only integrated school year in its history.

By 1990 the school was in disrepair and in danger of being demolished. A prominent local alumnus, E. Franklin Warner, began a grassroots campaign to "Save the School," and Scrabble alumni created the Scrabble School Preservation Foundation. In 2005 the foundation began raising funds to preserve and rehabilitate the building for use as a senior center and interpretive space to commemorate the school's history.

The project is a partnership of public and private institutions. The school building and site were owned by the Rappahannock County Board of Education. With support from Rappahannock County and grants from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, Jesse & Rose Loeb Foundation, the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation Preservation Fund through the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Trust's Alice Rosenwald Flexible Fund, and other donors, the Scrabble School Foundation engaged the University of Virginia (UVA) to collaborate in the rehabilitation of the building and in collecting and interpreting the school's past.



**The Scrabble School in Rappahannock County, Va., shown here before restoration, now serves as senior citizens center.**

Researching Scrabble School's history proved to be challenging. When the school was abandoned, its records were discarded and much of its history was lost. Students from UVA's Carter G. Woodson Institute for African American and African Studies and the Virginia Center for Digital History, working with faculty members and foundation board members, developed a program called "History Harvests," to collect oral histories from alumni. The Harvests enabled the school's alumni to share their stories about Scrabble's curriculum, faculty, students, and daily life. This material was invaluable to UVA's School of Architecture, whose faculty and students, together with a local consultant, designed an interpretative strategy and created an exhibit to tell the school's story.

The team had two objectives: to create a regional senior citizens' center and to tell the story of the school's history. The Rappahannock County Center for Senior Health, which provides a range of on-site programs for senior citizens, required the use of the two former classrooms, a number of the former school offices, and the school's annex. The floors, walls, and ceilings of all rooms were renovated and new windows and doors were installed to fit in the original openings. Former teachers' offices were converted into bath-



rooms, and a small annex added in 1961 was removed and replaced with an addition containing a new kitchen and serving area.

Expanding on the oral histories gathered in the History Harvests, the team installed an interpretive exhibit or story wall where the school's blackboards once stood as the focal point of classroom activity. Vandals had removed the slate blackboards years before.

The story wall uses a variety of media to tell the stories of the building's construction and use. A timeline provides a chronology of significant events in Scrabble's history put in the context of relevant local and national events. Permanent display panels provide an overview of public education for African Americans in the Jim Crow era, descriptions of the Rosenwald School Building program, and the local African American community's efforts to secure funding for a Rosenwald school. Computer screens will provide access to oral histories, offering an opportunity for the alumni to tell the school's story themselves.

The school re-opened in the summer of 2009. The Senior Citizens Center operates daily programs serving approximately 50 seniors. In remarks at the reopening ceremonies, a representative of the National Trust noted that the project proved to be a true collaborative effort involving the integration of the skills, expertise, and enthusiasm of a wide variety of participants creating something that no one entity could have achieved



Above: The 2009 grand opening celebration of the Rappahannock County Center for Senior Health. The center provides a full range of on-site programs for senior citizens.

Photo by Crista Gibbons

Below: A timeline provides a chronology of significant events in Scrabble's history put in the context of relevant local and national events.

Rendering provided by Craig Barton

alone. The finished project allows the building to be fully used by the surrounding communities while they continue to collect and tell the stories of this place. For more information and to see an online interpretive exhibit, visit [www.scrabbleschool.org](http://www.scrabbleschool.org).



## RESOURCES

### Websites

Rosenwald Schools Initiative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation  
[www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org) or  
[www.rosenwaldschools.com](http://www.rosenwaldschools.com).

For Rosenwald School Plans:  
[www.historysouth.org](http://www.historysouth.org).

### Archives

**Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives.** Special Collections, John Hope and Aurelia Franklin Library, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. A microfilm of the documents is available at the Amistad Center, New Orleans, La.

**Julius Rosenwald Papers.** Special Collections Research Center, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill., [www.lib.uchicago.edu](http://www.lib.uchicago.edu). Microfilm available at Kent State University Library.

**Booker T. Washington Papers.** Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Microfilm available. [hwww.loc.gov](http://hwww.loc.gov).

**R.R. Moton and Clinton J. Calloway Papers.** Special Collections and University Archives, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Ala. [www.tuskegee.edu/libraries](http://www.tuskegee.edu/libraries).

**County Board of Education Records.** Held by county archives, county school systems, or county governments.

**State Department of Education Records.** Held by state archives.

**Jackson Davis Collection.** Special Collections Library, University of Virginia. Photographs include Rosenwald and other African American schools, as well as students and teachers. [www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/collections/jdavis/](http://www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/collections/jdavis/).

**Personal Papers and Photograph Collections.** Historical documents and photographs taken by the state agents for Negro schools and Rosenwald building agents may be preserved by the special collections and archives at historic black colleges and universities as well as state archives.

### Publications by the Rosenwald Fund and Related Agencies

*The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community.* Tuskegee: Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute Extension Department, 1915.

Dresslar, Fletcher B. *Report on the Rosenwald School Buildings.* Nashville: Julius Rosenwald Fund, [1920].

*Community School Plans.* Nashville: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1921, 1924, 1927, 1931.

*For Better Schoolhouses.* Nashville: Interstate School Building Service, 1929.

*Improvement and Beautification of Rural Schools.* Nashville: Julius Rosenwald Fund Southern Office, 1936.

*Suggestions for Landscaping Rural Schools.* Nashville: Julius Rosenwald Fund Southern Office, 1936.

Embree, Edwin R. *Julius Rosenwald Fund: Review of Two Decades, 1917-1936.* Chicago: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1936.

*Community Units: Supplement No. 2 to Julius Rosenwald Fund Community School Plans* (Revised in 1931), 1941.

State Department of Education publications: biennial and annual reports of the state superintendent, bulletins, school building plans.

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**ON THE COVER:** Rosenwald School, Brazoria County, West Columbia, Tex. Photo courtesy of Columbia Historical Museum

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